

NARRATIVE REPORT 2023

SCHOOLS FOR DEMOCRACY: *Supporting Educational Reforms in Ukraine*



“Education is not going to be as it used to be before. Children and parents are not going to be as before. Ukraine is not going to be as before. It is time to break professional stereotypes, (...) and understand why it is necessary to promote openness and inclusive environment in educational institutions”.

- course participant



Photo: A school in Lviv after Russian missile attack on 29 December, 2023
<https://lviv.tsn.ua/raketniy-udar-po-lvovu-sadoviy-pokazav-foto-naslidkiv-2481676.html>

BACKGROUND

The European Wergeland Centre (EWC) has been working in Ukraine since 2013. In close cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (MoES), *Schools for Democracy: Supporting Education Reforms in Ukraine Programme* aims to reinforce systemic democratic transformations in the country through supporting democratic reforms in school and preschool education by promoting democratic culture and democratic citizenship in policy and practice. In particular, the Programme supports further implementation of the New Ukrainian School (NUS) reform in Ukraine through participating in policy-making, offering various capacity building activities for educators, promoting professional learning communities, and contributing to awareness-raising about the importance of reform among the wider public. The Programme also develops innovative teaching and learning materials, including a variety of massive open online and blended courses for both school and preschool educators. Since 2023, the Programme also focuses on youth and supports school-community projects in the newly liberated areas of Ukraine.

Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine has changed the political situation in the country and priorities in education drastically. By the end of 2023, approximately 18 percent of Ukraine's territory [remained](#) under Russian occupation. Human Rights Watch, referring to the MoES, [reports](#) that 3428 educational institutions all over Ukraine were damaged between February 2022 and October 2023; 365 of them destroyed completely.

According to [UNHCR](#), the UN refugee agency, almost 6 million Ukrainians found refuge in Europe by the end of 2023, and some 3,7 million people were internally displaced. Ukraine's education ombudsman [estimates](#) that almost one million of school age children and one million of preschoolers are currently outside Ukraine.

The Sociological Group "Rating" [reported](#) that 42 percent of children have school / preschool education online, 29 percent use the blended form including both online and face-to-face education, 26 percent attend schools / kindergartens in person, and only 3 percent take home education, based on the data collected on 27 January – 1 February 2023 among mothers of the Ukrainian children aged 3-17. Only 8 percent of the parents reported that their children did not attend school or preschool, mainly due to the fact that the educational establishments have been closed because of the war or parents choosing not to send their children to schools / kindergartens because it is too dangerous. At the same time, it is reported that almost 10 percent of children are forced to drop school every day and 18 percent several times a week due to air raids, lack of heat, electricity, or sickness. It is most typical for those children living close to the front line and studying online.

In 2023, the Programme entered the second year of the current three-year cycle that sets focus on facilitating systemic democratic reforms in Ukrainian education and strengthening European cooperation by promoting democratic culture and citizenship in policy and practice. The team continued the work carried out in 2017-2021 and initiated new activities in line with the current Programme strategy (2021-2024).

Ukrainian school and preschool teachers show enormous resilience at wartime and are willing to work hard, get new knowledge, adopt new approaches, and offer the best education possible for the Ukrainian children.

Current report elaborates on the main trends and activities characterizing *Schools for Democracy: Supporting Education Reforms in Ukraine Programme* in 2023.

2023 IN NUMBERS

POLICY SUPPORT

- Programme experts contributed to **4** policy documents
- Team involved in **5** policy working groups and **5** communities of practice

LEARNING RESOURCES

- **5** webinars gathering **954** participants
- **4** videos for preschool educators sharing Norwegian experience
- **4** videos on Outdoor education gathering **1944** views
- **1** digital resource on student self-governance
- **92** new activities uploaded to [Toolbox for teachers](#) on the [Programme website](#)
- **1** activity book on outdoor education that has been downloaded **1820** times from the website library
- **17** activity cards for mentorship support of preschool teachers



ONLINE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

- **5** MOOCs currently available on the [Prometheus platform](#)
- **128 708** course participants registered for our MOOCs since spring 2021
- **33 033** new participants enrolled in our MOOCs in 2023
- **9** online blended courses offered at the [EWC online learning platform](#)
- **5** new online blended courses developed in 2023
- **5173** educators (school and preschool) took part in the online blended courses

SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PROJECTS

- **202** high school students, **10** mentors and **20** teachers participated in a specially tailored civic education programme implemented in the newly liberated areas of Ukraine

COMMUNICATION

- **280 943** readers reached through **20** publications produced and disseminated on various online educational resources
- **33 183** unique visitors to the [Programme website](#)
- **7045** unique users accessing the [Toolbox](#)
- **1746** unique users visiting the [library](#) at the [Programme website](#)
- **6600+** followers on the [Programme Facebook page](#)
- **1201** course alumni actively participating in the online professional learning community *Democratic Kindergarten Network*

POLICY WORK

The implementation of the New Ukrainian School (NUS) reform at the secondary school level remains one of the main priorities of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (MoES) despite the war. Schools for Democracy Programme is recognized as one of the main international donors supporting the work of MoES and Ukrainian education in times of war. The Programme experts were invited to be a part of the working group paving the way for the next stage of the reform concerning high school.

Due to the change of political leadership in March 2023, the MoES started revision of its strategic plans in late summer. The Programme experts were involved in this process.

As the war goes on, there is steadily more attention to youth's meaningful engagement and capacity building of the resourceful partners being able to effectively work with this target group. The Ministry of Youth and

Sports of Ukraine in cooperation with the Council of Europe (CoE) and in line with CoE's Action Plan on Ukraine helps regulate the sphere of youth work as a response to challenges Ukraine faces. In 2023, the Programme contributed to creating the professional standard of the youth worker. To ensure that the youth workers are aware of the Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (EDC/HRE) approaches and use them in practice, the Programme in cooperation with the CoE project Youth for Democracy in Ukraine: Phase III organised a training course on the [Compass: Manual for Human Rights Education with Young People](#) for the teams of youth workers and teachers in July 2023.

During the reporting period, the Programme has contributed to five policy working groups and five communities of practice in Ukraine. The table on p. 6 gives an overview of the working groups that the Programme was a part of in 2023 and the results of their activities:



WORKING GROUP	ACTIVITY PERIOD	ROLE	RESULT
National curriculum and assessment in high school (ongoing, continues its work from 2022), MoES	01/23 - ongoing	Expert support, technical support	The Programme contributed to organising and facilitating two strategic sessions for Ukrainian education policymakers in Kyiv, Ukraine in January and May devoted to developing assessment criteria in secondary school. Programme experts continue to take part in drafting the curriculum for high school.
Group of experts working on the new <i>National Strategy of Education and Science of Ukraine 2030</i> (ongoing), MoES	07/23 - ongoing	Expert support	The Programme experts continuously participate in developing the National strategy and contribute with expert knowledge in the fields of secondary education, teacher training and digital transformation.
Working group on drafting the professional standard of the youth worker (finished its work in March 2023), Ministry of Youth and Sport	01-03/23	Expert support	The Programme experts worked on the <u>Professional standard of the youth worker</u> adopted in March 2023 and contributed to a better understanding of the youth politics for a country at wartime and defining the role of the staff working with youth and realising youth politics in practice.
MoES working group on the development of Strategy for the reform of upper secondary education	10/23 - ongoing	Expert support	Programme experts participated in group work as a part of the peer learning seminar 'Models of Upper Secondary Education Internationally - Insights for Ukraine' organised by MoES and OECD with the support of UNICEF. The work on the reform of upper secondary education will continue in 2024.
Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) working group	01/23 - ongoing	Expert support	The Programme contributed to the work of the group by carrying out a research project on <i>Democratisation of preschool education in Ukraine</i> and producing an analytical report based on research findings that was delivered to the MoES.

While the working groups led by MoES are focused on the development of concrete policy documents, there were also established communities of practice that include a variety of stakeholders cooperating to offer various solutions to tackle relevant problems in Ukrainian education. The Programme is a member of four such **communities of practice**:

- **“Education and Science” MoES Sectoral Working Group** (community of international actors in Ukrainian education): it holds regular meetings to inform about the needs of the MoES as well as plans and activities of various international donors and other institutions supporting education in Ukraine.
- **Ukraine Education Cluster (school education)**: organised as a part of the Global Education Cluster aiming at “strengthening capacity for coordinating education in emergencies, improve the quality of education in emergencies response for all affected children and youth, contribute to prepared and resilient education systems, and advocate for the prioritisation of education in emergencies” and staffed by the Cluster lead agencies – UNICEF and Save the Children.
- **Ukraine Education Cluster (preschool education)**: regular meetings organised for donors, partners, organisations working with the preschool education, and representatives of the MoES aimed at sharing information about implemented initiatives, providing updates about current situation in the regions, and disseminating relevant information. The working group is co-led by NGO Montessori UA and World Vision International Ukraine Crisis Response.
- **West (Lviv) Education-Sub Cluster**: a part of the aforementioned cluster, focusing on Western Ukraine.
- **CoP for Ukrainian NGOs working in education sphere (coordinated by MoES)**: all participating organisations registered at the Education Recovery Support Platform that includes such areas of activity as reconstruction, restoring access to offline education, quality access to online education, overcoming educational losses, mental health, educational materials, building trust and culture, and reforms of education.

The Programme is in regular contact with other international organisations that are well-established in Ukraine, such as UNICEF, Save the Children, IOM, SOS Children’s Villages, etc, in terms of policy work and experience exchange. In addition, from the beginning of Russia’s war on Ukraine, the Programme has been available for the Norwegian authorities, research institutions and civil society organisations having inquiries about Ukraine, its educational system, integration of Ukrainian refugee children in Norway, and other related questions.

The Programme team based in Oslo has held meetings with the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (Udir), Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research (NIBR-OsloMet), Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies (NKVTS), Regional Centre for Violence and Traumatic Studies (RVTS-Øst) among others and is an active member of UKRAINETT (Norwegian Network for Research on Ukraine).



In 2023, the Programme has also been represented in **two scientific advisory boards** for:

- UKRAFLY2 project at NIBR-OsloMet that studies the experiences of the Ukrainian refugees in Norway concerning integration and various services provided by the state;
- a project elaborating on the problem of mental health among the Ukrainian refugees in Norway (NKVTS).

CAPACITY BUILDING: *Massive Open Online Courses*

Massive open online courses (MOOCs) have become a popular and powerful educational tool allowing an unlimited number of people to benefit from online educational resources without time or geographical restrictions. The Programme has been actively using it for several years for the sake of capacity building of the Ukrainian educators and supporting the implementation of the New Ukrainian School reform. It has proven its effectiveness at wartime when face-to-face training is significantly restricted due to the current security situation, and online learning opens up good possibilities for professional development of the Ukrainian educators who continuously show resilience and will to learn.

There are five MOOCs developed by the Programme that are currently available at the Prometheus platform. They constitute a course series *30 Steps towards the New Ukrainian School: Educating a Citizen* launched on the Prometheus platform in 2021 and including the following courses:

- *Starting towards a successful school* (30 hours / 1 ECTS)
- *Secrets of the successful principal* (28 hours / 0,8 ECTS)
- *Everyday solutions for teaching* (30 hours / 1 ECTS)
- *School and community for students* (18 hours / 0,6 ECTS)

MOOC on digital citizenship *School life online* (30 hours / 1 ECTS) was released in May 2022, less than three months after the beginning of Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine and has become a success. It is a unique online course in the Ukrainian educational market that aims at explaining the concept of digital citizenship and demonstrates the relationship between digital and civic competences. It motivates teachers and school administration to create and maintain a safe digital environment at school and promote the development of social and civic competences in the digital age. The course is in line with the New Ukrainian School reform and is based on the approaches, principles, and materials of the Council of Europe and European Wergeland Centre.

Ukrainian educators show great interest in continuing their professional development despite the war. As of the beginning of 2024, **128 708** participants enrolled in the online courses developed by the Programme.

33 033 new users did so in 2023, and **15 351** of them fulfilled courses and obtained certificates.

Many participants gave positive feedback on the course *School life online* and were highly motivated to learn more about innovative distance learning methods and obtain a certificate. Despite the war in the country, many teachers, just like the majority of Ukrainians, are optimists about the future and are concerned about their professional development.

In 2023, the Programme has been also working on developing a **new MOOC** for the Teaching Staff Professional Development Centres in cooperation with the Ukrainian Institute for Education Development. The course will be launched in early 2024 on the [EWC e-learning platform](#).

More than 300 Teaching Staff Professional Development Centres have been established in Ukraine since 2016. One of the main tasks of this institution is to organise learning communities on the local level to facilitate teachers' further professional development. Their role in the implementation of the democratic education reform in Ukraine is fundamental. Therefore, the upcoming MOOC is an important step in further capacity-building of the Centres' staff.



CAPACITY BUILDING:

Online blended courses

“I would like to teach and continue my professional growth. I want my Ukrainian language and literature lessons to be exciting. I can do a lot of things, but there are so many new and interesting ideas around, so I am looking for new skills and knowledge. Today, my school is offering a distance learning format, and students are scattered all over Ukraine. We managed to keep most of them (1200 students remained). I want to take this course because working in the conditions of war, we need to create a safe digital environment, conduct interesting online lessons that would teach children rather than overwhelm them with information, and at the same time provide safe digital culture and online space.”

*- course participant
from the motivation letter*

One of the most popular learning forms among our target group is online blended courses. They combine self-paced online learning at the designated digital platforms (asynchronous learning) and synchronous online sessions led by the Programme trainers. In other words, these courses comprise both the elements of participants' independent work and facilitated learning and group work provided by the Programme trainers during regularly scheduled online meetings.

In 2023, the Programme's online blended courses for school and preschool educators were re-adjusted to the war situation and made available at the [EWC online learning platform](#).

These include **three courses for school teachers:**

- *Transversal development of civic competences*
- *Development of civic competences through student councils*
- *School life online*

as well as **one course for preschool staff:**

- *Listening to children's voices: culture of democracy in preschool education*

A new course for preschool teachers *Democratic kindergarten: Comfortable psychosocial environment for everyone* was developed and launched in 2023. A new preschool course *Democratic kindergarten: Psychosocial support* specifically designed as a tool for psychological aid at wartime has been under development and will be first launched in early 2024.

Four new courses for school teachers have also been developed in the reporting period and successfully launched in Autumn 2023. They include:

- *Formative Assessment – Cooperation – Success – Self-realisation*
- *School management and formative assessment*
- *Team leadership for developing democratic culture at school*
- *How to support without disrupting: preparing student council mentors*

All courses in the school component included a revised module on **psychological support** based on the Council of Europe materials. All trainers developing and teaching Programme online blended courses have received specially tailored training in using new materials and approaches as a part of their individual capacity building.

Online meetings as a part of these courses were facilitated by **37** trainers from our vast trainer network, some of them living and working close to the frontline or being internally displaced. **5173** persons took part in the courses in 2023 and **2030** obtained certificates.

LEARNING RESOURCES - school

“Training days as part of the Schools for Democracy workshops are full of learning and creativity. Thank you for the opportunity to invest in the future!!!”

- course participant

In 2023, for the first time after covid restrictions and beginning Russia’s full-scale war on Ukraine, the Programme team has got an opportunity to compliment the online blended course with practical face-to-face workshops. All online blended course alumni were eligible to apply for one of the three **creative summer workshops** *Forming and assessing civic competences: Developing teaching and learning activities* organised by the Programme team in Lviv, Ukraine, in July 2023. During these days participants received a unique opportunity to try the skills learnt during the courses in practice and develop new teaching and learning resources to be used further in the educational process.

The overall **goal** of the workshops was to develop teaching and learning resources and exercises that would contribute to developing civic competences among students throughout various school subjects at the basic secondary and upper secondary level.

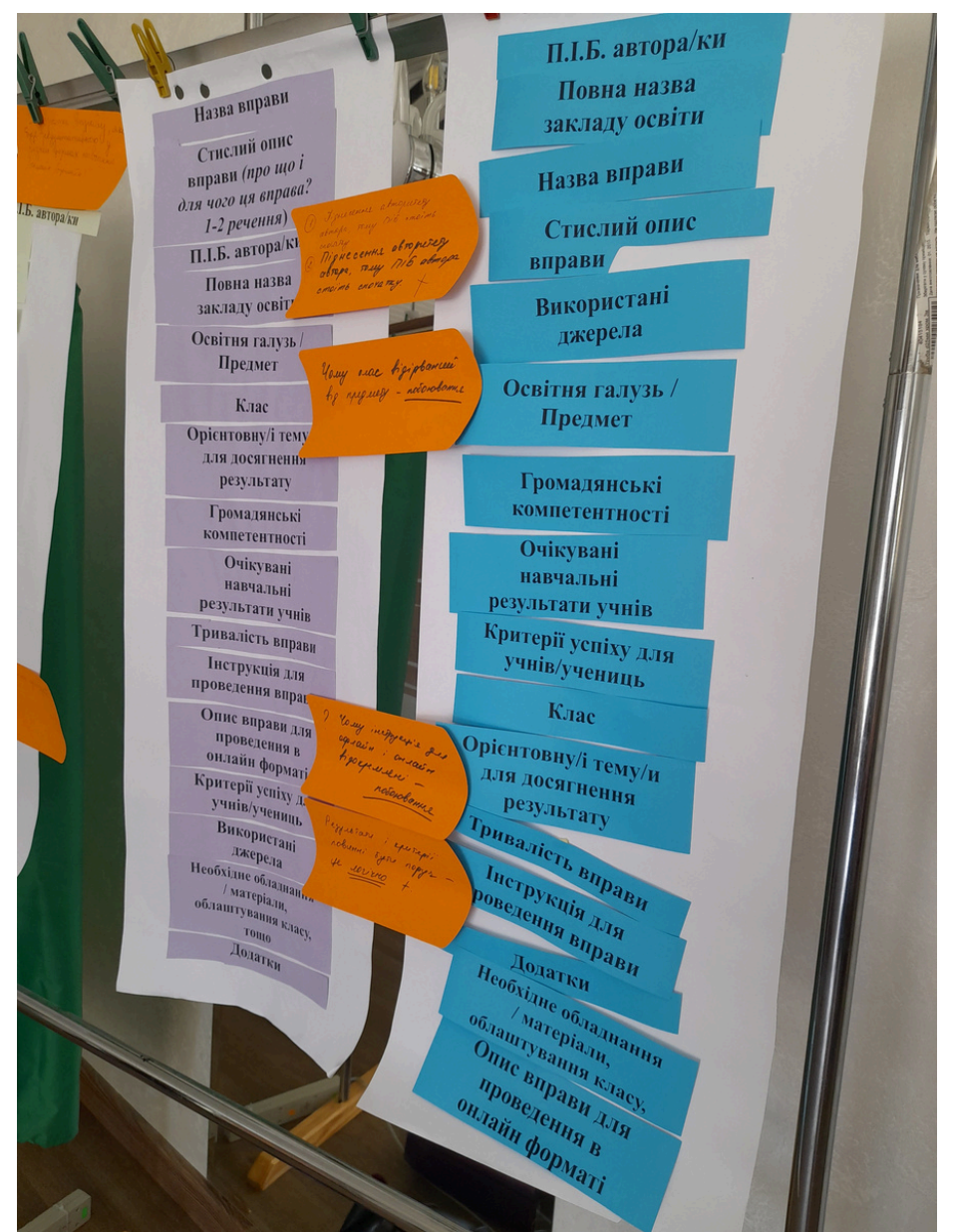
Based on the whole-school approach to education in democracy and human rights promoted by the Council of Europe and the European Wergeland Centre, the workshops applied the principles of peer learning for achieving the following **objectives**:

- develop new teaching and learning materials to support the New Ukrainian School reform,
- contribute to the professional development of school teachers,
- facilitate experience exchange among the representatives of various educational institutions and strengthening of the Program network.

146 course graduates applied for these summer workshops, and **81** of them were selected as participants. All the participants successfully fulfilled the programme and were awarded certificates of participation equal to 1 ECTS credit (30 hours).

The **results** of the workshops are reflected in the programme for improving the qualifications of educators *Creating educational materials for developing and assessing civic and social competences in the implementation of the state standard of basic secondary education*. This document is an important step in implementing the provisions of the New Ukrainian School reform in basic secondary education and, in particular, for developing key civic and social competences across different subjects.

After the workshops, the Programme **Toolbox** was replenished with **92 new exercises**. All exercises went through quality control and were published for public access. The Toolbox for teachers is a popular resource at the Programme website, which contains more than 790 teaching and learning activities for development of school students’ democratic competences. It can be used for lessons in 25 different subjects.





Another **30** participants including youth workers, teachers, and educators were selected to participate in the **National training course on Human Rights education: Using 'Compass' manual in formal and non-formal education**, which was a joint collaboration of The Donetsk Youth Debate Center and Center for Educational Initiatives with the support of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe (Strasbourg, France) and the European Wergeland Centre in July 2023. The course was aimed at training the participants in implementing education for democratic citizenship (EDC) and human rights education (HRE) in formal, non-formal, and informal educational settings, as well as disseminating the educational approaches outlined in the 'Compass' manual as an important learning resource in youth work.



1 digital resource on student self-governance was developed by a group of Programme trainers who also conduct the online blended course on student self-governance. The resource is presented as a game **Hero's path** that encourages students to take active part in school life and have a say in the teaching and learning process, as well as their leisure time with peers.



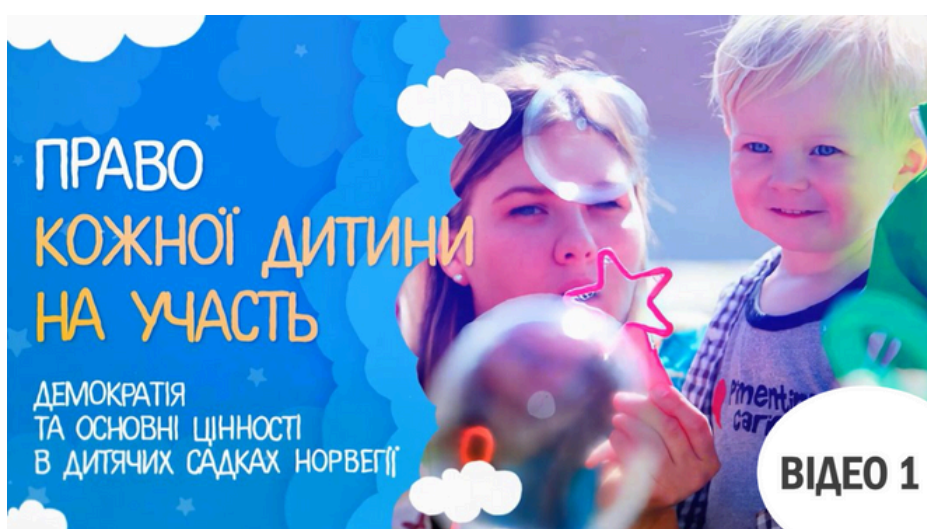
Шлях героя

LEARNING RESOURCES - *preschool*

The teaching and learning resources developed at the preschool component included two series of videos that can be used by the Ukrainian preschool staff in their everyday work.

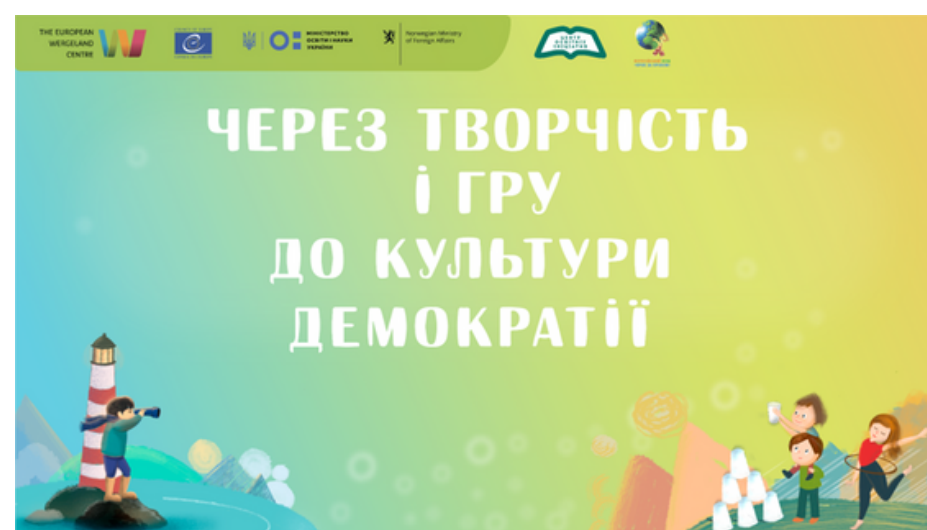


Four videos were developed in close cooperation with [Kanvas](#), Norway's biggest private kindergarten foundation. Kanvas experts shared their knowledge and experience of organising work in Norwegian kindergartens with the Ukrainian preschool educators. They touched upon the importance of the democratic values and children's rights to participation in Norwegian kindergartens. The videos were devoted to such important aspects of early childhood education as creating a safe psycho-social environment in kindergartens, providing possibilities for children to experience free play and have a say about what is happening in kindergarten. These principles are currently being actively implemented in the Ukrainian preschool system and are, therefore, an important contribution to a better understanding how a democratic kindergarten functions in practice.



The Programme also produced another series consisting of **four videos** on *Building a culture of democracy through play and creativity* inspired and

based on the experience of carrying out integration and socialisation activities for internally displaced children in 2022. These videos focus primarily on experiential learning and Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (CDC) as well as creating safe spaces, developing cooperation skills, integration and team building through outdoor activities. Even though they were particularly designed for a special group of children, this resource is universal and suitable for children of various age groups.



The videos are supplemented by a **handbook** as a practical guide to outdoor education. It consists of various activities and exercises based on the results of several hundred workshops for children and youth, conducted by the Programme team for internally displaced children in Ukraine during spring and summer 2022. The activities from this handbook often have a therapeutic effect as they help children distract from the traumatising experience, restore their emotional condition, and cope with anxiety at wartime. They also help develop various social and civic competencies in an informal way through playing.



TRAINERS NETWORK

The war has affected all people in Ukraine, including educators, Programme staff, and network of trainers. For many years, the trainers network has been the foundation of the Programme expertise. When the full-scale war broke out, the training pool members actively supported each other both psychologically and practically. Some helped colleagues escape from dangerous areas and collected funds for humanitarian support in the most precarious cases.

Seven members of the trainers network are currently registered as refugees, while six have IDP status and reside in relatively safe regions of Ukraine. 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 activities of the Programme. They conduct meetings and workshops at schools and kindergartens to support both educators, children, and parents in the new circumstances, contribute to developing massive and online blended courses, and make an enormous contribution to their local communities.

In 2023, the Programme network included **51** active members (**40** belonging to the school and **11** to the preschool component). In reality, school and preschool trainers often cooperate and contribute to each other's work.



NETWORKING - school

Networking in the Programme occurs at different levels:

- networking of trainers,
- networking of schools (Schools for Democracy network),
- networking of educators (graduates of the Programme courses),
- networking for Teaching Staff Professional Development Centres supported by the Programme.

In the times of ongoing war networks are maintained online (including Facebook groups for trainers and schools), through online working meetings and conferences. However, this year we managed to conduct some face-to-face networking activities as well.

In 2023, the Programme trainers network had regular online and face-to-face meetings for developing MOOCs and online blended courses. Two face-to-face meetings – in March and July – became an important milestone for the Programme’s trainers who were deprived of the possibility of meeting physically from 2021. The result was the development of four new online blended courses (see p. 9 for more details) and adjustment of other previously developed materials to the war situation.

These were followed by a meeting of the entire Trainer Network (school and preschool) in August that aimed at strengthening the capacity of the trainers, summarising the work carried out in 2022-2023, and discussing the plans for 2024, as well as the future of



the network. Supplemented by the sessions for deepening the knowledge on the topics of the Programme’s online blended courses, the gathering became an important professional development and integration event for the established group of trainers who have been the core of the School for Democracy Programme for years.

Networking for the representatives of the Teaching Staff Professional Development Centres is an important instrument of building professional learning communities, which they develop and actively promote among the Ukrainian educators. **954** participants attended the total of **5** webinars for the Teaching Staff Professional Development Centres organised by the Ukrainian Institute of Education Development and supported by the Programme.

December, as the last month of the year, is traditionally the time of conducting **online graduation ceremonies** for the Programme’s course participants. **243** participants of the online blended courses of the school component joint the event this year and were offered an exciting programme full of jokes, quizzes, laughter, and good memories with School for Democracy Programme in 2023.



NETWORKING - preschool

At the preschool level, networking occurs mainly through the online professional learning communities.

Our Programme Facebook Network of Democratic Kindergartens that consists of our Programme course alumni has grown from **189** members in 2022 to over **1200** in 2023. It unites preschool professionals from all over Ukraine who share useful information and resources and promote relevant teaching-learning materials.

The Programme also sees a significant potential in developing online learning communities and plans various networking events and workshops on professional development using the opportunities provided through digital resources. In May, the Programme initiated a series of online meetings for preschool educators Let's talk about kindergarten. **14** online meetings took place during 2023 and gathered **226** participants from different parts of Ukraine who were particularly interested in peer learning and new working methods.

All participants who obtained the certificates after finishing online blended courses traditionally received an invitation to the online course graduation ceremony in December, and **87** eventually joined.

Нумо говорити про садок

Вечірні зустрічі

Тема: Робота з батьками в дошкільній

01 спікерка **ЛЮДМИЛА НЕКРАШ**
фахівчиня з питань раннього розвитку та дошкільного виховання, психологиня, тренерка програми «Демократична школа» Європейського центру Вергеланда

11 травня о 19:00

ONLINE

“Education starts with the preschool level, which is sometimes overlooked by some educational projects. Building a team, developing its motivation, being able to involve parents - all of these are necessary for preschool institutions.”

- course participant

ЩО ТАКЕ ВІЛЬНА ГРА І ЧОМУ ВОНА ТАКА ВАЖЛИВА У ДОШКІЛЬНОМУ ВІЦІ?

Белла, Liudmyla Nekrash, Люба Балала, Ольга Кузьміна, Наталья Шейка, Олена Барсук, Валентина

Міська майстерня
Осередок навчання грамоти
Математичній та маніпулятивних ігор
Осередок приготування їжі
Драматичний осередок
Бібліотека
Музичний осередок
Осередок гри з кубиками
Дослідницько-природничий осередок

RESEARCH

In order to better understand the current state of affairs in the Ukrainian preschool education, the Programme carried out a study **Democratization of preschool education in Ukraine** in cooperation with the Research bureau Sociologist (Ukraine) in March – June 2023. The study is an important contribution to ensuring quality early childhood education, facilitating comprehensive development of children, and transforming the Ukrainian system of preschool education in general.

Our intention was, on one hand, to reveal how democratic values are implemented in Ukrainian kindergartens through studying the practices that help teachers develop competences for democratic culture among young children; on the other, we tried to look at the educators' needs in professional development regarding the development of the democratic values and competences for democratic culture among children.

As a result, it became a complex study consisting of

- **30 in-depth interviews**
- **6 focus group discussion** with a total of 67 informants
- quantitative **online survey** among 9133 respondents

The results of the study show the need for a comprehensive and systematic approach to democratization of the Ukrainian preschool education from various stakeholders – the government, educational institutions, and society in general. It might be necessary:

- **To develop a concept of a democratic kindergarten** that would lay the foundation of the preschool education based on democratic principles.
- **To provide financial foundation** by allocating sufficient funds for the development of preschool education, in particular for the (re)construction of kindergartens, upgrading the qualifications of teaching staff and purchasing necessary equipment and materials.
- **To create safe environment** by turning a preschool into a safe, comfortable and stimulating space for both children and teaching staff.

- **To provide systematic support and professional development for preschool educators**, so that they can offer quality education to children based on democratic principles. This can be done through trainings, seminars, and other forms of professional development.
- **To involve parents and the public** by creating the mechanisms allowing for parents' active participation in the decision-making process regarding preschool education. These may include, for example, parental committees, various forms of consultations and meetings with the kindergarten administration and local authorities. Parents should become an important actor coming with suggestions and monitoring the quality of preschool education.
- **To take into account international experience.** Ukraine should start learning from the best international practices in democratization of preschool education. That implies stronger cooperation with different international organizations, as well as experience exchange with other countries having more advanced approaches to democratization of the preschool education.

Taking into account that kindergarten is the first institution where children interact with peers and adults and that children should experience democracy from early age, this study on the democratization of the Ukrainian preschool education can become an important tool for monitoring and evaluating the quality of the educational services in Ukraine. It provides basic data and information about the state of the democratic environment in the Ukrainian kindergartens that is important for fostering democratic citizenship, understanding otherness, and learning the principles of equality, tolerance, and mutual respect.

The study also opens possibilities for comparative analysis, identifying trends, and developing strategies, programs, and policies aimed at improving the quality of preschool education and developing democratic values among the youngest.

YOUTH WORK

“We believe that education is a fundamental right that should be accessible to all.”

- ICF savED

In 2023, the Programme got the third implementation partner – **an international charitable foundation savED** that restores access to education in Ukrainian communities that suffered from the Russian war against Ukraine. The second wave of their **UActive project** has become a part of the Schools for Democracy Programme.

UActive is designed for students in grades 8-11 who are offered a specially tailored civic education program in order to learn skills that would help them launch socially important projects in their local communities. Just in line with the whole-school approach, the students participating in the programme learn to analyse social challenges, propose solutions, and implement them in practice together with other community representatives.

After an application process for 46 applicants had been completed, the savED team selected **10 schools** from the liberated areas of Kyiv and Chernihiv regions to participate in the project. These have got **10 motivated mentors** and **20 active teachers** who worked directly with the teams representing the selected schools throughout 2023.

All mentors and teachers were offered a training course introducing the tools and skills needed for working with young people and developing and implementing school-community projects. It included:

- Basic course in project management
- Programme’s MOOC *School and community for a students*
- Information about participants’ safety online
- Information about the handbook and 8-week curriculum

After many hours of work and training, **202 high school students** from **20 teams** representing **10 Ukrainian schools** took part in the final pitching of

ideas on 7 November 2023 in Kyiv. As a result, 10 teams received small grants for implementing their school-community projects. Examples of the student projects included:

- A gym at the old House of Culture in Myrcha village (Kyiv region)
- A green stage as a centre for developing art and creativity in Anysiv village (Chernihiv region)
- A training space in the schoolyard in Novyi Bykiv (Chernihiv region)
- A creative space for children waiting for school bus in Kaharlyk (Kyiv region)
- New school corridors turning into interactive areas for games, development, and recreation in Baryshivka (Kyiv region)
- A playground near a local hospital in Baryshivka (Kyiv region)
- A youth space at school in Nove Zalissia village (Kyiv region)
- A sorting station in Kolychivka village (Chernihiv region)
- A new school gym in Anysiv village (Chernihiv region)
- A shelter turning into a space for self-discovery and reflection in Shkarivka village (Kyiv region)

All of these villages in Kyiv and Chernihiv regions were under Russian occupation at the beginning of the full-scale invasion. When finally liberated, these communities faced lots of property damages, and social projects designed by students will bring more life to these communities and contribute to fostering a new generation of Ukrainian leaders.



INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING

In order to facilitate institutional capacity building of the selected Ukrainian kindergartens and support the democratisation of the preschool education in Ukraine, the Programme has launched a pilot project **Mentorship for developing democratic values among preschoolers.**

While mentorship is a widespread pedagogical practice in Ukrainian schools, it remains quite an unknown territory at the preschool level. EWC's mentorship project deals with understanding democratic values and competences for democratic culture and incorporating them into the everyday life of kindergartens. All mentors get a specially tailored training that makes them well prepared for sharing their knowledge with colleagues and learning together.

The mentorship initiative that in 2023 included **20** kindergartens, **66** preschool teachers, and **29** mentors from 7 regions in Ukraine builds up on such values as equality, freedom, participation, respect for diversity, partnership, regard for children's interests and needs, respect for and protection of rights, etc., and is meant to teach children to make own choices, understand and identify own emotions and emotions of other people, resolve conflicts, protect natural resources, take care of plants and animals, and many other important competences.

We sometimes tend to underestimate the importance of preschool education. Giving children their first experience of social life, kindergarten is a place where children learn to interact with peers and develop the skills needed for living in a democratic society. Our mentors visit their colleagues in other kindergartens, give them advice, and help planning activities for children. Mentorship is always a cooperation based on reflections.



“Mentorship provides enormous possibilities for all teachers who want to learn new things and are ready to change something in their practice.”

*- Inna Horbenko,
psychologist and Programme trainer*



CAPACITY BUILDING OF THE PARTNERS

It is important for the Programme to contribute to the capacity building of the implementation partners. That's why, in June 2023, we organised a **study visit** to Oslo for our partner Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation that coordinates the preschool component of the Programme.

The study on *Democratisation of preschool education in Ukraine* has clearly shown that it needs guidelines, examples, and good practices existing in other countries that can also be used in Ukraine. Thus, the study visit included a variety of meetings with the Norwegian stakeholders having relevant knowledge and experiences that can fill up the knowledge gaps currently existing in Ukraine.

Our partners have got a good overview about the Norwegian preschool system both thanks to visiting kindergartens and speaking to the Norwegian preschool educators working there, but also from the conversations with the experts from the Norwegian kindergarten foundation Kanvas, local psychologists, other preschool practitioners, representatives of the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (Udir), psychological-pedagogical services, etc.

Inspired and equipped with new knowledge and ideas, our partners returned to Ukraine and immediately started developing **two new online blended courses** based on the Norwegian experience (more information on p. 9).



PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

“Get ready! We are planning again”

- Schools for Democracy Facebook page

The Programme staff in Oslo is at all times in close contact with all three implementing partners in Ukraine. Even though most of the communication between the parties happens online at wartime, and face-to-face meetings are rather an exception, the Oslo team managed to carry out a strategic planning meeting with the Schools for Democracy team Ukraine in Warsaw in September 2023. It has been the first offline team meeting since the beginning of the Programme in November 2021, as the Oslo team reframed from travelling to Ukraine after the beginning of Russia’s full-scale war.

The meeting was devoted to discussing major challenges and needs of education in Ukraine, priorities of the Nansen support programme for Ukraine, current activities of the Schools for Democracy Programme, cooperation between different Programme components, and implementation plan 2024. Based on the latest research results about the development of Ukraine’s education and Programme’s own experiences for the last two years of war in Ukraine, the team has started envisaging the way further and elaborating on the Programme concept for 2024-2027.



RISK ASSESSMENT AND MITIGATION

From the beginning of the Russian full-scale war on Ukraine, the issue of risk assessment and mitigation became an important concern for the Programme administration. In 2023, the following topics were of the highest priority:

TEAM SAFETY

Team safety has been a major concern of the EWC since the beginning of Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine. Some members of the field staff and trainer network had to relocate to the safer regions of Ukraine for periods of time or permanently. Some needed help to leave occupied areas or territories with military activities.

The Programme management has been monitoring the security situation thoroughly throughout 2023. In addition to staff meetings, we have been using various chats to keep track of the rapidly changing situation. The Programme has also been in contact with other international organisations in Ukraine and well updated about the various reactions to the current situation.

FINANCE

Due to the financial risks related to currency exchange fluctuations in times of war, the Programme implementation partners in Ukraine have chosen to exchange smaller amounts of currency at the time in order to mitigate this risk in 2023.

OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT

All current documentation was stored online; documents that needed to be signed were scanned and uploaded. All trainers joined the service allowing for electronic signatures of documents. Routine procedures for internal communication have been in place a long time before 24 February and have proven to be efficient.

PARTICIPANTS' SAFETY

Having monitored the safety situation in Ukraine, the Programme team decided to open for carrying out face-to-face meetings in Ukraine in March 2023. However, it has been agreed on the following regulations:

- The EWC highly recommends that face-to-face events preferably involve participants at the local level. The limit for such events is 70 persons.
- Face-to-face events that gather participants from different parts of Ukraine can be conducted in safer parts of the country (Western Ukraine). According to the statistics of air strike alarms, these are four regions: Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Chernivtsi and Zakarpattia as per March 2023.
- Venues have bomb shelters big enough to fit all event participants.
- Venues for the events are most accessible logistically (less travel & transfers).
- Training/meeting halls are located on the lower floors with easy access to the bomb shelters.
- Face-to-face events involving participants from different regions (oblasts) should be an exception based upon special consideration and discussion between the field staff and Oslo office. The limit for such events is 40 people.
- Information about events will be disseminated post factum; there will be no announcements disclosing precise time & location of the events in social media or other channels of information.
- When booking hotels/venues, it will be agreed on last minute cancellation procedures.
- Facilitators of the event are obliged to stop work in training halls during alarms and direct participants to shelter.
- In case of rapid deterioration of the safety situation where the face-to-face event is held, organizers will discontinue all the activities.

CONCLUSIONS AND PLANS FOR 2024

In 2024, Schools for Democracy Programme enters its final year in the current programme cycle. However, as Russia's war against Ukraine has brought significant changes to Ukraine's education and uncovered new challenges and urgent demands, the Programme team keeps monitoring the situation and identifying the areas where Norwegian support is particularly needed.

While the long-term priorities of the New Ukrainian School reform implementation remain the same, the reform itself was slowed down due to the war situation and rotations at the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. Ukrainian education ended up in a critical situation that required support and involvement from all stakeholders within this sector.

In addition to providing comprehensive support to various actors of the educational process in Ukraine including policy makers, educators, students, and parents, at both school and preschool level, the Programme will continue devoting more attention to the youth component and finalising school-community projects that play an important role in youth participation and contribute to encouraging democratic resilience in the local communities.

The Programme staff will continue updating and adapting the existing teaching and learning resources, disseminate relevant information, and run the existing online blended courses in order to reach as many potential participants as possible under the current conditions and size of the Programme. Other priorities also include facilitating online and face-to-face networking activities and strengthening the existing networks of educators and trainers both at school and preschool levels.

In 2023, the Programme continued producing relevant knowledge about Ukraine. Our research on democratisation of Ukraine's preschool education provided a valuable input to mapping the needs of the preschool system and developing the concept of the democratic kindergarten in Ukraine.

Programme activities for next year have been drafted in line with the Ministry's new [Strategic Plan 2023-2027](#). In 2024, the Programme will continue supporting capacity building of Ukrainian educators concentrating primarily on online and blended learning that, due to the war situation, will remain the main teaching-learning format in Ukraine in the near future. The Programme staff and trainers have developed and updated a number of courses that respond well to the current needs. Two of them – a new course on psychosocial support in kindergartens and the one on professional learning communities for the Teaching Staff Professional Development Centres – are no-analogue at the Ukrainian education market. Both are going to be launched during the first months of 2024.

Finally, to assure the continuity of the Programme, the team will continue working on the concept for the next project period that will concentrate primarily on tackling the existing educational losses, fostering democratic resilience, promoting democratic culture in schools and kindergartens, and trying to prevent the emerging social divides and polarisation in the Ukrainian society.

“If you stop learning, you will drop out of education. Education is not a fixed concept, but a very changeable and dynamic one. You must constantly be ‘on the wave’ if you want to be a leader for others. (...). Once, thanks to the Schools for Democracy Programme, we have got a complete restart for our school family. I love this project and will continue participating in it.”

- course participant

OUR PARTNERS

Implementing partners



Center for Educational Initiatives



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