

REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

# Learning Beyond Borders

Education Challenges and  
Opportunities for Ukrainian  
Refugee Children in the Republic  
of Moldova

September 2023



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency

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Photo: Community Center in Chişinău  
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### About REACH

REACH facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery, and development contexts. The methodologies used by REACH include primary data collection and in-depth analysis, and all activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT Initiatives, ACTED and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research - Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNITAR-UNOSAT). For more information, please visit [our website](#). You can contact us directly at: [geneva@reach-initiative.org](mailto:geneva@reach-initiative.org) and follow us on Twitter @REACH\_info.

This assessment was made possible through funding from UNHCR.



And with the support of UNICEF and the Education Working Group partners



## SUMMARY

The Government of the Republic of Moldova has taken significant steps to ensure access to education for refugee children in the country, including by publishing on 4 September 2023, an Instruction guaranteeing access to education for all children, regardless of their legal status. However, Moldova's education sector is facing challenges that are hindering access to quality education for some Ukrainian refugee children. These challenges relate to the inclusion and integration of Ukrainian refugee children conducting online education into the in-person learning environment of Moldovan schools. Ukrainian refugee children living in Moldova have two options for learning during the conflict: in person enrollment in a Moldovan school, or online learning using the Ukrainian curriculum. Decisions that go into the choice of learning modality are complex and based on many different considerations such as: the preference of the caregiver, the situation in Ukraine, movement intentions, and access barriers to access to education in the host country, among other considerations. Currently, the majority of Ukrainian refugee school-aged children in Moldova study online using the Ukrainian online education platform. The preference for online learning is also reflected in the low number of school-aged children enrolled in schools across Moldova. According to UNHCR figures from November 2023, the estimated number of children in Moldova is approximately 50,000 children (37,000 of school-age), however, less than 1,700 children (aged 6-17) are enrolled in schools in Moldova.<sup>1</sup>

The assessment objectives focused on understanding the access to and the conditions of Ukrainian online education for school-aged refugee children (between 6 and 17 years old) in Moldova, the reasons why more children currently access online education than in-person education, and the impact of remote learning on children's social and emotional well-being. Additionally, the assessment explored the experiences and conditions of Ukrainian refugee children enrolled in Moldovan schools and their caregivers including the enrolment process, learning and cohesion, as well as social and emotional well-being of the children. The assessment aims to provide a clearer understanding Ukrainian children and caregivers' perceptions of the Moldovan education system, and ways of improving inclusion of Ukrainian children. Furthermore, in consultation with UNICEF and UNHCR, recommendations were compiled to focus education sector activities on important areas for continued advocacy and action.

Data collection took place between June 19, 2023 to July 14, 2023. The assessment focused on Chişinău, the capital of the Republic of Moldova, due to the high number of refugees in the city and, compared to other locations, the relatively high school enrolment. The primary method of data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews, using a qualitative approach. The target populations were disaggregated by method of schooling (online and in-person) to capture the perspectives of both groups and compare experiences. The discussions with children, Moldovan teachers, and caregivers were further disaggregated by age of the child- primary or secondary school ages. The discussions with children were also separated by gender to capture any differences in experience (see Table 1).

In total, 16 Focus Groups Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with primary and secondary school children attending both online and in-person schooling, 25 Informant Interviews (IIs) were conducted with caregivers of children attending both online platforms and in-person learning, and 18 total Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with Moldovan and Ukrainian teachers, Municipality Education Authorities, and representatives of the Ministry of Education and Research of Moldova (MER). All assessment groups were sampled purposively. Therefore, the extent to which findings on refugee children's schooling in Moldova can be generalised is limited, and the findings should only be considered as indicative of the wider situation.

<sup>1</sup> Provided Directly by UNHCR.

**Additionally, the writing of this report occurred during the time of the release of a revised Instruction (September 4, 2023) from the MER regarding the enrollment of Ukrainian children into the education system in Moldova.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, some reported challenges, notably, administrative barriers and facilitators to enrolment, have been addressed in the new guidance and some challenges presented during the course of this assessment may no longer be relevant. A summary of some of the main changes from the new instruction are introduced here and before the conclusion section.**

According to the MER Instruction of 4 September:

- All children from Ukraine can enroll in Moldovan schools, no matter their legal status. They do not need to present any document related to legal status to enroll.
- Documents needed to enroll include: parent/guardian national ID, child's national ID or birth certificate, child's medical records (from Ukraine or can be obtained in Moldova), child's school records if available (electronic versions accepted); if not, there are several procedures according to the age of the child to determine the grade of placement.
- Parents can enroll their child by submitting an application form to the local school. In case there is no available space in the local school, they can be referred to a nearby school that has space.
- Schools are also requested to facilitate access to on-line learning for any child who wishes to study the Ukrainian curriculum on-line, but in a school setting.
- Auditor status no longer exists. Students that were previously auditors can fully enroll in school or choose to study online.
- Enrolment of Ukrainian students in Moldovan schools is not mandatory, as they still have the option to study through the Ukrainian online platform.
- Schools issue a certificate with reference to the learning results and education path achieved in educational institutions by the child in the Republic of Moldova.
- Schools recognize the equivalence of studies/certificates from studies in Ukraine for enrolment in the national system in the Republic of Moldova.

Another noteworthy change that occurred during the writing of this report is the easing of the requirements for proof of resident needed to obtain Temporary Protection, which has made it easier for many Ukrainians to apply for Temporary Protection.<sup>3</sup>

## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

### Enrolment Barriers and Facilitators

**Ukrainian caregivers generally identified language barriers and curriculum differences as the main barriers faced by their children to attend Moldovan schools.** Primary school caregivers mostly desire for their child to learn Ukrainian and continue to be in contact with teachers in Ukraine, with whom they are familiar, while secondary school caregivers are more concerned with the education curriculum and the effects that changes might have on the ability of their child to receive a certificate of education completion from Ukraine. Other reported barriers included paperwork needed from Ukraine to enrol in Moldovan schools and needing to obtain Temporary Protection status before enrolment. Caregivers wish to receive

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Education and Research, [Instruction](#)

<sup>3</sup> Republic of Moldova, [CES Decision](#)



additional information about education opportunities available in Moldova, as well as more guidance from Ukrainian authorities about steps to take for their child's education, including enrolment in Moldova.

The most common reasons reported by caregivers who chose to enrol their child in school in Moldova, was to ensure the socialization of their child, to improve the quality of their learning, and to avoid the difficulties they faced with online learning.

For the current school year 2023-2024, most online caregivers reported that their child would continue to use the online learning platform due to the barriers mentioned. However, some also reported the length of the war or its outcome, and, as a result, extended stay in Moldova, as considerations which might make caregivers more likely to register their children in Moldovan schools.

## Learning Conditions and Experiences

The learning conditions for children vary greatly between those children attending school online and those attending in-person, due to the conflict in Ukraine. **For Ukrainian children attending online classes in Ukraine remotely from Moldova, the learning process is challenging. Teachers in Ukraine have difficulties related to air raid alarms disrupting class, internet connection issues and power cuts.** These challenges result in shortened or canceled lessons which can contribute to education loss for children studying online. **These disruptions also have an effect on the child's motivation to learn, as caregivers and teachers report a decrease in the ability to concentrate, negatively impacting the child's active learning.** Ukrainian teachers have adopted strategies to increase communication with children regarding school lessons such as organizing consultation groups with students and pre-recording lessons, to aim at filling gaps in knowledge. **However, most children reported dissatisfaction with online schooling, as well as with their quality of learning. Overall, the children feel that it has gotten more difficult to learn compared to in-person learning.** They report being unable to concentrate on schoolwork, their grades are worsening, and they indicated that teachers are able to better explain lessons in-person.

In addition, children studying online frequently reported difficulties related to online education access from Moldova. In addition to the internet difficulties they face from the context in Ukraine, they also reported lacking access to reliable internet in their homes in Moldova. Most also reported using a cell phone to attend class online instead of a laptop or tablet. Access to quiet spaces for children to study was another reported need. Most children reported studying from their bedroom, however shared spaces were also a common study area for children.

**In contrast, children learning in-person mostly reported enjoying going to school in Moldova. Some aspects of attending school in-person the children reported enjoying include: learning, socializing with their classmates, and clear/comprehensive instruction from teachers. Children did report struggling with Romanian language class, which led to some children reporting worsening grades. Overall, children reported mostly positive impacts of attending school on their learning quality. Many mentioned that their grades have improved, and they described the quality of learning as very good.**

## Social Integration

Overall, children who attend school in-person in Moldova have reported increased socialisation with peers inside and outside the school environment compared to children attending classes online. Inside the school environment, children reported participating in activities such as charity school fairs, school clubs, and excursions. Outside of school, children reported socialising at the playground, playing sports, and spending time together.

**Whilst just over half of children who reported attending online classes reported participating in some social activities in their free time, the number of children reporting not participating in any social activities was still high.** Most children learning online did report that they did not interact with their classmates outside of class, although most did report that overall they had a good relationship with them. The majority reported that their classmates online live outside of Moldova, so they are not able to physically meet to socialise.

Caregivers mostly reported no challenges in social interactions between their children and their Moldovan peers. **However, when challenges were reported they were related predominately to political discussions among children which lead to arguments, or war-related insults.** This is exacerbated at times because of the language barrier. These same political challenges have been reported by children and Moldovan teachers and represent a challenge to cohesion between students. Some teachers also reported that political talk between children can sometimes reach the point of a fight.

## Social and Emotional Well-Being

**Overall, primary-school girls attending online classes were the group of children who reported to be the most worried compared to all other groups of children consulted.** The children mostly worried about their family and friends who stayed in Ukraine. They also reported to miss the life they had before they arrived in Moldova and expressed their wish to go back to school in Ukraine with their friends. **Many also expressed good feelings about being in Moldova, that they like it here and are generally doing well.**

**Primary and secondary school children attending Moldovan schools, mostly reported having no worries** and reported largely positive feelings, socialising with friends, and generally reported feeling safe, although they also worry about relatives and friends back home. **Moldovan teachers similarly report mostly no difficulties in children's well-being.** Of the teachers who reported to have witnessed difficulties for students, and more specifically, being reserved or worried at first, they indicated that the children have adapted over time once they have settled in. **Caregivers of children attending in-person classes in Moldova have reported both negative and positive changes in their child's well-being.** The negative changes mostly depict the well-being of the child when they had first arrived in Moldova. These included feelings of stress or fear, being withdrawn, and feelings of sadness from the absence of the child's father. **However, many of these negative initial feelings were reported to have improved over time as the child has adapted to life in Moldova. Most caregivers believe that these changes in well-being have positively impacted the child's ability to learn.** They reported that learning has improved and there are less war-related distractions.

**Caregivers of children attending online classes reported noticing mostly negative changes in their child's well-being.** These included losing interest in school, isolation from other children due to a lack of socialisation opportunities, and the lack of time spent with family and friends who stayed in Ukraine, which has had a negative effect on the child. Behavioral changes mentioned included stress, impulsive behavior, tantrums for which the child has been put on medication, and frequent crying. Those caregivers who reported an impact on the learning of their child reported changes such as the inability to concentrate on schoolwork or being affected by memories before the war. **Conversely, a few caregivers reported positive changes in well-being. These relate to the ability of the child to adapt to life in Moldova and to be able to rest emotionally and recover.**

**Ukrainian teachers have also reported changes in children's well-being. The reported changes include increased sadness, levels of aggression, and fear of alarms, while others have been able to better adapt to changes.** Also related to the well-being of children, is that of the Ukrainian teachers,

which can directly affect the learning quality of the child. **Ukrainian teachers reported needing psychological assistance, rest for some that are overworked, as well as increased communication between teachers and the education authorities.**

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## List of Acronyms

<b>FGD:</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>II:</b>	Individual Interviews
<b>KII:</b>	Key Informant Interview
<b>MER:</b>	Ministry of Education and Research of Moldova
<b>MoES:</b>	Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine
<b>MSNA:</b>	Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment
<b>RAC:</b>	Refugee Accommodation center
<b>RNA:</b>	Rapid Needs Assessment
<b>RRP:</b>	Refugee Response Plan
<b>UNHCR:</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNICEF:</b>	The United Nation International Children's Emergency Fund

## Geographical Classifications

**Chişinău:** Capital city of Moldova, Rep.

## List of Terms

**Primary school:** Instruction that includes grades 1-4 (ages 6-10/11)

**General secondary education:** This consists of Basic Secondary (*gymnazium*) and Upper Secondary (*lyceum*) components. Ages range from 10-14/15 years for basic secondary and 15-18 for upper secondary. Basic Secondary school covers a general core curriculum while upper secondary has an academic stream or vocational stream for students to choose from during their studies.

**In-Person Moldovan Schooling:** Refers to Ukrainian refugee students registered in one of the education institutions in Chişinău.

**Online Ukrainian Schooling:** Refers to Ukrainian refugee students following the official online education platform of the Ministry of Education and Science in Ukraine.

**School-aged refugee children:** Children between the ages of 6 and 17 years.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For this assessment, 'school-aged' refers to children in primary and general secondary school only to align with the research focus on online and in-person enrolment into the education system.

## INTRODUCTION

As of 1 December 2023, the total influx of refugees from Ukraine into the Republic of Moldova since March 2022 has exceeded 981,000 border crossings, with 113,409 Ukrainian nationals remaining in the country.<sup>5</sup> Among the total number of refugees who reside in Moldova, almost half are children.<sup>6</sup> According to the September 2023 figures from the Republic of Moldova Ministry of Education and Research (MER), fewer than 1,500<sup>7</sup> refugee children were enrolled in primary or secondary schooling in-person in Moldova as of June 2023 (the last month of classes before this assessment was conducted). On the other hand, findings from the Education Rapid Needs Assessment (RNA) conducted in June 2022 indicated that the majority of refugee children receive education through the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science's online learning platform.<sup>8</sup> Little is known about the students accessing this type of learning modality or how learning online has impacted learning quality. Additionally, while the RNA explored barriers faced by refugee children to accessing the Moldovan education system, the link between these barriers and the reasons for children continuing their education through the Ukrainian online learning platform requires further investigation. Finally, the impact of displacement from Ukraine due to the ongoing conflict, is likely to have taken a toll on children's social and emotional well-being which in turn, can hinder their development and ability to learn and integrate within the community and schools.<sup>9</sup>

Through bilateral discussions with the Refugee Education Working Group partners in Moldova, the information gaps regarding the education experience and conditions of refugee children enrolled in Moldovan schools and enrolled in online learning were identified. The aim of this research was to increase the understanding of the education situation for refugees in Moldova, particularly related to the enrolment decision-making of Ukrainian refugee caregivers<sup>10</sup>, the learning conditions for refugee children online and in-person, as well as their social and emotional well-being. The specific objectives of this assessment were to:

- Understand the access to and the conditions of Ukrainian online education for school-aged primary and secondary refugee children in Moldova, incentives to attend online education, and the impact of remote learning on children's social and emotional well-being.
- Explore the experiences and conditions of Ukrainian refugee children enrolled in Moldovan schools, and of their caregivers, regarding the enrolment procedure, learning conditions and in-school social cohesion, social and emotional well-being.

The findings of this assessment will seek to inform the MER's education programming for the current school year (2023-2024), as well as the efforts of key education stakeholders as part of the Refugee Response Plan (RRP) for 2024.

The report is divided into three main sections. The **first section** outlines the methodology of the study, including the geographical scope, sampling strategy, data collection methods, analysis, challenges, and limitations. The **second section** outlines the findings of the primary data analysis, including Enrolment Barriers and Facilitators, Learning Conditions and Experiences, Social Integration, and Social and Emotional Well-Being. Finally, the **third section** of the report includes a series of policy recommendations endorsed by the Refugee Education Working co-chaired by UNICEF and UNHCR for education stakeholders based on findings from this assessment.

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR dashboard, [Daily Population Trends](#)

<sup>6</sup> UNHCR dashboard, [Moldova data portal](#)

<sup>7</sup> Meeting Minutes, <https://Ministry of Education and Research of Moldova>

<sup>8</sup> Education needs assessment IsraAID, [Rapid Needs Assessment](#)

<sup>9</sup> Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process of developing the self-awareness, self-control, and interpersonal skills that are vital for school, work, and life success.

<sup>10</sup> In this usage, caregiver and parent are interchangeable

In the **Enrolment Barriers and Facilitators** sub-section, the perception of barriers and facilitators to enrolment in schools in Moldova is explored through the perspectives of caregivers, children, teachers, and education authorities.

In the **Learning Conditions and Experiences** sub-section, the changes in education delivery since the start of the war are explored with particular focus on children's learning access, conditions, and quality of learning, along with the effect that this has on their learning ability.

In the **Social Integration** sub-section, the ability of children attending in-person and online courses to integrate into the Moldovan society, and potential difficulties related to social cohesion, are reported.

In the **Social and Emotional Well-Being** sub-section, the general well-being of children, related to the process of learning, is assessed to identify positive or negative changes in the well-being of children.

## METHODOLOGY

This assessment relied on a qualitative research methodology using semi-structured tools for interviews with target populations. Research tools were developed with UNICEF and UNHCR, which provided guidance on the assessment design, as well as the Education Working Group members in-country who provided contextual knowledge and expertise during the drafting of the tools.

- a) Key Informant Interviews (KIs) with local/national authorities:** KIs were conducted with one (1) local authority representative with an expertise in the education sector from Chişinău Municipality, and two (2) from the Ministry of Education and Research departments relevant to the child-specific refugee response in education. Interviews were conducted to better understand education-related policies, needs of children and access to services, as well as the extent to which these are shaped by contextual factors.
- b) Key Informant Interviews (KIs) with Ukrainian/Moldovan school teachers:** KIs were conducted with 11 Moldovan schoolteachers and four (4) Ukrainian schoolteachers giving online classes. The KIs were purposively selected, with the help of partners and REACH staff working in Ukraine. The aim of these interviews was to better understand teachers' needs, difficulties in education delivery, school capacity with regards to the influx of refugees in Moldova, and any coping strategies used during challenges. Ukrainian teachers were interviewed through online platforms, while Moldovan school teachers were interviewed in person.
- c) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)/Child Consultations with refugee children attending Ukrainian online education and in-person education in Moldova:** FGDs intended to better understand the impact of any education barriers, coping mechanisms, and perceptions of schooling. The consultations were conducted in Chişinău where REACH could collaborate with its partners who implement projects in the region. Sixteen focus group discussions were conducted with children between 6 and 17 years old to understand the specific experiences of refugee children. The consultations were grouped by age (primary school, secondary school) and gender. Consultations were conducted through age-appropriate child participatory methods, with the consent of the children's caregivers and assent of the children, and delivered in a group setting.
- d) Informant Interviews (IIs) with caregivers of refugee children attending Ukrainian online education and in-person education in Moldova:** The IIs were conducted in the same locations as the child consultations. Thirteen interviews were conducted with caregivers of children enrolled in online schooling and 12 with caregivers of children attending in-person classes. The interviews aimed at reflecting the specific experiences of each caregiver in enrolment, learning conditions, learning quality, attendance, integration, and well-being of the children.

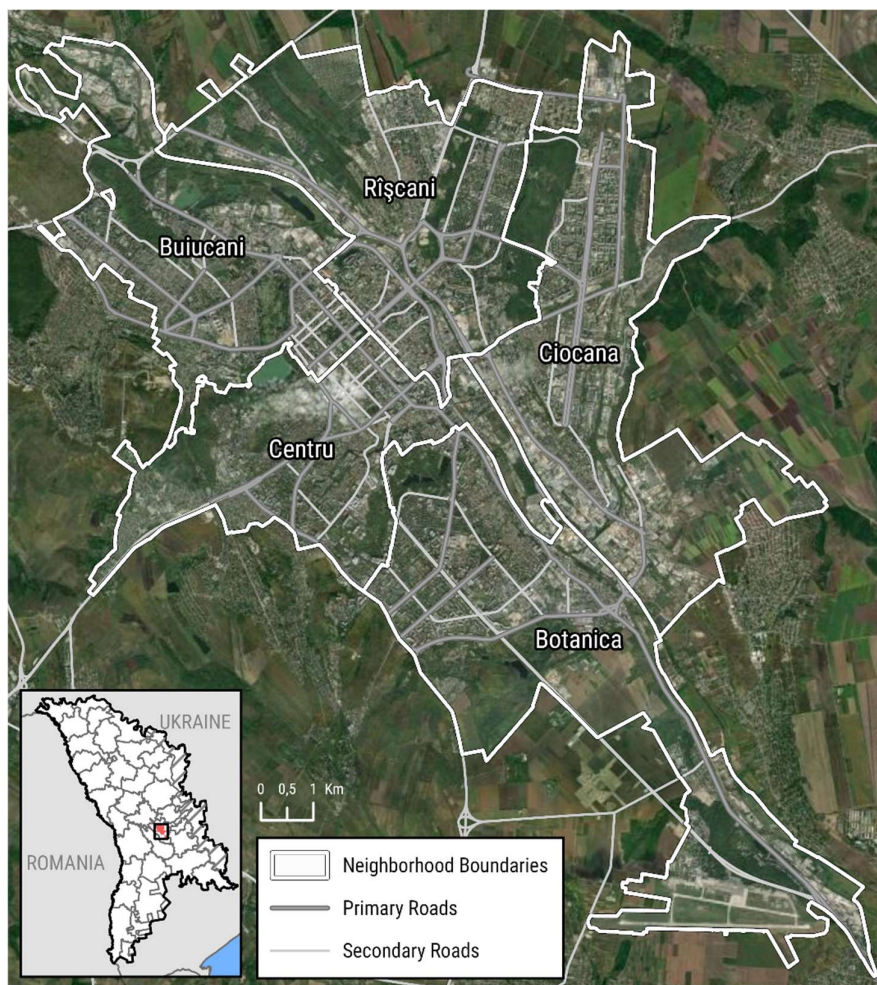
## Geographical Scope

The assessment was conducted in the city of Chişinău, the capital of the Republic of Moldova, which is a country neighboring Romania and Ukraine. **Figure 1** illustrates the 5 sectors that make up the city: Botanica, Buiucani, Centru, Ciocana and Râşcani. Chişinău city is part of the larger Chişinău Municipality, which includes the surrounding areas of the city. The location of the assessment was purposively selected based on the areas with the highest number of Ukrainian refugee children aged 6-17, as reported in UNHCR cash assistance data (March 2023)<sup>11</sup> as well as the areas with the highest refugee enrolment rate in schools (around 48% in Chişinău city) according to the MER.<sup>12</sup> Another consideration when choosing this location was the ability to collaborate with partners working in the education sector who could support in collecting data. This strategy of targeting the appropriate area was key due to the low numbers of enrolment of refugees in schools in Moldova.

<sup>11</sup> UNHCR's data on the location of refugees, provided directly.

<sup>12</sup> Ministry of Education and Research of Moldova, provided directly

Figure 1: Map of Chişinău



## Sampling Strategy

The populations of interest for this assessment were primary and secondary school-aged Ukrainian refugee children (between 6 and 17 years old) who attended either online or in-person schooling, caregivers, Moldovan and Ukrainian teachers, and Municipal and MER Education Authorities of Moldova. According to the MER data, the majority of children enrolled in schools in Moldova were attending primary or lower secondary education, (1141 students, grades 1-9), while only 30 students were participating in upper secondary education (grades 10-12), based on data from April 2023.<sup>13</sup> The low numbers of enrolment for in-person classes also correspond to findings from other assessments which found that most children are participating in online education or other informal types of education.<sup>14</sup> However, there was no comprehensive data available on the number of children attending online or alternative education modalities.<sup>15</sup> These two limitations presented a challenge in determining the

<sup>13</sup> Ministry of Education and Research of Moldova, provided directly

<sup>14</sup> Education needs assessment IsraAID and partners, [Rapid Needs Assessment](#)

<sup>15</sup> The MER has started publishing data on the number of children studying in Education Tech Labs in Moldovan school at the start of the 2023-2024 school year



sampling for each modality. The sampling of refugee children in primary and general secondary school was chosen to allow for a comparison of the educational experiences of students attending online education and those who enrolled in school in Moldova. Although preschools are generally included as part of the school-aged population, they were not included as part of this assessment due to the scope of the research, and the lack of impact experienced by preschool children in online learning.

**Table 1. Sampling Table**

	Ukrainian Online education				In-person Moldovan education				
	Primary school		Secondary school		Primary school		Secondary school		
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Total
FGDs with children	3	3	3	3	1	1	1	1	16 FGDs
IIs with caregivers	6		7		5		7		25 IIs
KIIs with Moldovan school teachers					6		5		11 KIIs
KIIs with local authorities					1				1 KII
KIIs with Ukrainian online schoolteachers	4								4 KIIs
KIs with national authorities					2				2 KIIs

Table 1 presents the sampling strategy and disaggregation used for both education modalities. The primary disaggregation was the level of education modality, Ukrainian online education and in-person Moldovan education. Targeted groups were further disaggregated into a primary and secondary school focus to assess any difference in experiences based on the age of the child. Children were divided by gender for FGDs to assess any differences based on this factor.

Due to the issue of population size of enrolled children, there were fewer FGDs held with children attending in-person education compared to children attending online schooling. Perspectives on in-person education, therefore, were based on discussions with 13 children enrolled in schools in Moldova, while perspectives on online education were based on discussions with 46 children conducting online schooling, who participated in FGDs. Children, caregivers, and teachers having insights to share on in-person education in Moldova were identified with the help of the Ministry of Education, the Directorate General of Education in Chisinau Municipality, and the Education Working Group partners in Moldova. Children attending online schooling were identified with the help of Education Working Group partners, also working in the area. To address safeguarding concerns and ensure child protection, prior to conducting interviews with children, REACH enumerators were trained in the fields of child protection, referral, and safeguarding practices by UNHCR and internally by REACH Initiative. Additionally, a Child Protection protocol tailored to this assessment was created to guide its implementation, including data collection activities with children. The protocol was endorsed by an expert from UNHCR in child protection. Enumerators ensured that respondents had clear and sufficient information about the research objectives and tools before they consented to participate.

## Data Analysis

The data cleaning and analysis processes were conducted alongside data collection. After conducting the interviews, enumerators transcribed them directly from the recording or note-taking form. Original



transcripts were in Russian, Romanian, or Ukrainian. The transcriptions were then translated into English and made available to the assessment officer for coding. Any inconsistencies in the data or need for clarification were followed up with the enumerator who conducted the interview. Qualitative analysis was then performed through inductive coding and saturation grids.<sup>16</sup> For more information on the methodology, including the Child Protection Protocol, and data analysis plan, please refer to the assessment's Terms of Reference.<sup>17</sup>

## Challenges and Limitations

Challenges were faced during the data collection phase of the assessment. Firstly, there was difficulty in locating participants as data collection occurred during the summer months when school had already finished for the year.

In addition, locating refugee students attending school in-person in Chişinău was challenging, given the overall low numbers of enrolment. There was also limited capacity from the research team to conduct further interviews in additional locations.

Non probability sampling methods were used, which means any information that was captured should only be considered indicative of those sampled. Certain indicators may have been under-reported or over-reported due to respondent bias (subjectivity and perceptions of respondents about their own situation).

Children did not always respond to all questions asked during consultations due to their preference or other factors. Non-response can introduce bias in reporting.

Constant movement of families and children during this protracted stage of the crisis means that this assessment should be considered as an indication of the situation at the time of the assessment.

<sup>16</sup> [Data Saturation Grid](#)

<sup>17</sup> REACH, [REACH Resource Center Education Assessment](#)

## FINDINGS

In 2020, the education system of Ukraine developed an online education platform in response to the global pandemic of COVID-19 and the resulting widespread adoption of social distancing strategies. Ukrainian teachers reported the existence of this online education system as a familiar structure which contributed to a smooth transition, in terms of education modality, for students who attend online classes due to the conflict. Refugee children in Moldova or other countries outside of Ukraine who want to continue their studies in the Ukrainian curriculum can connect to their school in Ukraine where they used to study in this online format or continue their studies using the created online e-learning platform of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (MoES), 'The All-Ukrainian Online School'.<sup>18</sup> The platform provides educational material for school subjects including video lessons, tasks, and tests, allowing children to progress in learning. In the 2022-2023 school year, there were a total of 506,468 Ukrainian students who were living abroad, and who accessed general secondary education via this platform.<sup>19</sup> Conversely, the low numbers of refugee student enrolment in Moldovan schools illustrates the existence of preferences or barriers that negatively impact the enrolment of Ukrainian students, although this educational option is available and promoted by the MER in Moldova.

### (i) Legal Framework for School Enrolment in Moldova

Enabling access to education is closely tied to the provision of formal rights and policies. In the Moldovan education system, school attendance is compulsory for the child until the age of 16.<sup>20</sup> Prior to the introduction of Temporary Protection, the right to education for all was conferred based on the State of Emergency declaration, various laws in the Moldovan Constitution, as well as the Asylum Act.<sup>21</sup> These allowed refugee children to attend schools in Moldova under the condition that the necessary documentation for enrolment was provided, including academic records from Ukraine, vaccination history, personal identifying documentation, the translation of documents in Ukrainian to Romanian, among other requirements. At the beginning of the emergency, only students who were granted refugee status by the General Inspectorate of Migration could fully enroll in Moldovan schools, while other students could attend school as "auditors," without receiving grades or diplomas.

The Temporary Protection (TP) directive ensured access to the Moldovan education system for children who are beneficiaries. A subsequent 4 September 2023 MER Order and Instruction guaranteed access to education for all Ukrainian children in Moldova, regardless of their legal status. From the beginning of the emergency, children have always had the option to continue their learning through the online platform.

### (ii) Education Options

The choice of online learning could be due to barriers preventing enrolment or could be based on caregiver preference. Ukrainian teachers reported during interviews that students taking courses abroad are allowed more flexibility in learning, which includes extra time to complete lessons. Children abroad can also choose various methods of instruction. One method is to study independently and take exams quarterly to measure the child's competency in the course topic, and this is referred to as 'family education'.<sup>22</sup> They can also combine education modalities and attend classes online from Ukraine as well as in-person in the country of displacement, though this option is not recommended by teachers, due to the heavy workload it imposes on children. This method of combining education types is reportedly common according to caregivers interviewed, although there is no data available to know the number

<sup>18</sup> Osvitoria, [Ukrainian online learning platform](#)

<sup>19</sup> Directly provided by the Director General of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine

<sup>20</sup> [LP547/1995 \(legis.md\)](#)

<sup>21</sup> UNESCO, [Education in Moldova](#)

<sup>22</sup> Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, [Education guide](#)

of students using this method of learning. Teachers and caregivers, however, reported that this additional workload can also be difficult for the child to manage and can make them overwhelmed. Conversely, one of the teachers interviewed reported that many children are ultimately not attending classes at all.

## Enrolment Barriers and Facilitators

Increasing the enrolment of refugee children is one of the main goals of education sector partners and Moldovan education authorities. Amongst the most reported barriers to enrolment for Ukrainian refugee children in Moldova is the language barrier. In Chişinău, for example, 80.8% of all students that attended school in the 2022 to 2023 school year, received instruction in Romanian, while 19.1% were instructed in Russian, and 0.1% in other languages.<sup>23</sup> Although Ukrainian language is also preferred by respondents as a language of instruction, the availability of classes taught in Russian in Moldova could provide an avenue for education inclusion for Ukrainian refugees due to language similarities. **Table 2** provides the enrolment information in July 2023, for all primary and secondary school refugee children in Chişinău, including their preferred language of instruction, number of children enrolled, enrolment registration status (student or auditor), and the languages of instruction offered by the school. The education system in Moldova allows for some flexibility in choosing the language of instruction, although Romanian is the language taught in most schools. In the Municipality of Chişinău for example, there are 100 schools which offer instruction in Romanian, 26 schools which offer instruction in Russian, and 18 mixed-language schools which allow the caregiver to choose the child's language of instruction (between Romanian or Russian).<sup>24</sup> **In total, registered Ukrainian refugee children in Chisinau attended 41 schools including 1 primary school, 38 general secondary schools and 2 special education schools, with 90% of students attending schools offering instruction in Russian and (10%) attending schools offering instruction in Romanian** (see table below).

**Table 2: Refugee students' enrolment in Chişinău primary and secondary school institutions (July 2023)**

School	Type of Institution	Language of Instruction chosen by student	Number Enrolled	Status of 'student'	Status of 'auditor' <sup>25</sup>	Languages offered by the school
1	Special education school grades 1-12	Russian	1	0	1	Russian
2	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Russian	20	0	20	Russian
3	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Russian	15	0	15	Russian
4	Special education school grades 1-12	Romanian	1	0	1	Romanian
5	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Russian	13	0	13	Russian
6	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Russian	6	4	2	Russian
7	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Romanian	2	0	2	Romanian
8	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Romanian	1	0	1	Romanian
9	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Russian	13	0	13	Russian
10	Secondary cycle grades 1-9	Russian	2	1	1	Mixed
11	Secondary cycle grades 1-9	Russian	8	7	1	Mixed

<sup>23</sup> Directly provided by the Education Municipality of Chişinău, July 2023 (for then end of the school year)

<sup>24</sup> Directly provided by the Education Municipality of Chişinău. \*Does not include special education schools.

<sup>25</sup> Auditory status no longer exists according to the MER instruction from 4 September 2023.

School	Type of Institution	Language of Instruction chosen by student	Number Enrolled	Status of 'student'	Status of 'auditor' <sup>25</sup>	Languages offered by the school
12	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Russian	35	1	34	Mixed
13	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Russian	18	1	17	Mixed
14	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Russian	10	0	10	Russian
15	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Russian	6	0	6	Russian
16	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Romanian	3	2	1	Romanian
17	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Russian	4	4	0	Mixed
18	Secondary cycle grades 1-9	Russian	6	0	6	Russian
19	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Russian	18	4	14	Russian
20	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Russian	28	8	20	Mixed
21	Secondary cycle grades 1-9	Russian	38	18	20	Russian
22	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Russian	12	12	0	Mixed
23	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Russian	7	0	7	Russian
24	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Russian	9	5	4	Russian
25	Secondary cycle grades 1-9	Russian	7	0	7	Russian
26	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Russian	10	2	8	Russian
27	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Russian	16	1	15	Russian
28	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Russian	49	13	36	Russian
29	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Russian	3	3	0	Mixed
30	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Russian	21	1	20	Russian
31	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Russian	35	20	15	Russian
32	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Russian	2	0	2	Russian
33	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Russian	6	3	3	Russian
34	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Russian	39	14	25	Russian
35	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Russian	8	0	8	Mixed
36	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Russian	3	3	0	Russian
37	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Russian	24	8	16	Russian
38	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Russian	21	13	8	Russian
39	Primary school grades 1-4	Russian	9	0	9	Russian
40	Secondary cycle grades 1-9	Russian	15	8	7	Mixed
41	Secondary cycle grades 1-12	Russian	1	0	1	Russian
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>545</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>389</b>	

**\*\*Data provided in July 2023, for the end of the school year 2022/2023.**

The seeming preference of caregivers for enrolling children in schools with Russian instruction, can be partially explained by the similarities between Ukrainian and Russian language, coming both from the Slavic family of languages, and the fact that many Ukrainian children coming from certain oblasts already speak Russian. According to data from the 2001 census in Ukraine, 67% of the population spoke Ukrainian, and 30% spoke Russian as their first language.<sup>26</sup> Specifically in the southeastern oblasts of Ukraine (Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Zaporizhia, Dnipropetrovsk, and Odesa), Russian is often the most spoken first or second language. For example, in Odesa Oblast, where most of the secondary school children attending online classes (60%) and caregivers (77%) in this assessment reported as their oblast of origin, nearly 81% of the population speaks Russian. This Oblast consequently also has the highest number of schools with Russian as the main language of instruction.<sup>27</sup> The majority of children attending in-person classes in Moldova, reported that their language of instruction was Russian and this was not a barrier to their learning. Instead, many children reported having difficulties with classes in Romanian.

*"There is Romanian language [class] and I'm not very good at learning it."*

Primary school child on the challenges of learning Romanian.

## Capacity of Moldovan Schools and Staff

Currently, the enrolment of refugee students remains a small proportion of the total number of school-aged children in Moldova. However, from Table 2, it is possible to anticipate that an influx in enrolment and the preference for school instruction in Russian language, could cause an increased workload on these institutions. According to one MER official, the low number of enrolments in schools has not caused a significant strain on the schools or the government's ability to provide education for the students<sup>28</sup>. The main spending increases experienced by the education sector were reported by education authorities as the additional provision of school meals and access to certain school services such as internet. **Moldovan teachers reported that the biggest need for schools is an increase in psychological support for children. Although most teachers interviewed reported having this support, it is not enough to support the needs of students.** Also, many teachers reported wanting the continuation of workshops provided by organizations on how to work with refugee children as this was reported as helpful in their work with refugee children.

## Barriers Hindering Regular Attendance and Enrolment

According to Individual Interviews (IIS) with caregivers of children enrolled in Ukrainian online schooling, **most have not attempted to enrol their child in school in Moldova. The caregivers mostly reported this decision was based on reasons related to language (Romanian language primarily), as well as curriculum differences between Moldovan and Ukrainian schools (especially among secondary school caregivers).** The curriculum is a concern due to the differences in coursework but also the structure of the education system in Ukraine. When a child completes coursework for each grade level, they are working towards a 'certificate of completion' which is the formal acknowledgement of coursework completion, and which allows the child to continue on to the next education level (for example: from primary school to lower secondary school).<sup>29</sup> In this case, the concern for the caregivers is that the child will not earn credit towards this certificate by taking classes in Moldova, which would delay their educational progress.<sup>30</sup> In addition, caregivers expressed their desire for children to continue to learn the Ukrainian language (especially among primary school caregivers). Ukrainian language is not offered in many schools in Moldova, but it is the official language of instruction on the Ukrainian online learning platform. **Caregivers reported the familiarity with teachers, curriculum, and Ukrainian**

<sup>26</sup> Translators without borders, [Language data for Ukraine](#)

<sup>27</sup> Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 2020 [Language of Instruction in Ukraine](#)

<sup>28</sup> During the 2023-2024 school year, the MER has identified major funding gaps related to the active promotion of school enrolment for Ukrainian refugee children.

<sup>29</sup> Education needs assessment IsraAID and partners, [Rapid Needs Assessment](#)

<sup>30</sup> This concern has been addressed by MER, [Order 178](#)

**language as the most often perceived advantage of online learning.** Most primary and secondary school children reported enjoying having the same teachers and classmates they had in Ukraine. This desire for familiarity is another hindrance for caregivers to the enrolment in Moldovan schools.

Some caregivers of children studying online have attempted to enrol their child in school, and almost all reported facing barriers. These include the perceived need for Temporary Protection status before registering their child in school, the distance of the school from the residence, and difficulties with obtaining paperwork for enrolment from Ukraine.

*"... what I hear from other mothers, yes, there are difficulties, for example, they may say that there is no place [in the school] or there are difficulties in documentation, that is, you have to bring documents from Ukraine here and also translate into Romanian. These are the difficulties that arise."*

Caregiver of online learning child speaking about difficulties of enrolment.

**Caregivers who had enrolled their children in school in Moldova mostly reported the enrolment process as easy.** Most reported completing school documents for enrolment and providing the necessary identification documents requested by the school. On some occasions, a school administrator, social worker or teacher were reported to have assisted with the process. Some caregivers reported that their children were enrolled as auditors because Temporary Protection or residency documents were not needed<sup>31</sup>. One caregiver reported that the difficulty to enroll was based on the decision of the director of the school who reportedly denied the enrolment of their child on the grounds that the school did not receive funding for auditors..

Ultimately, many caregivers who chose to enrol their child in school in Moldova, reported doing so mostly for reasons of socialisation and learning quality for the child, and in response to difficulties with online learning. Moldovan teachers reported that Ukrainian caregivers want their children to continue learning, and this is why they choose to enrol them in school. **However, teachers also reported that barriers such as Romanian language, and the Temporary Protection status mostly cause them to continue learning online instead.**<sup>32</sup>

**Overall, the cost of school supplies and school fees were not seen as a barrier to attendance in Moldova.** Annually, caregivers reported paying between 1,000-5,000 Moldovan lei<sup>33</sup> for school supplies, though many also reported paying nothing because organisations providing support to refugees were able to cover the costs. School fees reported by caregivers were also mostly paid by organisations. Those who did pay reported paying between 100-300 lei a month for fees. As many caregivers interviewed for this assessment were able to receive assistance for school-related fees, cost was not seen as a barrier to enrolment. While transport to school was mostly not reported as a barrier, distance was. Most caregivers reported their child taking the bus or walking as the primary methods of transport to school. However, caregivers reported distance of the school from their residence as a barrier to enrolment. For instance, one caregiver reported that his child had to take a bus for one hour to arrive at the school.

## Enrolment Facilitators

Caregivers of children studying online were asked what could be done to remove the barriers to their child's enrolment into schools in Moldova. **The main incentive of online learning reported, is the caregiver's desire for their child to obtain course credits towards the Ukrainian certificate for the coursework that is completed.** This could take the form of courses completed in Moldova for which they can receive credit in Ukraine, or to **include courses based on the Ukrainian curriculum in Moldovan schools. Another facilitator suggested was to include courses to teach the Ukrainian**

<sup>31</sup> The designation as auditor no longer exists according to the 4 September 2023 MER instruction.

<sup>32</sup> The attainment of Temporary Protection Status is no longer a barrier to enrolment in schools since the 4 September 2023 instruction.

<sup>33</sup> 1 MDL = .521 EUR ([Inforeuro](https://inforeuro.eu), retrieved: Oct. 12, 2023)



**language in Moldovan schools.** Regarding the process of enrolment documentation, caregivers suggest reforming the need for documentation which would require travel to Ukraine, as well as increased information about schooling options provided by Moldovan and Ukrainian education authorities, to assist in the enrolment process.<sup>34</sup>

*"It would be nice if they would solve the problem with the documents. I need to get some documents from them[the schools], but they don't want to send them online, we have to go there[to Ukraine] to write an application to get them."*

Secondary school Caregiver recommendation

## Caregiver Recommendations for Ukrainian/Moldovan Education Authorities

To remove barriers to enrolment in Moldovan schools, caregivers recommended that Ukrainian education authorities could collaborate with their counterparts in Moldova to create a unified program for children studying in Moldova to receive course credits towards the certificate of completion. This was reported by all secondary school caregivers as a need. This certificate was also acknowledged as a main barrier by education authority KIs.<sup>35</sup> In addition, improved communication from the MoES regarding schooling options for children would assist caregivers in the decision-making process for their child's education. However, many also reported not yet knowing what to recommend as they have yet to go through the enrolment process.

From the perspective of Moldovan education authorities, measures have been taken to include refugee children into the school system of Moldova including the provision of classes in Romanian and Russian languages, Romanian language courses, teacher trainings for teachers working with refugee children, collaboration with partners to facilitate service provision for refugee schooling needs, collaboration with the MoES for school exams to be taken in Moldova, etc. An education authority KI mentioned that there have been measures taken on the side of the government to collaborate towards providing needed education services for refugees. The challenges they reportedly face are in facilitating access to education when parents might not be inclined to enrol their children.

## Access Needs

Children who are taking classes in Moldova whether through the online learning platform or in-person in Moldova, reported needing certain materials to ensure their regular attendance and learning. **For children taking online classes, internet access is the most reported need. Children reported needing laptops or tablets to use for studying. Most children reported using cell phones, which is not preferred.** Some also requested new books and quiet spaces to study. Many primary school children reported wanting to learn physically at school and socialise. However, when asked if there was any kind of assistance to help children to go to school in Moldova, the majority did not know or replied that they needed no assistance. Some reported they would go to school only if classes and teachers were from Ukraine, if there were Russian or Romanian language courses, or if their parents would allow them. Caregivers reported similar needs as the children. Children mostly reported studying in their bedrooms at home, and some also used common areas such as a kitchen or hallway. Children staying in Refugee Accommodation Centres (RACs) reported using a special room in the RAC to study, a computer room, or a common room.

<sup>34</sup> The issue of travel to Ukraine for documentation for school enrolment has been addressed in the 4 September 2023 instruction.

<sup>35</sup> The coursework completed in Moldova is recognized by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine MER, [Order 178](#)

*"I used to study in the computer room, it had all the facilities, and everything was fine, now there is no internet and I study in the common room, and it is not comfortable because everyone is noisy, and the teacher reprimands me for the noise."*

Primary school child speaking about study spaces.

**Primary school children taking classes in-person in Moldova, reported needing comfortable and quiet spaces at home to take lessons and technology (specifically laptops), though generally reported that they do not need anything.** Secondary school children would like new books, and most would also like Romanian language classes and internet access at home.

**For the current school year 2023-2024, most online caregivers reported that their child will continue to use the online learning platform.** However, they mentioned some factors that could change their minds about enrolment. Amongst them, the ongoing war or its outcome could induce caregivers to register their children in Moldovan schools. If there was the possibility of learning the Ukrainian curriculum in Moldovan schools, children could obtain the certificate of completion.<sup>36</sup> Some caregivers reported that they would attend if the school was closer to where they live. Children attending online education were asked if they would like to attend school in-person in Moldova. The responses to this question were mixed. **Primary school children reported being worried about the difficulty of making new friends, not wanting to learn another language, Romanian or Russian, and reported worrying about conflicts that might take place between children.** Those children who reported being interested in going to school in Moldova were not worried but rather encouraged about the opportunity to meet new friends/teachers.

*"No. I wouldn't want to, because it would be difficult, because I don't know anything here, I don't know the teachers, I won't have any friends. I don't want to go to a Russian school because it won't be our school, there won't be my teachers, there won't be my colleagues."*

Primary school child's reaction to attending school in Moldova

## Learning Conditions and Experiences

Findings from the 2022 Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA) conducted in Moldova revealed that out of the Ukrainian refugee households who reported that they had children in their household who were not enrolled in school in Moldova (n=422), 80% of HHs with children ages 7-10 and 11-15 years reported the main reason was the preference for the Ukrainian online learning platform.<sup>37</sup> The MSNA 2023 similarly reported that among those not intending to be enrolled in school in Moldova for the 2023/2024 school year, 72% of those aged 11-15 (n=109) and 77% of those aged 7-10 (n=60) reported a preference for Ukrainian distance learning (parental decision) as the reason.<sup>38</sup> To explore the incentives for online learning and the conditions in which they learn online, children and caregivers were asked about their experiences with online learning from Ukraine, including challenges, coping mechanisms, and satisfaction with learning. These experiences were also contrasted with the experiences and conditions of children learning in-person in Moldova. The social and emotional well-being of children was also explored in relation to education.

### Education Delivery challenges

<sup>36</sup> This concern has been addressed in the MER instruction on 4, September, 2023.

<sup>37</sup> REACH, [MSNA 2022](#)

<sup>38</sup> REACH, [MSNA 2023](#)

Depending on the location of residence of the child in Ukraine, the education format can be either face-to-face, distance education, or a mix of the two formats. In most institutions in southeastern Ukraine (Odesa, Mykolaiv, Dnipro, Kharkiv, Zaporizhia), most of the educational process is remote due to heavy conflict.<sup>39</sup> For those children attending classes remotely outside of Ukraine, and whose schools are in these areas of heavy conflict, there may be greater challenges to learning including increased interruptions to internet or disruptions from air alarms. The oblast of Odesa in fact, is the oblast of origin reported by most secondary school children in this assessment. **Ukrainian teachers reported in this assessment that the main challenge they faced overall are the interruptions to classes due to air raid alarms which require the teacher and students to retreat to the school's bomb shelter. During this time, the education process cannot continue in the absence of high-speed internet or electricity in shelters.**<sup>40</sup> These impacts are also reported by children studying online from Moldova.

According to Ukrainian teachers interviewed in this assessment, challenges can also vary by population density. For example, in rural locations, there is often a lack of, or poor internet connection compared to urban areas. In addition, damage to targeted areas such as energy infrastructure can impact access to electrical and internet coverage for particular areas. These challenges may force students to study on their own and contribute to education loss.

*"If there was no light (and I still have a full-time class), I would switch with another teacher (like computer science), take books and texts, and we'd read. When the light came on, we'd switch back. And with online classes, we made arrangements and moved the lesson to another time."*

Ukrainian teacher describing adaptations to challenges

## Learning Quality

**Most children conducting online learning reported not liking or only somewhat liking learning online, specifically primary school girls. The main reasons for their dissatisfaction with online schooling include poor internet connection in Ukraine, the lack of learning quality, shortened lessons, alarm disruptions to class, being bored at home, and the desire to socialise.** The most frequently experienced difficulty reported was the air alarm disruptions which can occur at any time during the lesson. Many caregivers and children (**including all secondary school children**) facing these challenges describe having no or very few coping mechanisms to adapt the learning process in these conditions.. **Secondary school girls reported having more difficulties with online learning than boys, including the lack of socialization, perception of poorer quality of learning online, and greater difficulty in access to internet.** They also reported being more open to attending school in Moldova given the opportunity. Caregivers reported trying to motivate their child about the importance of education, taking extra classes with teachers online, and using recordings of lessons provided by teachers to reduce learning gaps. However, some caregivers also reported that they have no strategy to deal with challenges, and ultimately the child was reported to either not be able to finish their studies or the lessons were shorter.

*"We don't get the knowledge we need, and the lessons only last 25 minutes."*

Secondary school child's perspective on online learning

Children also reported that their quality of learning has changed since displacement and overall, it has become more difficult. **The difficulties that the students mentioned include that teachers were reported to give more explanations when classes are given in-person than online, their grades have gotten worse, and they are unable to concentrate on schoolwork. Some children reported positive changes to learning quality including an improvement in grades, and the replacement of**

<sup>39</sup> Ministry of Education and Science, [Monitoring of education](#)

<sup>40</sup> Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, [Education guide](#)

**previous teachers with better-quality teachers.** Most children also believe that they are successful at school, but not all believed that their caregivers felt the same way. Caregivers reported dissatisfaction with the lack of teacher interactions, frequent changes of schoolteachers, and too many children attending online classes.

*"The disadvantages are many, children get distracted, they don't concentrate, sometimes they don't even come to class. Some lessons cannot even be taught online, students have to study a lot on their own... They lack motivation and desire to learn, hence the quality of learning decreases and they no longer want to learn."*

One caregiver's perspective of online learning

To improve education delivery, teachers have created various mechanisms to improve communication with students. For example, teachers reported recording lessons for children to access in case of disruption or for review purposes. Consultation groups were also organised for students to have a forum to ask teachers questions. **But even with these strategies, teachers reported that online learning has caused students to have poorer learning outcomes compared to in-person learning. That was especially the case for students studying abroad who are reportedly less likely to come to class than students in Ukraine.** One Ukrainian teacher reported that learning outcomes overall depend on the child's grade level, with younger children having the most difficulty to learn online. Overall teachers believe the level of education of the children has decreased, they are less active in learning, they may have difficulty communicating, and they often require more support from their parents to supplement their learning.

*"For the first six months of the war there were full-time and online classes, and after six months there was a striking difference. That is, the online classes lagged far behind the offline classes. Those who studied offline were significantly better at learning the material."*

Ukrainian teacher reporting online learning effects on students

## Learning experiences in Moldova

The experiences of refugee students enrolled in schools in Moldova as well as challenges in access to education for children studying online related to living in Moldova were explored.

**None of the children attending in-person schooling in Moldova reported disliking going to school.** Primary school children reported enjoying spending time with friends and learning. Secondary school children mentioned liking their classmates and reported that teacher instructions were clearer and could be comprehended in a single lesson, unlike the multiple lessons often needed in online settings. **Whilst none of the children reported disliking going to school on the whole, there were some reported challenges, including reported political talk from children and the feeling of being discriminated by their teachers, on the basis of being Ukrainian.** They also expressed disliking Romanian language classes which they find challenging and often result in lower grades.

**Children reported mostly positive impacts of attending school on their learning quality.** Many reported their grades were improved, and that the quality of learning was very good. All children reported doing well in school and believed that their parents felt the same way. Children also reported liking their teachers who they described as kind and good at explaining lessons.

*"I tried not to skip at all, first of all, they teach very interesting things here. For example, in chemistry and physics they gave us test tubes and said now we would do an experiment, and we did. We didn't have that in Ukraine."*

Secondary school child going to school in Moldova

## Social Integration

The ability for refugee children to socialise is important for their integration into life in Moldova as well as to their social and emotional well-being. **Although most children attending classes online mentioned participating in some social activities in their free time, many also reported no participation in any social activities with friends in Moldova.** When children meet, primary school children mostly reported playing games or walking together, while secondary school children reported playing sports and doing outdoor activities. As far as their relationships with their classmates online, most reported not speaking with their classmates outside of class, although they highlighted having a good relationship with them overall. The majority reported that their classmates online also live outside of Moldova, making it impossible for them to meet in person and socialise.

Alternatively, most children attending school in Moldova mentioned engaging in social activities with friends in their free time. Most activities reported by primary school children are school-related activities, such as charity fairs, school clubs, school excursions, and playing on the playground. Children also mentioned taking part in Romanian language courses in their free time.

*"I mostly go out with friends, I used to go to fencing and then I took Romanian courses."*

Secondary school child reporting activities during free time

Caregivers mostly reported no challenges regarding their children's relationships with their Moldovan peers. However, commonly reported challenges relate to political discussions among children which can lead to arguments or war-related insults. These arguments may be exacerbated because of the language barrier between children. These same political challenges have been reported by children and Moldovan teachers which could indicate that it is a common issue related to social cohesion.

*"We met local people who were very fiercely propaganda for Russia, there were such moments at school, but it was not long because the teacher suppressed such moments, parents also discussed such situations among themselves, but in general, all then came to naught, as they solved such problems with the children."*

Caregiver of child going to school in Moldova about integration challenges.

**Almost all children attending school in Moldova reported having a good relationship with their peers. Some challenges reported by children included being teased or discriminatory language being used toward them.** One primary school child reported not having made any friends yet. Moldovan teachers mostly reported that the school curriculum differences are the main challenge for children to integrate into schools, followed by language difficulties. Some teachers also reported that political talk between children can sometimes reach the point of a fight.

To better integrate children, caregivers recommended more extracurricular activities jointly with Moldovan children, excursions, language courses (Romanian), and overall creating more opportunities to communicate with Moldovans. Online caregivers foresee integration challenges mostly because of the language difficulties, and their children's lack of opportunity to socialise. Education authority KIs mostly reported that more can be done from the government to increase the publicity of education services available for refugees, including enrolment information. Activities with Moldovan children and summer camps were reportedly organised for both groups of children to increase interaction over summer break. One authority KI reported that the difficulty in integration lies with the family decision on their movement and if they will stay or go. Those families that have made the decision to stay are perceived to be more willing to integrate into society.

## Social and Emotional Well-Being

The assessment of the children's well-being as it relates to their ability to learn was adapted from the International Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Assessment tool promoted by the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies and published by Save the Children.<sup>41</sup> The SEL assessment, as it was designed, was to allow for measuring stress management, perseverance, conflict resolution, and other characteristics related to well-being in children. In this research, questions of well-being were included to assess the child's feelings since displacement, how they approach situations of conflict with others, socialisation opportunities with other children, and caregivers' perceptions of their child's well-being.

**Overall, primary-school girls attending online classes were the group of children who reported to be the most worried compared to all other children's groups consulted.** The children mostly worried about their family and friends who stayed in Ukraine. They also reported to miss the life they had before they arrived in Moldova and expressed their wish to go back to school in Ukraine with their friends. Some also mentioned being afraid of noises such as those made by airplanes and fireworks. While some children have been able to adapt and integrate, some reported not having many friends. **Many also expressed good feelings about being in Moldova, that they like it here and are doing well.**

**Children in secondary school online and in-person, reported equally good and bad feelings since coming to Moldova.** Those who had worries reported, as the primary school children, missing their families or friends in Ukraine or worrying when they hear news of the events happening in Ukraine. This was mostly reported by girls. Some children reported feeling that there are misunderstandings between Moldovan and Ukrainian children because of the language barrier. While some children have been able to adapt and integrate, some report not yet having many friends. Some children who reported difficulties in the beginning of their displacement stated having integrated into life in Moldova.

**Primary and secondary school children attending Moldovan schools, mostly reported having no worries** and reported largely positive feelings, socializing with friends, and generally reported feeling safe, although the worries they did have were about relatives and friends back home. **Moldovan teachers similarly reported mostly no difficulties in children's well-being.** Of the teachers who reported to have witnessed difficulties for students, and more specifically, being reserved or worried at first, they indicated that the children have adapted over time once they have settled in. **Caregivers of children attending in-person classes in Moldova have reported both negative and positive changes in their child's well-being.** The negative changes mostly depict the well-being of the child when they had first arrived in Moldova. These included feelings of stress or fear, being withdrawn, and feelings of sadness from the absence of the child's father. **However, many of these negative initial feelings were reported to have improved over time as the child has adapted to life in Moldova. Most caregivers believe that these changes in well-being have positively impacted the child's ability to learn.** They reported that learning has improved and there are less war-related distractions.

**Caregivers of children attending online classes reported noticing mostly negative changes in their child's well-being.** These included losing interest in school, isolation from other children due to a lack of socialisation opportunities, and the lack of time spent with family and friends who stayed in Ukraine, which has had a negative effect on the child. Behavioral changes mentioned included stress, impulsive behavior, tantrums for which the child has been put on medication, and frequent crying. **Conversely, a few caregivers reported positive changes in well-being. These relate to the ability of the child to adapt to life in Moldova and to be able to rest emotionally and recover.** According to most caregivers of children attending online classes, these changes in well-being have not impacted the child's

<sup>41</sup> ISELA, [Social and Emotional Learning Assessment](#)



ability to learn. Those caregivers who reported an impact on learning include such changes as the inability to concentrate on schoolwork or being affected by memories before the war.

**Ukrainian teachers with online students have also reported changes in children's well-being. The reported changes include increased sadness, levels of aggression, and fear of alarms, while others have been able to better adapt to changes.** The true consequences of the war on children's well-being, however, are not yet fully known. Also related to the well-being of children, is the wellbeing of Ukrainian teachers which can directly affect the learning quality of their students. **Ukrainian teachers reported needing psychological assistance, rest for some that are overworked, as well as increased communication between teachers and the education authority.**

*"Teachers also did not sleep at night... It's twice as hard as it is in the classroom. If you don't give a teacher that kind of rest, the next year the teacher is burned out. There is no teacher next[then]. Half the teachers at the end of the year were crying and wanted a settlement [to quit teaching]."*

Ukrainian teacher explaining difficulties faced by teachers.

## Future Needs for Enrolment

### Policies and Priorities of Moldovan Education Authorities

One focus of National Education Authorities for the 2023-2024 school year is to increase school enrolment of refugee children. Some authority KIs reported providing as much information as possible about schooling for Ukrainian caregivers as important for the current year. Continuing collaboration with associations representing Ukrainians in Moldova is also important to continue to understand the needs of refugees. Authority KIs stated that the impact of Temporary Protection on education enrolment has yet to be felt, however, the education authority will reportedly benefit from better monitoring of beneficiaries to be able to better estimate education budgetary costs. The primary needs, as described by authorities, are to increase school psychologists, continue to train teachers on refugee needs, and increase incentives for teachers who are experiencing a subsequent greater workload.

#### **\*\*NOTE:**

During the writing of this report, on 4 September 2023, the MER issued a new Instruction on enrollment procedures for Ukrainian children living in Moldova. According to this guidance, released in September 2023<sup>42</sup>,

- All children from Ukraine can enrol in Moldovan schools, no matter their legal status. They do not need to present any document related to legal status to enroll.
- Documents needed to enroll include: parent/guardian national ID, child's national ID or birth certificate, child's medical records (from Ukraine or can be obtained in Moldova), child's school records if available (electronic versions accepted); if not, there are several procedures according to the age of the child to determine the grade of placement.
- Parents can enrol their child by submitting an application form to the local school. In case there is no available space in the local school, they can be referred to a nearby school that has space.
- Schools are also requested to facilitate access to online learning for any child who wishes to study the Ukrainian curriculum online, but in a school setting.

<sup>42</sup> Ministry of Education and Research, [Instruction](#)

- Auditor status no longer exists. Students that were previously auditors can fully enrol in school or choose to study online.
- Enrolment of Ukrainian children in Moldovan schools is not mandatory because the option to study through the Ukrainian online platform remains available.
- Schools issues a certificate with reference to the learning results and education path achieved in educational institutions by the child in the Republic of Moldova.
- Schools recognize the equivalence of studies/certificates from studies in Ukraine for enrolment in the national system in the Republic of Moldova.

**The recommendations included were drafted based on this policy update.**

## CONCLUSION

The current educational landscape for Ukrainian refugee children in Moldova is a mixture of challenges and opportunities. Barriers to enrolment combined with a preference for online learning have impeded children from switching to in-person learning environments. Poor online learning conditions are exacerbating any learning gaps that have come with displacement. For children studying online, the lack of socialising is diminishing the opportunity to improve children's integration into life in Moldova. The overall social and emotional well-being of children conducting online learning is being affected by challenges in learning conditions and integration into their new environment, while children attending school in-person have reportedly experienced improved quality of learning, socialisation, and well-being. Most children reported enjoying going to school in Moldova, socializing with their classmates, and clear/comprehensive instruction from teachers. Overall, children reported mostly positive impacts of attending school on their learning quality. Many mentioned that their grades have improved since attending school in person, as well as the quality of learning. There are some positive signs that the new policy measures enacted by the MER which removed enrolment barriers could provide incentives for in-person attendance for refugee children choosing to continue their education in Moldova.

Reported challenges to enrolment at the time the interviews were conducted (some are no longer applicable) include: legal requirements for enrolment such as documentation from Ukraine, the need to acquire Temporary Protection, and those reported by caregivers such as the difficulty with language, differences between the curriculums of Ukraine and Moldova, and caregivers' desire for children to continue to learn the Ukrainian language. The enrolment challenges and perceptions have contributed to the low number of refugee children enrolled in schools in Moldova. At the same time, there is also an acknowledgement from many caregivers and children that learning online in the current conditions is not sufficient. There are frequent disruptions from alarms and less interaction with teachers. Children reported being unable to concentrate on schoolwork and have seen a decline in their grades, and have fewer opportunities to socialise with peers. In contrast, many caregivers of children studying in-person reported positive learning conditions, socialisation in school and outside of school with peers, and greater involvement in school activities.

Given the overall positive reports of well-being, learning quality, and socialisation for children attending school in-person, the reported preference for online learning raises concerns about the long-term impact this learning modality can have on a child's education, and overall development. Based on the findings in this assessment from caregivers, teachers, and children, the impact of online learning on learning quality has been largely negative. In addition, caregivers and Ukrainian teachers expressed a reluctance to continue the online learning system for a long period of time due to its negative effects on children's learning and socialisation. Even though caregivers are aware of the limits of online learning, their reported preference for this modality of learning based on caregiver's desire for Ukrainian language continuity and the challenges with curriculum/language differences, will require some structural changes to incentivize caregivers to enrol their children in Moldovan schools. It has now been over 1.5 years since the start of the conflict in Ukraine, with no clear idea of when it will end. According to the RNA,<sup>43</sup> the top education consideration for caregivers in Moldova in 2022 was to wait and see what will happen- if they will return to Ukraine or move to another country. It remains to be seen to what extent this hesitancy among caregivers will continue into this current school year (2023-2024) and the future impact this decision will have on refugee children's education and well-being. As of November 2023 there are less than 1,700 primary and secondary school children enrolled.

One positive change in the education landscape is the new MER Instruction that seeks to reduce many reported barriers to enrolment (see note above), including related to legal status and document requirements. These policies will be beneficial for caregivers seeking to enrol their children into schools by removing much of the paperwork required prior to enrolment. However, there is still more to be done

<sup>43</sup> Education needs assessment IsraAID & UNICEF [Rapid Needs Assessment](#)

to improve the education outcomes of children displaced by the war in Ukraine. The following recommendations section highlights tangible changes that could be made to address the current education situation in the country for Ukrainian refugee children based on results reported from this assessment.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Improving the enrolment and quality of primary and secondary education in Moldova requires a **multi-stakeholder approach** that should include **the government, educators, parents, and the community**. Based on the findings of the assessment, and in collaboration with UNHCR and UNICEF, the following actions have been identified.

### Short Term Recommendations:

- **Challenge:** Most caregivers reported the desire for their children to continue learning the Ukrainian curriculum instead of enrolling in Moldovan schools. On the other hand, many children conducting online learning mentioned lower levels of socialisation compared to those conducting classes in-person.

**Recommendation: Expand access to online learning in Moldovan schools.** *In order to achieve a balance between family preference and the known negative impacts of prolonged online learning, it is recommended that access to online learning in Moldovan schools is further expanded by MER and local schools, with the support of humanitarian partners, to allow Ukrainian children to continue to study the Ukrainian curriculum, but in a school based setting, with access to the full range of services available in a school. Additionally, it is recommended that MER and local schools engage Ukrainian teachers and support staff in overseeing and facilitating online education for children in Moldovan schools.*

- **Challenge:** Most caregivers who attempted to enrol their child in school in Moldova faced barriers in the enrolment process.

**Recommendation: Continue to disseminate 4 September Instruction and support families with school enrolment.** *This assessment was conducted from June-July 2023, before MER's new and simplified school enrolment Instruction for Ukrainian children was published on 4 September. It is recommended that continued efforts by MER, local Departments of Education, and humanitarian partners are undertaken to ensure that the information in the Instruction is widely disseminated throughout the community. Additionally, it is recommended that humanitarian partners with case management services provide individualized support to families who need support with school enrolment. Finally, it is recommended that local Departments of Education make clear the mechanism by which parents can seek support if they are encountering problems with a particular school.*

- **Challenge:** Many children reported hesitancy in meeting new classmates and new teachers, as a reason for non-enrolment.

**Recommendation: Coordinate activities that will increase the inclusion of refugee children and their caregivers in the Moldovan school system.** *It is recommended that schools ensure that both in-school and extracurricular activities involve both Ukrainian and Moldovan children, including Ukrainian children studying online in a school setting. It is also recommended that humanitarian partners organize after school activities to bring together both Moldovan and Ukrainian children. Additionally, it is recommended that a mentorship program is initiated in schools to support new Ukrainian students with having a Moldovan "buddy" whom they can rely on for support. Finally, it is recommended that "open houses" are organized for*

*parents to visit schools and meet teachers, to become familiar with their local education options.*

- **Challenge:** The majority of caregivers reported the need for more information about enrolment options for their child abroad and the effect enrolment abroad would have on the child's progress towards a certificate from the Ministry of Education and Science in Ukraine.

**Recommendation: Increase information campaigns on education-related topics for caregivers with school-aged children to ensure informed decision-making.** *The certificates issued in Moldova will be recognised in Ukraine, although many caregivers reported this as a major barrier. To assist caregivers in making informed decisions about their children's education, it is recommended that both MER and humanitarian partners continue information dissemination campaigns to ensure that information of these topics is widely shared.*

### Long-Term Recommendations:

- **Challenge:** Most Ukrainian refugee caregivers (especially primary school caregivers) reported wanting their children to continue learning the Ukrainian language in Moldova.

**Recommendation: Offer the Ukrainian language as an elective course in Moldovan schools.** *It is recommended that Moldovan schools offer Ukrainian language classes as a school elective, which can be potentially taught by Ukrainian teachers living in Moldova.*

- **Challenge:** Most children and caregivers reported the Romanian Language as a barrier to enrolment in Moldovan schools.

**Recommendation: Increase the availability of Romanian language classes by creating a formal program within Moldovan schools.** *It is recommended that a formal and structured Romanian as a second language programme is established by MER, with the support of humanitarian partners, if needed, and implemented in all Moldovan schools hosting refugee children. In the short term however, schools and partners can still support in providing after-hour classes for Romanian language.*

- **Challenge:** Some online caregivers reported no or poor internet access in their residence which affects their children's ability to study.

**Recommendation: Publicize spaces created for students and the services offered.** *While many community study spaces exist, in libraries, community centres, and youth centres, it is recommended that the services of these locations are further publicized, to ensure that all caregivers and students are aware of them.*

- **Challenge:** Most caregivers, students, and teachers agree that there is a large difference in the curriculums between Moldova and Ukraine which can cause a child to fall behind in learning compared to their Moldovan classmates.

**Recommendation: Implement support programs such as catch-up classes for students with gaps in education related to curriculum differences or extended periods of time outside of the classroom.** *It is recommended that schools offer specialized support, such as in school tutoring, for Ukrainian children who need help adapting to the Moldovan curriculum. For*



*Ukrainian children who have been out of school for prolonged periods, have gaps in their education, or who have never attended school, it is recommended that MER supports local schools to implement in-school catch up classes and an accelerated learning program, taught by qualified teachers.*

- **Challenge:** Many Moldovan teachers reported small incidents between children in school regarding political talk which resulted in disagreements.

**Recommendation: Provide additional support and training for teachers to effectively address any issues related to politically driven conflicts between students and supplement this training with school campaigns that promote cohesion.** *It is recommended that MER, with the support of humanitarian partners, provide additional training for teachers on inclusive education, innovative learning pedagogies and social cohesion in schools to ensure inclusion of all children and prevent politically driven conflicts among students. In addition, it is recommended that programmes and activities be developed to foster communication and social cohesion between refugee children and their Moldovan peers. Finally, it is recommended that promotion of anti-bullying campaigns, co-led by students, are promoted in schools through contests or other engaging activities to generate participation.*

- **Challenge:** Most caregivers of online and in-person schooling reported their children having experienced negative effects to their social and emotional well-being since their displacement.

**Recommendation: Increase the capacity of schools to respond to the psychological support needs of refugee students by hiring additional psychologists and providing training for teachers that work with refugee children.** *It is recommended that MER support local schools to hire additional psychologists, if needed, for those schools with refugee students enrolled. Additionally, it is recommended to organise training of educational staff on Psychosocial First Aid (PFA) and Psycho Social Support (PSS). For caregivers whose children are taking classes in person, it is recommended for schools to publicise available PSS resources and services that are offered both in school and by humanitarian partners. For caregivers whose children are taking courses online, it is recommended to promote these services and resources through channels commonly used by refugees.*

## Annex

All Tools used for the surveys in this assessment can be found here [Tools including the questions for the Key Informant Interviews as well as the questions for the Focus Group Discussion for the children from the different school levels.](#)