

SCHOOLS FOR DEMOCRACY

Supporting Educational Reforms in Ukraine

Narrative report
September 2022

INTRODUCTION

The European Wergeland Centre (EWC) has strongly condemned Russia's war on Ukraine that started on 24 February along with many other organizations around the world. This act of military aggression predetermined in many ways the first half a year of the new instalment of the “Schools for Democracy” Programme launched in November 2021.

Based on the experience the EWC has had in Ukraine since 2013, the current Programme has aimed at supporting further implementation of democratic education reforms in Ukraine through participating in policy making, offering various activities in capacity-building for educators, promoting professional learning communities, and contributing to awareness-raising on the value of reforms among the wider public. The team continued the work launched in 2017-2021 and initiated new activities in line with the current Programme strategy (2021-2024).

Russia's war on Ukraine changed the political situation and priorities in education in the country drastically. As of the beginning of September 2022, roughly 20 percent of Ukraine's territory was under Russian occupation. Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (MoES) reports that 2177 educational establishments all over Ukraine have been damaged and 284 completely destroyed, as of 1 September. [The UN reports that](#) more than 6 million Ukrainians fled the country to find refuge and more than 6 million are internally displaced. [UNICEF](#) also underlines that more than 4 million children have been forced to leave their homes and 5 out of 7,5 million children in Ukraine are in need of humanitarian assistance.

Following the recommendation of the MoES, the education process stopped on 25 February. However, the educational process was resumed in 13 regions of Ukraine on 14 March already. Internally displaced children got a chance to continue studying in the educational institutions of their new place of residence. Refugee children had an opportunity to either go to kindergartens and schools in the host countries or continue education in Ukrainian schools remotely.

The new academic year started traditionally on 1 September. The MoES informed that out of 12 800 Ukrainian schools, 3 000 will offer education offline, almost 5 700 will work remotely, and 4 000 will use a blended format.

The Programme adapted to the new realities of the full-scale war by developing an emergency response in order to continue supporting the provision of quality education in Ukraine. The team provides policy advice, sustains close dialogue with all partners in and outside of Ukraine, supports the inclusion of internally displaced and refugee children at the new schools, builds psychological resilience of Ukrainian teachers and facilitates their professional development even during the war.

POLICY

School component

Since November 2021, the Programme representatives have participated in five working groups. Despite the fact that many of these groups shifted their focus to supporting Ukrainian education in times of war, the introduction of the New Ukrainian School (NUS) reform at the secondary school level, scheduled for the 2022/23 academic year remained one of the main goals of the MoES. The NUS concept is strongly related to school democratization, and the Programme has played a significant role in the development and implementation of the concept since 2015. Currently, the Programme remains among the main international donors supporting further NUS implementation by contributing to the working groups of experts and capacity building of Ukrainian educators.

The importance of distance learning has increased dramatically due to the large number of internally displaced and Ukrainian refugee children. The MoES requested Programme's participation in contributing to the development of the guidelines for assuring the quality of distance education in this crucial time. As a recognition of the Programme's contribution to the education reform in Ukraine, the team was also invited to join the groups drafting recovery plans for education and youth policies.

The table below gives an overview of the working groups that the Programme has been involved in, as well as the results of their activities.

Working group	Activity period	Programme's role	Results
Assessment in grades 5-6 of the New Ukrainian School	11/21 - 03/22	Expert support, technical support	Methodological recommendations for students' assessment in grades 5-6 following the national basic secondary education curriculum (adopted in April 2022). This document guarantees fair, unbiased, objective, independent and non-discriminatory assessment to all students. Students' progress is now monitored in the area of civic competences development, such as expressing one's own opinion, critical thinking, problem-solving, cooperation and respect towards human dignity, as well as societal engagement.
Model of distance education for Ukrainian schools	05/22 - ongoing	Expert support, moderation of meetings	Models of the education process in schools in times of the full-fledged Russian aggression against Ukraine. It is expected to be adopted in August 2022.
Working group on Centers for Professional Development of teachers	01/22 - ongoing	Expert support, technical support	The Program contributed to the series of webinars on various national systems of organizing professional learning communities and actively participated in the working group on developing a Manual for different actors involved in working with the Centres of Professional Development ¹ . The latter is currently being finalized.
Recovery working group "Education and Science" The Programme represented in subgroups: "Secondary education", "Preschool", "Extracurricular and Lifelong-learning education")	05/22 - ongoing	Expert support	Having analyzed the current state of affairs in education, the group identified the main problems and suggested solutions from short-, mid-, and long-term perspectives. The plan suggests more focus on implementing civic education through non-formal approaches in educational institutions, improving the use of distance learning in preschool, school, extracurricular and inclusive education, and recommends different ways of organizing the process of education in the times of war. More details on the general recovery strategy for Ukraine can be found here: https://recovery.gov.ua The current draft of the Recovery plan "Education and Science" is expected to be open for public discussion in August 2022.
Recovery working group "Youth Policy"	05/22 - ongoing	Expert support	A draft of the recovery plan "Youth policy" is currently being finalized.

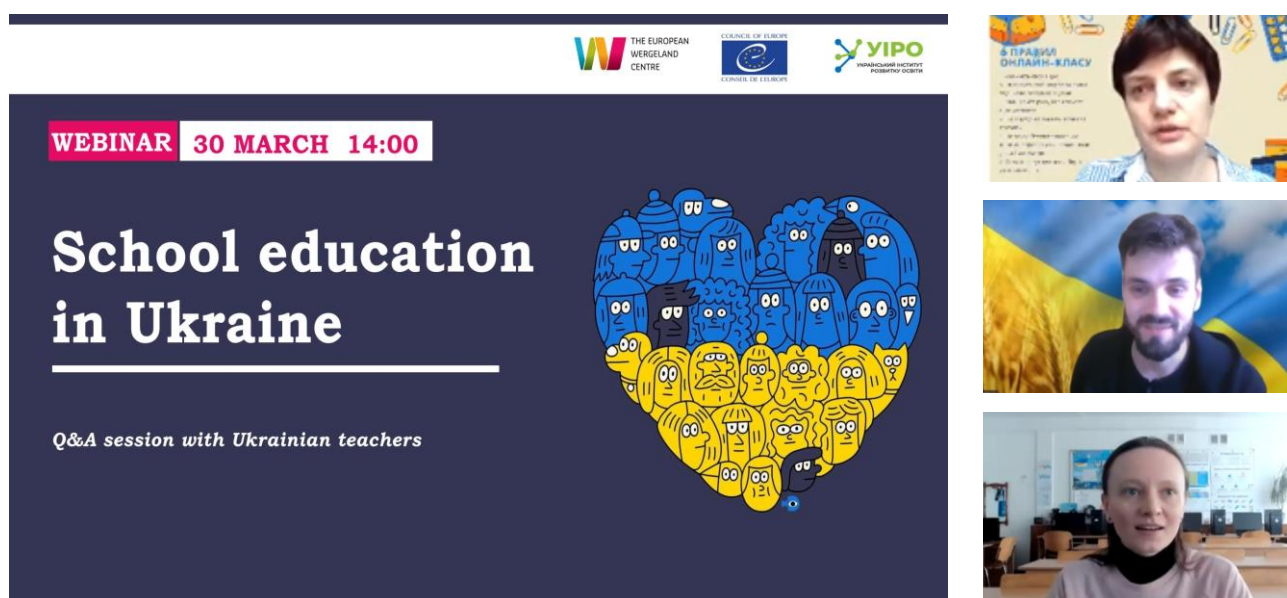
¹ Since the current reporting period covers November 2021 - July 2022, details on the adopted document will be provided in the next Programme report.

In addition, the Programme experts participated in preparing the [methodological recommendations on teaching history & civics in 2022/23](#)².

The Programme is also a member of two communities of practice. While working groups led by MoES are focused on the development of concrete policy documents, communities of practice include a variety of stakeholders who cooperate to offer various solutions to the issues that are considered to be important. The [“Education and Science” community](#) is affiliated with the MoES and international donors, as well as other institutions supporting education in Ukraine. The community holds monthly meetings to inform about MoES needs and donors' support provided or planned. To tackle the emergency needs, The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) organized the [Ukraine Education Cluster](#).

From the very beginning of the war, the Programme identified the need of helping faster integration of the internally displaced children, engaging the Programme's teachers and trainers in meaningful work, and introducing the activity to keep the network going at very special circumstances of the wartime. It was obvious that launching the activity called “Mobile youth work”, which was supposed to contribute to better socialization of the internally displaced children with the help of the activities offered by the Programme's team of trainers, became a natural emergency response under current conditions. The Programme's team, therefore, conducted a number of meetings with UNICEF and Reform Support Team (RST) representatives in order to better coordinate common efforts in conducting this kind of activities. As a result, the EWC and RST discussed further support for the schools piloting the new National Curriculum in grades 5-6 and planned further cooperation in the field.

Finally, the Programme was available for the Norwegian authorities, research institutions and civil society organisations having inquiries about the integration of Ukrainian refugee children in Norway. The EWC team held meetings with the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, Oslo Municipality, Norwegian Sports Federation, Institute for Urban and Regional Research (NIBR-OsloMet), and Fafo. In March 2022, when the first wave of Ukrainian refugees finally reached Europe, recognizing the lack of knowledge and information among policymakers, teachers and school principals who host Ukrainian students, the Programme conducted a [webinar on school education in Ukraine](#) in cooperation with the Ukrainian Institute of Education Development. The team, therefore, set up a [resource page](#) on the Ukrainian education system for teachers working with Ukrainian refugee children in Europe.



Webinar on School education in Ukraine with input from Programme experts and teachers from Ukraine, March 2022

² Since the current reporting period covers November 2021 - July 2022, details on the adopted document will be provided in the next Programme report.

Preschool component

The aim of the Programme's preschool component is to build up and foster the culture of democracy in preschool education by developing democratic values and competences from early childhood. Therefore, the Programme has been disseminating information about the updated version of the Preschool Basic Component (National Curriculum) developed and adopted in 2021 with the support of Programme experts. The document includes more focus on free play, child participation, competence-based approach, democratic and inclusive environment, and continuity in early childhood education (namely, preschool and primary school).

To implement the new curriculum in practice, the Programme team has been in close dialogue with the MoES to develop a concept of the *democratic kindergarten* with offering concrete steps and sharing good practices to make preschool more inclusive and democratic. Before the beginning of the war, the Programme team had regular bi-weekly meetings with the Ministry on this matter.

Due to the war in Ukraine, some of the plans for the preschool component had to be postponed. However, the Programme is determined to continue collaboration with the MoES and outline new approaches to preschool development in post-war times. A possible study on the learning needs of the preschool teachers is currently being discussed with the MoES representatives. Another direction of the team's current cooperation with the authorities concerns the promotion of the Programme's blended course "Listening to children's voices: culture of democracy in pre-school education".

CAPACITY BUILDING

School component

The Programme continues to support the implementation of the New Ukrainian School reform through the capacity building of educators. While face-to-face trainings are impossible due to current security measures, online and blended learning still gives an opportunity for professional development to Ukrainian educators. A massive open online course (MOOC) on digital citizenship "School life online" was released in May 2022. Over 6000 participants have enrolled in it during the first 3 months. The course continues the series of MOOCs "30 Steps towards the New Ukrainian School: Educating a Citizen" launched on the Prometheus platform consisting of the following five courses: ["Starting towards a Successful School"](#), ["Secrets of the Successful Principal"](#), ["Everyday Solutions for Teaching"](#), ["School and Community for Students"](#), and ["School life online"](#). As of July 2022, 75 000 participants have enrolled in these online courses (13 823 enrolled after 24 February 2022). Educators in Ukraine show great interest in continuing their professional development despite the war.



A poster of the MOOC "School Life Online" and a course certificate

Three blended learning courses “Democratic school governance”, “Transversal development of civic competences”, and “Development of civic competences through student councils” were offered at the [EWC online learning platform](#) in summer 2022. Blended courses comprise both the elements of participants’ independent work and direct facilitation by trainers during regular online meetings. Offline meetings for the courses Alumni are planned but currently postponed due to the circumstances. This is the third cycle of the blended courses in the Programme since spring 2021. In summer 2022, each course included a psychological support module to better enable teachers to work in the conditions of war. 305 participants registered for the blended courses and 158 obtained their certificates. Through participating in these courses, the participants improved their knowledge and capacity in several domains, such as knowledge and skills to develop civic competences of students in various subjects and through the student self-governance, as well as knowledge and skills to establish democratic governance at school. They also learnt how to support students and educators traumatized by war. Below are several citations from the participants’ feedback on the courses:



“I really liked the content of the course, the selection of materials, the format of conducting classes and conveying information to the participants.”

“I finally found out what exactly the values of democracy are!”

“Thank you for raising important topics that resonate with our difficult times, it will help in working with children.”

“This course gave me a lot of knowledge and showed opportunities on how to conduct lessons in a blended educational environment, which is very relevant now.”

Welcome to EWC's
online learning platform

A more flexible and wider access
to learning opportunities
for educators across Europe.



Screenshot from the EWC's online learning platform

In addition to capacity building courses and events, the EWC team contributed to a number of resources to continue the implementation of the education reform and support educators in their work during the war. An example of this is a **series of webinars** “Building Learning Communities: Best International Practices” (6 in total) for the Centres of Professional Development of teachers held in April – June 2022, where the leading experts on professional learning communities from France, Finland, Georgia, Norway, Slovenia, Moldova and Croatia shared their knowledge and experiences with the Ukrainian colleagues. The cases presented at the webinars will be reflected in a handbook, which is currently under development, and contain most relevant recommendations on how to strengthen the capacity of the Centres of Professional Development, as well as to create and support professional learning communities.

A new initiative that arose as an emergency response to war concerns integration and inclusion of internally displaced children through **mobile youth work**. Organized in the form of face-to-face meetings at schools for local and displaced children, teachers and parents and was conducted by the members of the Programme’s trainer network in safer regions of Ukraine. Inclusion has always been an integral part of the Programme’s activities and the trainers have profound expertise in this area that they share with teachers and parents. The meetings include team building and stress management techniques to help traumatized internally displaced children feel safer and get better accommodated in the new environment.

By encouraging local teachers to participate in this work, the Programme aims at strengthening their capacity to shape an inclusive and safe environment at schools. Teachers are instructed on how to deal with crisis reactions and focus on children's well-being and mental health. By the end of May 2022, the Programme managed to organize 225 trainings in 17 Ukrainian cities. 4573 participants took part in the meetings, including appr. 3500 internally displaced and 1000 local students and parents. They were joined by 111 teachers and 39 school principals.



Mobile youth work meetings held at schools for local and internally displaced children, teachers and parents in safer areas of Ukraine.

Preschool

In November 2021, the Programme launched a blended course “Listening to children’s voices: culture of democracy in preschool education” that contained both face-to-face and online capacity-building elements. A face-to-face meeting took place prior to the online work with course facilitators on the [EWC online learning platform](#). The course was aimed at introducing new requirements of the preschool curriculum on the development of democratic competences of children, as well as guidelines and practical advice on the creation of an inclusive and democratic kindergarten. 10 kindergartens took part in the online blended learning course, and each of them was represented by a team of 3 participants - preschool teachers, psychologists, and directors.



Face-to-face meeting with the first group of participants of the blended course “Listening to children’s voices: culture of democracy in preschool education”, Nov 2021.

Examples of feedback from the course participants:



"I got lots of useful information for working with children and building a democratic kindergarten".

"The course is quite interesting, meaningful and necessary for self-improvement and self-realisation".

"I wish all the teachers of our kindergarten would take this course, because the materials of the course make you think, change your attitude towards children, teach you how to communicate effectively with them".



23 course participants became the first members of the online [Democratic preschool network](#) sharing useful information and resources and promoting relevant learning materials. The Programme sees a huge potential in developing online learning communities and, therefore, plans various networking events and workshops on professional development for this particular group.

The adapted version of this blended course taking into account war context is currently under development and should be launched shortly. It will aim at supporting preschool educators who have to be able to deal with the psychological trauma of children, as well as communicate with internally displaced children and their families. It is expected that the network will gradually expand thanks to the new course participants.

Since the beginning of the war, hundreds of kindergartens have been closed in Ukraine for security reasons. However, internally displaced children of preschool age severely lack peer-to-peer socialization. The Programme, therefore, decided to support kindergartens and families by organizing **mobile groups** of trainers who visit preschools in different regions and conduct interactive learning sessions for children and their families. More than 3000 children, teachers and parents took part in these events in 16 cities in Ukraine and one city in Bulgaria. Mobile groups have been taking place until August 2022 and will possibly be continued due to a great demand and positive responses from the participants.



Mobile group meetings for preschoolers. Meetings took place in safer regions of Ukraine.

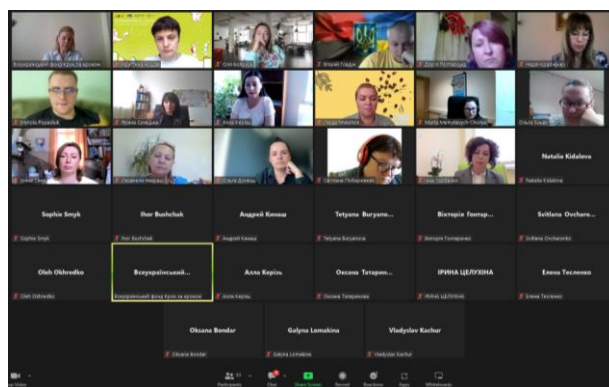
The Programme team has adjusted the work on supporting pre-school education in Ukraine to the harsh realities of the ongoing war. As an emergency response, a series of videos to guide preschool teachers, parents and caregivers through supporting children at wartime were prepared. [4 videos](#) on psychological aid for children give advice on how to deal with difficult questions, manifestations of anger, children's sleeping problems and nightmares, how to reduce stress, etc. The set of videos will be included as learning materials of the next blended learning course cycle. It is planned to expand on the series with an input of professional psychologist on new relevant topics, besides another series of videos on outdoor education, which will be useful for school and preschool teachers, parents and caregivers, is under development.

PROGRAMME NETWORK OF TRAINERS DURING THE WAR

The war has certainly affected all people in Ukraine, including educators and the Programme's network of trainers. For many years, the trainer network has been the foundation of the Programme expertise. When the war broke out, the members of the pool have been supporting each other both psychologically and practically. Some helped colleagues to escape dangerous areas and collected funds for humanitarian support in the most precarious cases. Seven members of the trainer's network are currently recorded as refugees, while six are internally displaced within the country. Some trainers have shared their perspectives on the war and its effect on students and education in Ukraine in public media.

Despite the challenges of war, many trainers are still actively involved in the Programme activities. They conduct meetings and workshops at schools and kindergartens to support both educators, children and parents in the new circumstances as well as blended courses for school and preschool teachers and principals.

In addition, some of the members of trainer pool were involved in a newly developed research project "Schools in times of war" and aquired new skills as interviewers. The research project is aimed at gathering witness stories on civic action and changing role of schools in a wartime. In spring 2022, 30 in-depth interviews were collected and three focus groups of teachers, school principals and students were conducted. The interviews were based on the methodology developed by the Research Bureau Sociologist (Kharkiv, Ukraine). The results of this research project will show the role of values, attitudes and knowledge in standing against Russian aggression in Ukraine and will be therefore presented in a joint Council of Europe publication in cooperation with NIBR-OsloMet.



Working meetings with a network of Programme's trainers focusing on project "Schools in times of war" and Mobile groups in preschool component.

³ Some examples can be found below:

<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/05/16/europe/russia-ukraine-education-intl-cmd/index.html>

<https://genderindetail.org.ua/spetsialni-rubriki/osvita-i-gender-u-viynu/vladyslav-kachur.html>

COMMUNICATION

The Programme continues to raise awareness among educators and parents in Ukraine about the value and approaches to democratic education. The Programme team has established cooperation with the most popular education platforms in the country that are followed by the majority of educators, teachers and parents, namely the [New Ukrainian school reform portal](#) and a website [Osvita.ua](#) covering news in the field of education in Ukraine. Using these platforms, the team promotes Programme's products, particularly massive open online courses and blended learning opportunities for a wider audience. The team also shares good practices, success stories and experiences from educators across Europe. More than 50 000 readers were reached through the published articles and almost 75 000 viewers watched our learning and promotion videos.



Illustration from the article in the New Ukrainian School Reform portal

Since the war broke out in Ukraine, the Programme has also produced materials to sustain the well-being and learning of children in Ukraine and abroad. The team produced a number of materials to support the school and preschool teachers in their everyday work and get them better equipped to provide care and support to students. Involving leading experts from the Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies (NKVTS), as well as a psychologist from Ukraine giving advice on how to deal with difficult questions and reduce stress among children, the Programme produced several video resources to support refugee families and educators who work with [more than 2 million Ukrainian refugee children](#).



Over **50 000** readers reached with articles published on the [New Ukrainian School Reform portal](#) and [Osvita.ua](#) website



[1 promotion video](#) of the new MOOC "School life online" produced and disseminated reaching **8500 views**



12 000 views of webinars on School education in Ukraine, Learning Communities and First psychological help: webinar-workshop for educators".



Nearly **5000** followers on the [Schools for Democracy Facebook page](#)
1600 subscribers to the Programme's Newsletter



800 views of videos, including the video series on psychological tips to guide adults through supporting children at wartime.



About **2000 visitors per month** on [Programme's website](#) in average (from 1 Nov to 31 July 2022). For security reasons the website was completely shut down during March-April.

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