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EXPLORING THE SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS LIVING IN POLAND IN THE FACE OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE

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BACKGROUND

This report is based on consultations with children and adolescents living in Poland and was commissioned by UNICEF, Plan International and Save the Children. The report aims to: (i) support the advocacy programmes of the organisations that commissioned the study; (ii) inform their future programming in Poland and elsewhere; (iii) provide lessons learned to replicate similar research in other countries affected by the conflict in Ukraine.

Articolo12 developed the methodological approach and tools, conducted the consultations with children and adolescents, summarised and reflected upon the information provided by the study participants, and developed this report in consultation with UNICEF, Plan International and Save the Children.

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Executive summary

Since the start of the full-scale war in Ukraine in February 2022, a quarter of the population has been displaced. Around 1.7 million people have crossed the border into Poland to seek temporary protection from the conflict, including nearly 700,000 children¹.

This report recounts the experiences, opinions and perspectives of 104 children and adolescents – including 90 from Ukraine and 14 from Poland – living in three cities in Poland (Warsaw, Wroclaw and Krakow), a country deeply affected by the war in Ukraine.

It sets out the findings of a qualitative study based on focus group discussions with the children that aims to understand the challenges that refugee children from Ukraine face and opportunities to enhance their wellbeing through their own words and pictures.

The consultations highlighted three closely connected themes: the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of refugee children from Ukraine, their education, and their integration into Polish society.

IMPACT OF DISPLACEMENT ON CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL WELLBEING

- Children from Ukraine expressed feelings of nostalgia for the people, pets and places they had left behind.
- Many children from Ukraine said that they felt stressed in their daily lives and worried because of the financial and housing problems that their families face.
- Many older participants from Ukraine (aged 14-17) explained that they were working part-time to earn some pocket money, but had struggled to find jobs because they did not speak competent Polish, which added to their worries.
- Loneliness was the most widespread feeling described by children from Ukraine across all age groups and genders, arising from a lack of deep friendships in Poland.
- Children from Ukraine said that playing sports, participating in craftwork and art activities organised by social hubs for refugees, and having contact with nature, people and animals helped them to cope with difficult emotions. A few participants said that when they become overwhelmed with feelings of stress, they became apathetic and resorted to excessive sleeping and eating.
- The majority of the children from Ukraine responded positively to the idea of receiving information via social media about activities organised for young people from Ukraine living in Poland, and expressed appreciation for organisations that arrange these activities.
- Just over half of the participants from Ukraine said they would like to talk to "someone professional" about their mental health.
- Some children said they access psychosocial support, but they only appreciate the service if it is available in Ukrainian. Children said the main reason to attend the psychological sessions is to cope with the distress caused by arguments at home.

¹) 1,658,346 refugees from Ukraine had registered for temporary protection in Poland as of 7 August 2023 (UNCHR Operational Data Portal, accessed on 10 August 2023: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine/location/10781>).

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE POLISH AND UKRAINIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

- Almost half the children from Ukraine who participated in the study are enrolled in both a Polish school and an online Ukrainian school, while the rest attend either a Polish school or a Ukrainian school.
- Those who attend a Polish school reported that although they face many challenges such as language barriers and adaptation to a new educational system, going to school provides some routine, as well as opportunities for social contact with peers and to learn the Polish language. They also appreciate the support provided by some Polish teachers and Ukrainian intercultural assistants.
- However, fewer than half of the study participants from Ukraine said they feel able to speak their mind openly at school in Poland; younger children (aged 8-13) in particular feel less confident.
- Participants who attend a Ukrainian school online were rather negative about their education. They said they are tired of excessive screen time and frustrated because, in their opinion, lessons are not well organised. However, those who can attend centres to meet their peers and get face-to-face support from Ukrainian teachers and educators appreciate this opportunity.
- Older participants who only attend a Ukrainian school explained that this is because they would graduate later if they enrolled in a Polish school.
- Older children from Ukraine who participate in both educational systems are anxious and worried about the future of their education and which college programmes to enrol in. They do not know the options available to them in Poland or in other EU countries very well.

THE STRUGGLE FOR CHILDREN FROM UKRAINE TO INTEGRATE IN POLISH SOCIETY

- Participants from Ukraine do not have a sense of belonging in Poland. When asked if they and their family would like to stay in Poland, fewer than half of the participants responded positively, although older participants were more confident about staying than younger children. Several participants said their opinions on this differed from their mother's.
- Some children from Ukraine said they were subject to discrimination at school, by both teachers and classmates; in their neighbourhood, by both adults and peers; and on public transport, especially when they speak Ukrainian.
- Nationalistic narratives of historical events, which feed stereotypes and create divisions, were frequently mentioned by children from Ukraine and their Polish peers.
- Participants from Ukraine strongly feel experiential and cultural differences with their Polish peers. Language is a gatekeeper between the two groups, as is the quality time they spend together. In most spaces, including Polish schools, Polish and Ukrainian children stick to their national groups.
- Children from Ukraine said that they have more meaningful interactions with some Polish adults (educators, landlords, etc.) than with their Polish peers and appreciate them greatly. Some Polish adults are seen as role models.
- The support of other Ukrainians, usually people who arrived in Poland before the war, is instrumental for helping children from Ukraine to understand and navigate Polish society.

- When Polish and Ukrainian participants had sufficient opportunities for deep one-on-one exchanges with others, they recalled positive experiences, getting along together and building friendships.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

In response to these three groups of challenges, national and local authorities in Poland, UN agencies, NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs) should take concrete and practical steps to ensure the wellbeing and integration of refugee children and adolescents from Ukraine in Poland, including:

MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL WELLBEING

- Increase awareness of and access to specialised, free of charge mental health care services for refugee children from Ukraine, e.g. through recruitment of Ukrainian mental health experts. This support could be extended to refugees from Ukraine who are primary caregivers, mostly mothers, encompassing stress and budget management.
- Foster parenting programmes, elevating the capabilities of educators, intercultural assistants, and volunteers to effectively address the mental health and psychosocial needs of mothers/caregivers and children from Ukraine.

EDUCATION

- Deploy more Ukrainian intercultural assistants in Polish schools and enrich teacher training content with modules on social and cultural cohesion, conflict sensitivity, anti-discrimination practices, and wellbeing.
- Prioritise Polish language classes, remedial support and peer-to-peer mentoring programmes. Involve children in the design of these programmes to support exchange of knowledge, skills and culture, and to boost integration between students.
- Provide information about education options for children from Ukraine, including pathways to higher education in Poland, and disseminate this information through the channels most used and trusted by children.

COHESION AND PARTICIPATION

- Fund extracurricular activities that enable children from Ukraine, especially those who attend an online school, to build meaningful relationships in Poland. Invest in recreational spaces where children from Ukraine can spend time together with their peers, and invest in opportunities for children to meet in semi-formal and informal contexts, through initiatives that are not primarily based on language.
- Ensure child participation in developing, planning, designing and implementing programmes to ensure that children's voices inform those decisions that affect their lives.
- Provide anonymous and child friendly feedback mechanisms in schools and child friendly spaces, to ensure that children have opportunities to safely report their concerns.
- Advocate for a long-term national strategy for refugee integration within Polish society.

Introduction

Following the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine in February 2022, one quarter of the population fled their homes to seek safety. Eight million people were displaced within Ukraine, while 6 million fled to other countries in Europe's largest refugee crisis since World War II. Almost 1.7 million people crossed the border into Poland where they stayed at least temporarily before deciding whether to migrate further west; 44% of these refugees were women and 40% were children.²

The way that children, adolescents and young people experience conflict and displacement can be distinctly different from the way that adult men and women experience such situations, and they have specific needs and concerns. For any humanitarian response to be effective, consultation with and participation of affected populations is crucial. Children also have the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives, and for their views to be heard and taken into account. It is therefore vital that the specific needs and concerns of children, adolescents and young people affected by the war in Ukraine are understood, documented and taken into consideration when aid organisations are developing and reviewing programming and advocacy strategies, and in order to influence their decision-making at national, regional and global levels.

Based on consultations with children and adolescents from Ukraine living in Poland, and with their Polish peers, this study explores four groups of questions, which guided the development of the methodology that was used to conduct and analyse the consultations:

- How has the war affected the daily lives and wellbeing of refugee children from Ukraine?
- What are their learning experiences in Poland?
- What do refugee children from Ukraine consider as their support network and how do they experience it?
- How could they meaningfully participate in Polish society? How could they actively engage and provide feedback on matters of interest to them?

Following a summary of the methodology, the study's findings are presented under three themes:

- Theme 1: mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of refugee children from Ukraine
- Theme 2: education of refugee children from Ukraine in Poland
- Theme 3: integration of refugee children from Ukraine in Poland.

This report also explores other topics highlighted by the children who participated in the study, including their experiences of work, their perspectives on receiving psychosocial support, and their opinions on participation in family and educational settings.

The study's key findings are discussed in the context of recent literature and placed within a model of social cohesion in order to explore entry points for potential social change. The report concludes with recommendations based on the findings of the study, which aim to improve the wellbeing, education, integration and participation of refugee children from Ukraine in Poland, as well as suggestions for replicating this study in other settings.

2) 1,658,346 refugees from Ukraine had registered for temporary protection in Poland as of 7 August 2023 (UNCHR Operational Data Portal, accessed on 10 August 2023: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine/location/10781>).

Summary of the methodology

This report is based on consultations with displaced children³ from Ukraine living in Poland, and their Polish peers. The consultations aimed to provide insight into the lives, exploring their experiences, perceptions and opinions about learning, daily activities, relationships and integration of refugees from Ukraine into Polish society.

A qualitative study design with an open approach was chosen, as it enables investigation without imposing restricted and predefined concepts upon participants. A participatory methodology called photovoice was used. This involves asking participants to take photos that relate to certain topics, which can then be used as the starting point for focus group discussions.

Before the consultations with children began, a package was developed containing tools for the facilitators, the participants, their caregivers, and local organisations who supported outreach to children and provided spaces for the focus group discussions to take place (see Annex 2). Almost all of these documents were translated into Ukrainian and/or into Polish.

Two facilitators conducted the consultations with children during May and June 2023.

PROJECT FRAMEWORK

As a general framework for addressing the research questions, developing the tools for the consultations, and making sense of the data, reference was made to ecological system theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and its adaptation for the UNICEF Innocenti Report Card 16, Worlds of influence (UNICEF, 2020).

This is a multi-level approach with the child placed at the heart of the framework. The 'world of the child' includes their key activities and relationships. The 'world around the child' consists of resources and networks, while the 'world at large' entails systems and context

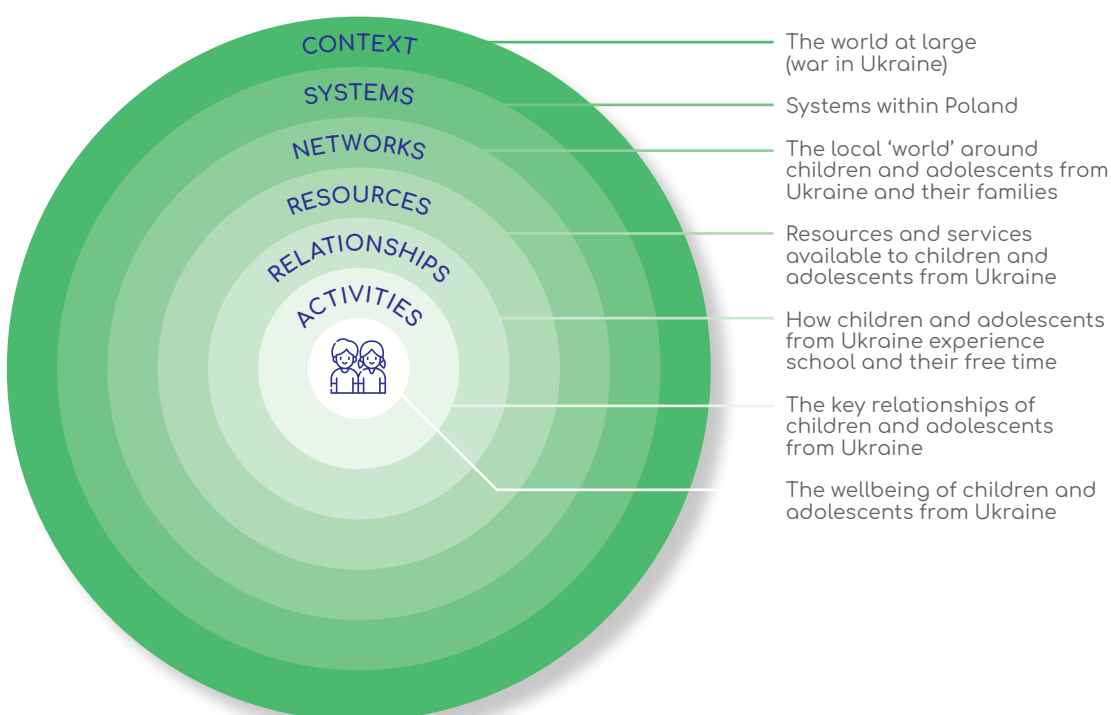
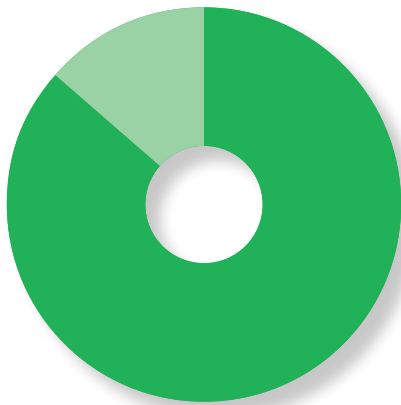


Figure 1. Application of the UNICEF – Innocenti Report Card 16 Ecological Framework – based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory – to this study

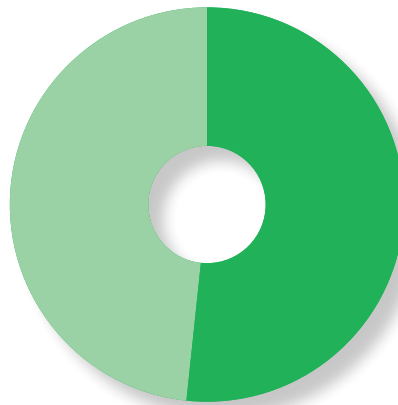
3) In this report, the term 'children' is used to refer to all people below the age of 18.



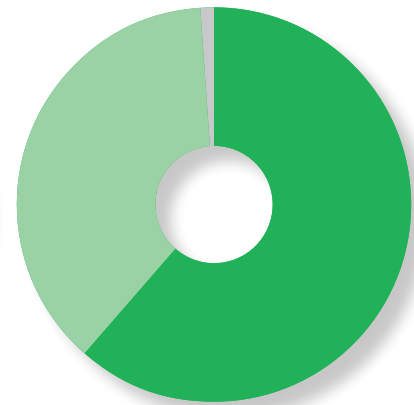
A TOTAL OF 104 CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS



● 90 from Ukraine
● 14 from Poland



● 54 aged 8-13
● 50 aged 14-17



● 64 females
● 39 males
● 1 non-binary

SAMPLE

A total of 104 children and adolescents (90 from Ukraine and 14 from Poland) participated in the consultations, which were carried out 15-16 months after the escalation of the war. 54 participants were between 8 and 13 years of age, and the remaining 50 participants were between 14 and 17 years of age. 64 children identified as female, 39 as male, and 1 as non-binary. The participants lived in three cities in Poland and were involved in the study through the support of local partners. They were selected through a purposive sampling strategy on the basis of specific characteristics (age, gender, nationality, type of school attended).

The word 'children' is used in this report to refer to all different groups of children. Where the study findings are distinctly related to children of a specific age or gender, this is highlighted.

The consultations involved a total of 17 focus groups:

- 15 focus groups with children from Ukraine and 2 focus groups with their Polish peers;
- 9 focus groups with participants aged 8-13 and 8 focus groups with participants aged 14-17;
- 8 focus groups in Krakow, 5 focus groups in Warsaw and 4 focus groups in Wroclaw;
- 11 focus groups with children from Ukraine who attended Polish schools face-to-face and 4 focus groups with children from Ukraine who attended Ukrainian schools online;⁴
- 4 focus groups with female participants, 3 focus groups with male participants and 10 focus groups with a mix of genders.

A diverse group of participants was involved in the study in terms of socio-economic backgrounds, time spent in Poland, geographical origin in Ukraine and family characteristics. All the children chose to participate in the study on a voluntary basis. The majority of them knew at least some of the other participants in their focus group discussion.

4) It should be noted that when the sample was originally conceived, it was expected that focus groups would be formed by children who exclusively attended Polish schools face-to-face or Ukrainian schools online. However, during the focus groups it emerged that almost half of the children from Ukraine (38/90) attended both types of school.

DATA COLLECTION

PART I: PHOTOVOICE

Photovoice is a participatory research methodology through which research participants are invited to take photos relating to certain topics, which are then used as the starting point for focus group discussions. This enables participants to use their own words and voices to describe their images.

For these consultations, the facilitators met with the children prior to the focus group discussions. During this preliminary meeting, the facilitators gave the children instant cameras and explained how to use them. They also gave the children photovoice instructions written in Ukrainian or in Polish, which contained:

- A few sentences explaining what photovoice is;
- The questions that children were invited to answer with their photos;
- Some tips on how to take good quality photos;
- Instructions related to ethics and safety.⁵

PART II: FOCUS GROUPS

Separate semi-structured guidelines were developed for the focus group discussions with children from Ukraine and Polish children. Both aimed to facilitate discussions among the participants using their photos as a starting point. Most activities relied on projection techniques, such as asking participants to create fictional characters who were similar to them, giving them an opportunity not to speak about their own experiences in the first person, if they did not want to.⁶ Both sets of guidelines began with an ice-breaker, an outline of the rules for a respectful conversation and the reiteration of participant assent. Both ended with short surveys about information and feedback needs and channels, which the participants completed anonymously online, on-the-spot.

ETHICAL APPROACH AND DATA PROTECTION

Consultations were conducted following an ethical approach that is both procedural and relational (Ellis, 2007). During all phases of the project, the following key ethical principles (Berman, 2020) were taken into account:

- Assessing and minimising risks;
- Informed assent of participants and consent from their parents/guardians;
- Confidentiality, privacy and anonymity;
- Respect for diversity;
- Data protection and security.

The study approach and the tools used were approved by Save the Children International's Ethics Committee before consultations started. The consultation tools included a referral pathway protocol that facilitators should follow if any participant reported that they were in danger or showed a state of psychosocial distress or concern. Furthermore, prior to the consultations, facilitators attended training conducted by Plan International and Save the Children on child safeguarding and safe identification and referral.

All consultations were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. After transcription, anonymisation and translation into English, the audio recordings were destroyed.

⁵ For further information about photovoice, please refer to Annex 1.

⁶ As the Findings section of this report shows, children often spoke in the third person when referring to these characters.

LIMITATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

While the selection of participants followed a targeted strategy and aimed to include as heterogeneous a group as possible by ensuring the participation of individuals with different characteristics, the study did not include children with disabilities or children living in rural areas.

As there were only two group discussions with Polish children, their voices are not as prominent in this study as the voices of their peers from Ukraine. Moreover, the low number of gender-disaggregated focus groups did not allow for the identification of significant differences in participant narratives depending on their gender.

An additional limitation is the selection bias connected with the involvement of intermediaries (e.g., teachers, staff from non-governmental organisations) who hold power relations with the children. Furthermore, those children most affected by the war in Ukraine may have decided not to participate in the study for fear of triggering negative war-related memories.

For more details, please refer to Annex 1: Detailed methodology.

Findings



THEME 1: Mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of refugee children from Ukraine

"I exist as a cat – on my own."

(S, girl from Ukraine, 12)

Figure 2: Core mental health and psychosocial well-being topics highlighted by children



SUMMARY

During focus groups, the vast majority of participants from Ukraine talked about stress, nostalgia and loneliness when describing the daily lives of the fictional characters, or when directly elaborating on their own experiences in Poland.

Although children did not always explicitly mention that they were distressed, their narratives revealed their struggle with psychosocial wellbeing. They reported that they missed friends, relatives and pets who were part of their daily lives in Ukraine. They also mentioned that they were worried about their family's financial situation in Poland, particularly as the majority of the children have only their mothers as breadwinners. They expressed that they feel pressure and stress due to housing problems and said that having a place to stay did not guarantee them adequate privacy. Most notably, children reported that they felt lonely.

The following exchange regarding two fictional characters invented by participants, provides a good summary of the wellbeing issues that participants from Ukraine expressed during the focus groups:

Facilitator: **"How did [the fictional characters' lives] develop after they moved?"**

Y: **"Stressful. Great deal of stress. Related with not knowing the language, with the fact that the streets are unknown."**

T: **"I think it's more to do with what's going on at home and the reasons why they left."**

Y: **"They worry about their relatives who stayed in Ukraine."**

S: **"It is a reaction to adaptation, to a complete change of environment, different mentality of people, and they had no friends here."**

(Y, girl, 17; T, girl, 16; S, girl, 17; all from Ukraine)



Pic. 1: **"It was a bit easier to find [a flat] with a dog than a cat. I know, I also have a friend of my mother's who was looking for a flat with a cat, and she was told that it was not allowed, but they were ready to move us into this flat [with a dog]. I have a dog. Here, a dog"** (Tarico, 16, girl from Ukraine).

STRESSFUL DAILY LIVES

Moving to a new environment following the outbreak of war, by necessity rather than choice, put many of the participants from Ukraine in a situation of confusion and difficulty. Navigating a new city and learning a new language was perceived as a challenge. For example, S. (girl from Ukraine, 15), who came from a rural area in Ukraine, explained: **“I didn’t know how to ride the tram. You just don’t know that. I didn’t know that you have to buy tickets on the tram, like a card. I didn’t know who was in charge of the tram, when it stops, how to open [the doors], to see you’ve arrived.”**

However, difficulties with speaking and understanding Polish or getting around in their new neighbourhood, while frustrating, did not appear to be the main source of participants’ worry. Even if they often talked about these challenges during the focus groups, it was evident that after living in Poland for several months, especially the youngest participants were coping reasonably well with these aspects of their new daily lives.

Participants’ primary worries were instead very much connected to their financial and housing situation. In a large number of focus groups, children talked about the high cost of living in Poland and even the youngest children seemed to be extremely knowledgeable about the prices of goods and rent and the various expenses faced by their families. Many older participants were doing part-time jobs or searching for one, since the money earned by only one parent was considered insufficient, as D. (boy from Ukraine, 17) explained: **“I am in Poland now only with my mother. And we are very short of money. I’m trying to find a part-time job, my mum is trying, but it doesn’t work out. Well, fortunately, my mum found some work, but I understand that it’s not for long. There is no stability.”**⁷

Many children and adolescents also elaborated on accommodation and rental prices. Upon arrival in Poland, a country with a higher cost of living than Ukraine, refugee families needed to find a place to live, which led to participants worrying about the housing crisis, overcrowding and insufficient privacy. On a positive note, some mentioned their landlord as a Polish adult who helped and supported them. Still, this accommodation rarely felt like home:

A: **“Now I live in a room with my mom and my cousin.”**

S: **“It’s like that for me too. Now we live not alone with my mom, but with the landlady. We share a room, but in Ukraine I had a separate room where I could do whatever I wanted. And relax. I considered my room to be my own...”**

A: **“My space.”**

(A, girl, 13; S, girl, 12; both from Ukraine)

Lacking their own room, many participants said they missed a quiet space to study, relax and enjoy privacy. As many of the children were enrolled in two school systems (a Polish face-to-face school and an online Ukrainian school)⁸ and had to learn in two different languages, unsatisfying accommodation and a lack of privacy added to an already challenging situation.

DEALING WITH MULTIPLE LOSSES: NOSTALGIA FOR WHAT IS “LEFT BEHIND”

Some participants reported that they were worried about their loved ones who were still living in Ukraine. When talking about home, many children and adolescents mentioned the people they had left behind, first and foremost their friends, and less frequently their relatives, including their fathers. Children also missed pets that could not travel to Poland: **“Well, most of all, if I was at home, I always had my cat, and I felt so comfortable with her, and she’s not here. I miss her very much.”** (S, girl from Ukraine, 12)

THEME 1.
Psychosocial
well-being and
the mental health
of refugees from
Ukraine



Pic. 2: **“I took a picture of my landlord’s things. He found us an apartment. And he told me to go to school. If I didn’t go to school, I wouldn’t know what to do”** (Aha, 10, girl from Ukraine).

7) For more information about the working experiences of participants, see Box B on p. 29.

8) For more information about the school and learning experiences of participants, see Theme 2 on p. 23.



Pic. 3: "He [fictional character] started playing... More precisely, he started playing computer games, kind of shooters. Well, he plays in the [gamers'] community, of course. In the whole world". Facilitator: "Why did he start?" "Maybe to suppress his feelings of sadness for Ukraine". (Gromsko, 17, boy from Ukraine).

9) In comparison with those participants who talked about friends who still lived in Ukraine, only a few mentioned their fathers, grandparents or relatives, although almost all participants were living with their mothers, while their fathers remained in Ukraine. This could be due to the methodological design of the study, which deliberately did not point the discussion towards triggering conversations about painful and intimate topics.

10) The Kakhovka Dam in Ukraine was breached on 6 June 2023, causing extensive flooding along the lower Dnipro river.

Some participants expressed concerns about what could happen to those who stayed in Ukraine, such as K. (girl from Ukraine, 15) who explained: "You are abroad in safety, and your father is in a security zone, and you don't know what can happen to him at any moment, whether he will return home, and there is no contact with him."⁹

Notwithstanding the anxiety the war in Ukraine evoked, many focus group discussions with children from Ukraine were dominated by nostalgia for home and the world that had been left behind, as these participants explained:

W: "It's cool here, no doubt about it... but home is home. You live there. You miss it, but you don't deny that this is a good place."

E: "It's not the same atmosphere..."

W: "You live there for a long time and you know everything. You remember sitting under that tree, that park, that tree, where you used to play and ride, you name it. I fell there. You have there acquaintances, friends."

(W, girl, 15; E, girl, 16; both from Ukraine)

Familiar places make them feel like they belong, and children from Ukraine said that they would like to return there one day, even if they appreciated their new city in Poland. There were, however, two exceptions to this. Firstly, some older participants, thinking about their short-term future after high school, saw themselves living in other countries within the European Union or North America, especially Canada. Secondly, children who came from war-ravaged regions within Ukraine who realistically stated that they had nothing left to go back to: "In Ukraine, I have nothing left [...] My gymnasium got burned to the ground. Nature got wiped out recently [by the destruction on the Kakhovka dam].¹⁰ What can be said? There was one friend of mine. Somehow the connections broke up. There were three friends, one from [name of a town], two from [name of a town]. One was shot, the other is missing. And [the one] from [name of a town] – a bomb flew straight into his apartment." (V, boy from Ukraine, 15)

DIFFICULTIES FORGING NEW FRIENDSHIPS AND FEELINGS OF LONELINESS

For almost all participants from Ukraine, regardless of age and gender, the nostalgia felt for their place of origin was connected to missing their social circle in Ukraine, their old friends. Many children claimed they communicated through mobile phone applications with friends who had stayed in Ukraine or had migrated elsewhere. They stayed on video calls for "more than one hour" (F, girl from Ukraine, 9) and some planned to visit their friends who had migrated to other cities in Poland. A couple of participants explained that they were able to maintain their old class group chat online for a while.

However, this was not true for all participants. Besides the ability to maintain their core friendships online, many participants explained that they had felt lonely, especially at the beginning of their stay in Poland:

"I had almost no friends here. There were a couple of people I talked to. But I didn't have such warm friends as I had in Ukraine." (A, boy from Ukraine, 17)

"When I moved here, I was quite lonely because I came here alone. For the first six months, I had my mum in Ukraine and my dad too. And I lived with my sister. It was very difficult because she often worked, and I felt very lonely because I had no friends. My friends from Ukraine stopped talking to me because I didn't tell them that I was leaving. They were very angry with me at that time. It was very difficult for me at the time." (D, girl from Ukraine, 13)

Furthermore, when participants first arrived in Poland, online exchanges with old friends occurred more frequently, while by the time the consultations took place, these had declined. This could result in frustration at times, as S. (girl from Ukraine, 17) explained: "There is a picture of my boyfriend, for example,

who is still in [city in Ukraine], and I haven't seen him for a long time, and it hurts, and it's very difficult, and it's a mess..."

When talking about fictional characters they created during the discussion groups, numerous participants mentioned them being unsatisfied with their friendships. For example, A. (girl from Ukraine, 11) explained that: "Vika [fictional character] wants a [female] best friend because her brother doesn't understand her and all their mutual friends are boys," and she wants "friends who are Ukrainians of the same age. Because her [acquaintances in Poland] are all either younger or older than their friends."

Many participants from Ukraine had met peers from Ukraine in Poland, but these ties were rarely close – incomparable with friendships made in Ukraine and not as deep-rooted or grounded, to the point that N. (girl from Ukraine, 16) called them fake: "All these relationships with these people [in Poland], they're somehow fake, or it's just that she [a fictional character] can't talk to them about any of her real problems. She jokes with them and smiles, but she doesn't talk with them in such a frank way. It's just been a bit difficult this year."

Participants from Ukraine distinguished between 'справжній друг' (a true friend), 'близький друг' (a close friend), 'реальний друг' (a real friend) and the category of 'друзі, але не близькі' (friends, but not close).

On a positive note, a few girls from Ukraine mentioned that they had found a "best friend" in Poland, which was always another girl from Ukraine.

However, for all children from Ukraine who participated in the study, and especially for older participants, what still felt missing was a larger group of acquaintances, people who "you could call to go for a walk," or "with whom you can just talk. It does not matter whether it is a Pole, a Ukrainian, a German. Does not matter. Just to communicate with someone." (V, boy from Ukraine, 15)

As many families from Ukraine were considering whether to return to Ukraine, stay in Poland or migrate further West, a few participants mentioned a fear of abandonment after they had managed to forge a friendship: "If you understand that a person is going to return to Ukraine in a week, then why even start something if it can end soon?" (V, girl from Ukraine, 16)

Unsatisfactory new ties with both Poles and Ukrainians¹¹ in Poland, the loss or deterioration of old friendships, and the difficulties in building a new social circle resulted in a general feeling of loneliness across all age and gender groups of children from Ukraine. Many participants denounced their solitude and said they wished to have more friends because "friends, they brighten up this, I don't know, life," (O, girl from Ukraine, 16) and make them feel stronger and more courageous: "If you sit next to each other and you know the answer, you are more courageous with a friend than you are alone. If I'm without a friend, I can't say anything, I'm embarrassed in front of everyone. And when I'm with a friend, I forget what embarrassment is." (S, girl from Ukraine, 13, UA)

In several cases, missing close friends was worsened by disrupted family ties, since many of the participants' fathers were in Ukraine, and their mothers or older siblings were often very busy with work, as M. (boy from Ukraine, 10) put it: "Here, you have to play with yourself. It's harder here when my dad is in Ukraine, and here... my mum works 12 hours a day. And I'm mostly at home with my brother or alone."

Some participants openly shared that they felt lonely, as Y. (girl from Ukraine, 12) said: "I exist as a cat – on my own," while others projected loneliness onto fictional characters: "Well, because he [a fictional character] got depressed. Because he was on his own. He didn't have any contact with anyone, so he was very sad by himself. And he got depressed." (K, boy from Ukraine, 17)



Pic. 4: "This photo is dedicated to what I like to do. I've got a drone and a bicycle on it [...] t's a real drone. I like flying drones and riding my bike" (Vsmel, 9, boy from Ukraine).

11) For more information about the relationship between Ukrainian participants and their Polish peers, see Theme 3 on p. 31.



Pic. 5: "There's one photo here, of a volleyball field. I started playing volleyball here, and for some reason I was really drawn to it. And I really like volleyball. I have most of my friends there, a social circle where I can communicate" (D, 13, girl from Ukraine).

In the survey conducted with children from Ukraine during the consultation,¹³ the majority of participants (81.9%) responded positively to the idea of receiving information via social media about activities organised for young people from Ukraine in Poland. This percentage was even higher (97.5%) among respondents in the 14-17 age group. As A. (girl from Ukraine, 15) explains: "Like the group of this centre, there are all sorts of events there. You can be added to it. There are a lot of interesting things there."

¹²) Acrobatics and dancing classes were mentioned only by girls, while skating, karate and football were mentioned only by boys.

¹³) Participants responded to a short survey on-the-spot at the end of each focus group. The results were analysed quantitatively and are based on a total sample of 81 participants from Ukraine.

COPING MECHANISMS

Based on the experiences and feelings that were shared by participants from Ukraine, it was clear that they had a lot to process as they described having to cope with worries for both themselves and for others.

They said they felt stress and nostalgia for their place of origin, and the most widespread feeling described by them was loneliness. A couple of the children talked about shutting down their emotions, as if they were "frozen," and said that they felt perplexed as a result. For some, giving way to apathy and "not trying anymore" seemed to be a response mechanism triggered by their life circumstances.

"I don't really do anything here." (M, boy from Ukraine, 10)

S: "The best thing to do in Poland is to sleep. I always sleep."

A: "And eat."

S: "I always think, for the future, [that] I'll go home, 100%. I'll be back in the summer, why should I do anything here? Why should I start anything, why do I need this Polish language at all, why learn it. If I come home anyway. But I understand that I may not return. And maybe I'll stay here. And I will sleep all day."

(S, girl, 16; A, girl, 16; both from Ukraine)

Only some participants displayed such atrophy of will. Most participants said that they kept busy with a number of activities and tried to find positive coping mechanisms to deal with their problems.

Several children reported that they played sport and this was regarded as something pleasurable. During the focus groups, participants mentioned playing football, volleyball and basketball, as well as skating, karate, cycling, acrobatics and dancing classes.¹² However, financial issues were often mentioned as a barrier to practicing sport, especially at an advanced level, which a few participants had done in Ukraine.

Some children from Ukraine, especially younger ones, talked about participating in activities at the social hubs where the consultations took place. They particularly enjoyed practical workshops related to arts and crafts, sightseeing in the city, visiting museums, and playing board games. One participant had joined a book club, while a couple said they liked going to the cinema.

Several participants said that nature played an important role in helping them to cope with stress because it offered a tranquillity and stillness that is necessary to relax, as M. (non-binary child from Ukraine, 15) put it: "The presence of fields, forests, where you could escape and sit, do what you want, think about what you want, nothing makes noise, oh, like this transport."

Furthermore, pets were also considered to be a key source of relief from stress. Those who had their dogs and cats with them in Poland were happy to be able to pet them, take care of them and keep them at home thanks to the good will of their landlords. The focus group discussions with children aged between 8 and 13 years old especially revealed the importance of pets because in the words of the children, "they give you joy," (Y, girl from Ukraine, 11); "they are so soft and warm, they relieve stress," (L, girl from Ukraine, 11); and "they're like antidepressants," (A, girl from Ukraine, 9). They also make children feel less lonely: "When I come back from school, my mum is still at work and the dog is with me." (D, girl from Ukraine, 9).

A few children also reported that they had found new opportunities in their host city, which could be considered as positive coping mechanisms. For instance, several participants had engaged in volunteering, which they did not do before. For some participants, moving to Poland meant "the opportunity to see the other side of themselves," (K, girl from Ukraine, 17), or "to start from scratch (...) and build something of their own here in Poland," (D, girl from

Ukraine, 15). For a few participants, the crisis situation had allowed them to create new relationships and **“to choose for yourself with whom you will be comfortable”** (P, girl from Ukraine, 17).

Overall, the participants described a number of coping mechanisms that helped them with the challenges they faced. Some responded with apathy, sleeping and eating a lot, or emotional suppression. Many, however, said that they engaged in positive coping mechanisms such as playing sports, taking part in group activities, spending time in nature, and cuddling pets, as well as trying to see their new lives from a new, positive perspective.¹⁴



Pic. 6: “[Cats] help you cope with stress. It’s also great to have them around, they’re like family members. But it’s hard to live with them in Poland. You come here and we couldn’t find an apartment for a long time with this cat [...] And then we found it because of the cat. Because the landlady likes red cats. And she actually rented us the flat.” (R, 15, girl from Ukraine).



Pic. 7: “This is my dog. I like to train him. I like to walk him” (Mriia, 17, boy from Ukraine).



Pic. 8: “This is a picture of my thread and needles, because I really like to sew. On Saturday I’m going to a workshop where they make dolls out of thread” (Zaichonok, 9, girl from Ukraine).



Pic. 9: “This is my hamster. I didn’t manage to take a picture of it, but it’s a hamster. Here is his cage, and the wheel, and the hamster, and the pipe, and the slide. And there is food. Carrots and cabbage” (Lev, 8, boy from Ukraine).

14) Spending time in nature was mentioned only in the focus group discussions with older children (aged 14-17), while younger children (aged 8-13) more often highlighted affection for their pets (this was also mentioned by older participants).

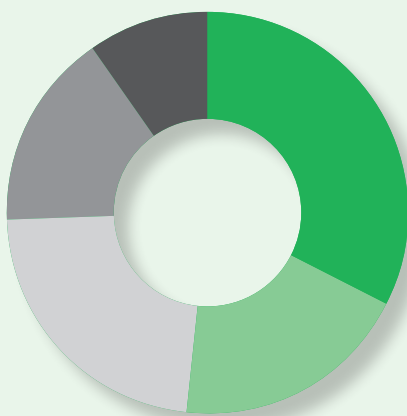
BOX A: Attitudes towards mental health and psychosocial support

Just over half of the study participants from Ukraine said that they would like to talk to “someone professional” regarding their mental health, although there was a difference between age groups (46.3% of 14- to 17-year-olds compared to 57.1% of 8- to 13- year-olds). Some children said they had access to psychosocial support, but the service was appreciated only when available in Ukrainian. According to participants, the main reason to attend psychological sessions was to cope with distress and behavioural problems. The majority said that they experienced high levels of stress at home, occasionally resulting in arguments, and this caused them to reflect on the need to foster positive communication.

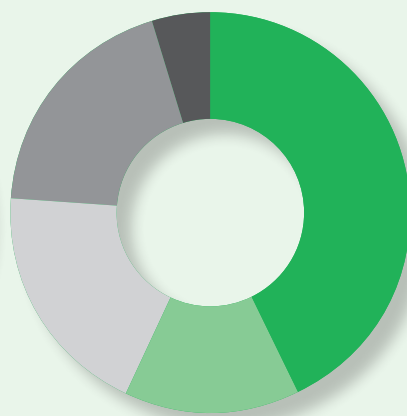


“I WOULD LIKE TO TALK TO SOMEONE PROFESSIONAL ABOUT MY FEELINGS AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK”

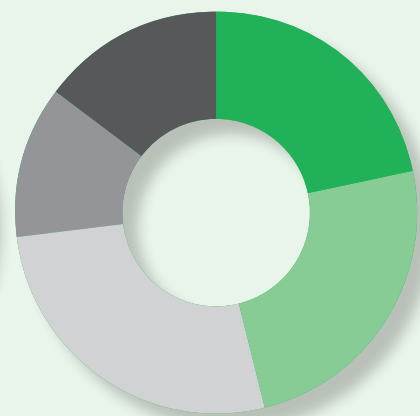
8 TO 17-YEAR-OLD



8 TO 13-YEAR-OLD



14 TO 17-YEAR-OLD



- 32.5% Fully agree
- 19.3% Rather agree
- 22.9% Not sure
- 15.7% Rather disagree
- 9.6% Fully disagree

- 42.8% Fully agree
- 14.3% Rather agree
- 19.1% Not sure
- 19.1% Rather disagree
- 4.7% Fully disagree

- 21.9% Fully agree
- 24.4% Rather agree
- 26.8% Not sure
- 12.2% Rather disagree
- 14.7% Fully disagree

The participants showed mixed reactions to psychosocial support. When asked to respond to the statement “I would like to talk to someone professional about my feelings at least once a week,” around half of the study participants from Ukraine (51.8%) fully or somewhat agreed. One-quarter of participants (25.3%) did not agree, while a similar number (22.9%) were not sure.¹⁵ The following exchange shows the different opinions within the same focus group discussion:

T: “My problems are my problems, why should I tell anyone about them?”

A: “It’s not very cool to keep problems inside yourself. It’s okay to talk.”

N: “If you accumulate a lot of problems, it can become a big problem later.”

T: “I really hate psychologists. I don’t understand why I need them at all, and my mum sends me and says, ‘you need it.’”

D: “They help you solve problems, your psychological state.”

A: “Like a best friend. It’s not like with your mum, [from whom] you have to hide some facts. With a psychologist, you don’t have to do that.”

(T, boy, 14; A, boy, 17; N, boy, 17; all from Ukraine)

Many participants said that they had received psychosocial support at school, at social hubs or at medical facilities¹⁶ and their feedback towards the professionals they met was generally positive. A couple of participants complained about costs and waiting time: “Yes [there is a psychologist] but it takes a long time. You have to wait in line.” (M, boy from Ukraine, 14). All the participants who had attended psychological sessions said they had opted for Ukrainian speaking professionals, and even those children who had not used such services before, explained that they would prefer a psychologist from Ukraine:

D: “I really want to go to the Ukrainian one [psychologist]. Well, mostly because of the language.”

O: “Well, [one can prefer] the Ukrainian one, maybe, because someone has problems with Ukraine. Maybe someone is insulted [because s/he is Ukrainian]. Or they are concerned and worried about Ukraine. Well, maybe you can speak [about such things] with a Ukrainian one, and not with a Polish [psychologist].”

(D, girl, 13; O, girl, 11; both from Ukraine)

According to the study participants, it is crucial to speak with a person whom they think could share their experiential, cultural, and also political attitudes, as explained by N. (boy from Ukraine, 14): “We had something like that [a school psychologist] at the beginning of the year; we also had a psychologist for the Ukrainians, but they thought of inviting a person from [name of a country other than Ukraine] who speaks only Russian. As you understand, although we have more people in the school who are from the East [of Ukraine], not from the West,¹⁷ they were all against it, because, seriously, some Russian woman from [name of a country other than Ukraine] will tell us that everything is fine... well...”

As an alternative to talking with a psychologist, S. (boy from Ukraine, 17) suggested he preferred to use hotlines because they guarantee anonymity and are free of charge: “I think that it is better instead of psychologists, of course, they can be [a solution], but a cool option is hotlines. First of all, it is anonymous, if someone is afraid. There are such people [who are shy], they can call [...] There are such hotlines. We have advertisements for Ukrainians. For adults, for children, different specialists. Free of charge.”

It was elicited from consultations that the majority of participants understood talking to a professional as a way to support themselves through challenging situations or, especially according to the younger children in the focus groups, to correct supposedly negative behaviour. V. (boy from Ukraine, 9) said he had talked with a psychologist, but did not have a positive opinion about it:

V: “I can say in my own words about a psychologist. He essentially makes my behaviour normal.” Facilitator: “What kind of normal?”

V: “Normal. I mean, adequate. You know, like all healthy people.”

15) The survey was methodologically conceived as a starting point to trigger further conversations with participants and the gender of participants was not therefore collected with the data. However, data gathered from the 7 focus group discussions disaggregated by gender (total of 31 participants) show that 73% of girls agree with the statement (7% are not sure), while only 31.2% of boys agree (31% are unsure). This suggests the need for further investigation on gendered attitudes towards psychosocial support among Ukrainian refugee children.

16) In one focus group (with children aged 8-13 years), participants explained that they received mental health and psychosocial support because their mothers encouraged and/or pushed them to do so.

17) Before the war, the majority of those residing in the Eastern regions of Ukraine bordering Russia, tended to speak Russian, whereas in the Western regions of Ukraine, Ukrainian was the dominant language. Since the beginning of the conflict, switching from Russian to Ukrainian has become a political statement.

Facilitator: "Have you ever been to a psychologist?"

V: "Yes, of course I have. They can correct some details in your behaviour."

Facilitator: "And did you like it there?"

V: "To be honest, the psychologist is my least favourite doctor, because I don't like it when people correct my morals."

Facilitator: "Why?"

V: "I told you. Because I like to be myself. I don't want to be like other people. I'm fine the way I am."

Beyond stress connected to the war and their displacement, participants notably reported that they had developed or strengthened their abilities to handle stressful situations at home. Many said that they experienced frustrating environments, sometimes resulting in arguments between them and their mothers. Emblematic of this is the fact that O. (girl from Ukraine, 11) explained that she was going to her first session with a psychologist "to help" her mother. Describing the situation at home and the dynamics between her and her mother, she said: "I'm very stressed because my mum scolds me, because she is tired. She scolds me and she gets very tired. That's why I got an appointment with a psychologist [...] I want to help her by going to a psychologist. To calm down a bit [...] Ukrainians don't believe in psychologists. Mothers just solve [their children's problems] by shouting. That's how they were raised and that's how they raise their children. Shouting. That's how they do it. Maybe [psychotherapy] is possible in some countries, for example, in England. But how is it [possible] in Ukraine? We don't solve it [problems] like that."

In summary, the consultations highlighted that almost all participants from Ukraine feel lonely, think that they do not "fit in" with Polish society, and feel that their environment at home is difficult to handle because of challenging circumstances arising from the war, financial issues and lack of privacy, with some younger participants reporting that they had argued with their caregivers.

THEME 2: The education of refugee children from Ukraine in Poland: challenges and opportunities

“The difference in education, in the system, that’s what’s affecting us.”

(A, girl from Ukraine, 15)

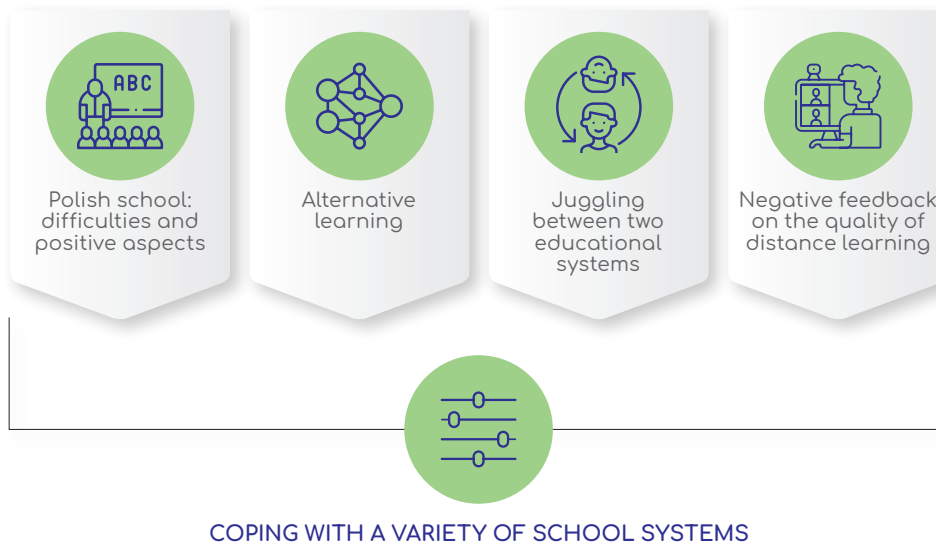


Figure 3:
Core educational
topics highlighted
by children

SUMMARY

When it comes to school and learning, the children from Ukraine who participated in this study experience multiple approaches to their education. Some are attending Polish school and some online Ukrainian schools, while almost half attend both a Polish school and an online Ukrainian school.

Notwithstanding the challenges of being in a new educational system, the majority of participants said that they appreciated studying in the Polish educational system because they generally found the teachers to be supportive and they also praised the support provided by Ukrainian intercultural assistants, which are present in several schools.

On the contrary, studying at an online Ukrainian school was deemed to be very tiring because of the amount of screen time but especially because, according to participants, the classes were not well organised. However, participants said they appreciated going to centres situated in one of the Polish cities, where they could attend their own online classes, meet their peers and access face-to-face support from Ukrainian educators.

The challenges that children face while attending online Ukrainian schools and juggling between two educational systems, has resulted in them focusing on Polish schools. The oldest students from Ukraine (16-17 years old) are the exception, as they are in their last year of their Ukrainian education. These children said that they saw no point in joining the Polish educational system, especially because it usually requires two, and sometimes three more years of study in comparison with the Ukrainian system.



Pic. 10: “I actually approached her [the teacher] today and she came to take a picture.” (S, 17, girl from Ukraine).

18) For more on the challenges faced by participants in their relationships with Polish peers and teachers, see Theme 3 on p. 31.

19) The Ukrainian and Polish educational systems are different. In Poland, a child usually spends 12-13 years at school until they complete secondary education whereas in Ukraine, primary and secondary school last for 11 years. Furthermore, since children from Ukraine who come to Poland do not know Polish, they are often sent either to the 'zero class' (for 6- to 7-year-olds) or the 'preparatory class' (for 14- to 15-year-olds). In other cases, they are asked to start one class lower than in their Ukrainian school because of the language barrier. Therefore, many Ukrainian students attending Polish school found themselves in a lower grade in comparison to their previous Ukrainian class. For both these reasons, Ukrainian children, depending on their level of Polish and their age, can be required to learn for one, two, or even three years longer when they transfer to a Polish school.

20) In terms of the general appreciation for Polish teachers, a few participants reported instances of discrimination or lack of sensitivity during consultations. For more on this, see Theme 3 on p. 31.

APPRECIATION FOR POLISH SCHOOLS

Attending a Polish school was challenging for many of the participants from Ukraine, particularly when they first moved to Poland, since they had to adapt to a completely new educational system. This is reflected in the following exchange during a focus group:

Facilitator: "Samuel and Margaret [fictional characters] came to [the city where the focus group discussion took place]. What do they do here?"

K: "They go to school."

S: "Polish school."

Facilitator: "And how do they like it?"

E: "It's difficult."

A: "The programme is different. The language is different. And people with their worldviews are different."

(K, girl, 15; S, girl, 15; E, girl; A, girl, 15; all from Ukraine)

Some of the participants explained that, initially, they had to adjust to the different school set-up and to a new grading system, besides having to integrate themselves in a new social environment.¹⁸ This was overall quite challenging. A couple of them also lamented having to study in a lower class,¹⁹ as shown by the following exchange:

Facilitator: "What do you think about this [the fact that they are in a lower grade in comparison to the Ukrainian educational system]?"

D: "It's a waste, because they [school personnel] don't understand what we can do."

M: "We can go [to the next grade]. But they think we can't manage."

(D, boy, 12; M, boy, 12; both from Ukraine)

However, in terms of educational outcomes, for the majority of participants from Ukraine the main challenge was having to study in a new language. Many participants who attended Polish schools reported that their grades worsened in comparison to when they were living in Ukraine. The grades of those who also attended online Ukrainian school were seldom as good. The fact that they could not understand everything like before and express themselves in the most effective way was quite frustrating for some children and adolescents. As an example, in this extract from one of the focus group discussions, the younger adolescents were talking about an imaginary character, Zina, who could not succeed with her studies in a Polish school:

S: "Maybe he [the teacher] doesn't want her [Zina] to have normal grades because she is from Ukraine."

V: "Because he doesn't like Ukraine and that's it."

A: "Or because she doesn't know Polish well and can't write a sentence properly, and the teacher doesn't understand it and gives her a bad grade."

(S, girl, 12; V, girl, 10; A, girl, 13; all from Ukraine)

Notwithstanding the difficulties the participants expressed about studying in Polish, the majority of them reported that the situation had improved significantly since they arrived in Poland. Participants who studied in a Polish school had more interaction with their Polish peers, in comparison to those participants who exclusively attended an online Ukrainian school. Indeed, the possibility of meeting new people and improving their knowledge of Polish language was praised during consultations. L. (girl from Ukraine, 11) said: "I like [about the Polish school] that I made friends and was able to develop my Polish language."

When it comes to the Polish school system, participants expressed a general appreciation for school personnel, especially teachers, who had an important role in participant narratives. When asked to photograph an adult who helped them to solve their problems, they often photographed a teacher.²⁰ Some participants noticed that many Polish teachers were supportive of them (e.g., allowing them to use mobile phones, which is generally prohibited

in Polish schools): “My classmates here treated us well and supported us. All the teachers also adapted to us. We have always used translators. They just say at the beginning of the year: “Don’t you understand something? Look here at the whiteboard, they say, don’t you understand? Translate, do, write, through the translator.” (S, girl from Ukraine, 16)

A few participants were particularly enthusiastic about certain Polish teachers who went beyond formal classroom communication and, for example, provided them with valuable advice, unrelated to the subject they were teaching. Below is a positive description of a biology teacher in a Polish school by S. (girl from Ukraine, 17):

“I could tell you about my [subject] teacher at the lyceum [...] She loves to communicate with young people, she is on the same wavelength. But at the same time, she can give such good advice. She is a very unique person. I may not have met anyone like her before. She can help me, perhaps, with different problems. But I just don’t want to burden people with my problems. But in principle, for example, in terms of understanding my future, she could also help. She often asks me if I have decided where I am going to study. She suggested that she could look for a university somewhere in Poland. She constantly asks me if I have already applied, and so on.”

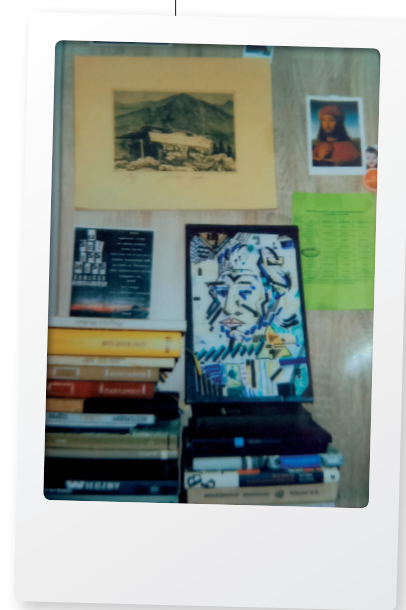
For students from Ukraine, Polish teachers could be a source of comfort and support. In this regard, it could be said that several Polish teachers managed the language barrier well, as well as other complications that children and adolescents from Ukraine were likely to experience. Many participants reported that teachers were not particularly demanding towards the pupils from Ukraine to the point that, for Y. (girl from Ukraine, 12) Polish school was “much easier” and she “doesn’t actually have any homework” – she even got annoyed at times “because everything seems easy.”

Furthermore, the schools that the participants attended had intercultural assistants, whose role was to provide help to pupils from Ukraine in navigating the learning process. In most cases, this position was occupied by an adult from Ukraine, who arrived in Poland prior to the outbreak of the full-scale war. This figure appeared to be very useful in mitigating potential conflict with the teachers: “Yeah, I also have an interpreter [intercultural assistant], and she says that on the contrary [to what Polish teachers say], I’m fine, I’ve learned it [Polish language] well so far, and it’s normal [to speak] Polish [imperfectly] for the time being [...] he says that no grades are required yet, no one is asking me for grades. Because I don’t know Polish well yet, I guess.” (S, girl from Ukraine, 12).

For another participant it was important that the intercultural assistant shared similar experiences with her: “Yes. She understands everything. She’s already experienced it” (A, girl from Ukraine, 13). There was no negative feedback regarding the intercultural assistants from any participant in the study, and the younger participants were even more fond of them than the older adolescents. O. (boy from Ukraine, 9) said: “She [the intercultural assistant] would help them [fictional characters] to learn Polish because she speaks Polish very well. And she is always so nice. Whenever someone comes, like when I came to take a picture, she hugged me [...] She helped me when I came to Poland and then went to a Polish school, she helped me learning Polish. She always helps everyone.”

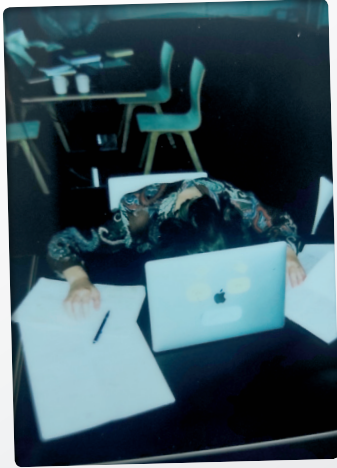
NAVIGATING BETWEEN THE TWO EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

Almost half of the study participants from Ukraine were enrolled in both the Polish and the Ukrainian education systems.²¹ They attended a Polish school daily and, after coming home, logged in to the Ukrainian school to join at least one or two online lessons. Attending two schools did not allow them to organise their time efficiently to keep up with the workload:



Pic. 11: “[The leaflet] just hangs in my head, I look at it and get inspired” (Werter, 14, boy from Ukraine).

21) A total of 38 participants (15 girls and 23 boys) said that they participated in both the Polish and Ukrainian school systems including 21 participants aged between 8-13 years old and 17 participants aged between 14-17 years old.



Pic. 12: "I don't like the distance learning! Here's a picture of me, there's a bunch of papers, a laptop, and there's just a huge workload in the 11th grade. You just lie there and die." (SH, 17, boy from Ukraine).

"Because my schedule is full. Monday. Five lessons, some breaks, and then I have a swimming pool. And gymnastics. On Tuesday I have seven lessons, well, 2 hours or so, and then I have karate. On Wednesday, I have lessons until 13.25, then I have English at 13.45. Thursday... my lessons end at 14.30, and I have a break and karate. On Friday, my lessons end at 12.25, and then I have English at 13.45. And on Saturday, I have another class at 11 o'clock."
(I, boy from Ukraine, 10)

All the participants who attended both Polish and Ukrainian schools were clear about how they felt about the situation: they reported being tired, busy throughout the week with next to no free time, and confused about the possible outcomes of their studies. As a consequence, they said that Polish school had become their priority, whereas the homework for the Ukrainian school online was seen as secondary. This was especially the case for younger children.

However, among older participants the reactions and opinions were more varied. Trying to perform in both school systems, they appeared to be much more stressed than their younger peers, as the words of N. (boy from Ukraine, 14) demonstrate: "I have three days of exams [in the Polish school] coming up. And I didn't have time to prepare for them... Well, I had time to prepare for them, but I didn't have time to do Ukrainian lessons, so now I have to catch up in three days, that's all. I had to do work for a month, and it's very difficult."

For a few of the older participants, the decision to attend both schools was often influenced by their parents, who hedged their bets regarding the future by insisting that their children study in two schools, even if they did not want to. The following conversation vividly illustrates this issue:

S: "My decision was that I wanted to stay at the Ukrainian school, but my mum said no, you'll go to a Polish school to learn the language. I don't know how it worked out because of my workload, because I'm in the last year of school in Ukraine, and I have to go to school in Poland for three more years. So, I thought it was better to stay in the Ukrainian school."

Y: "I also thought that there was no point in going to [the Polish school]... We thought for a long time whether to go to a Polish school or not. And I'm finishing 11th grade [the final year in the Ukrainian school], so these three years [in the Polish school] are going nowhere. Just nowhere."

(S, girl, 17; Y, girl, 17; both from Ukraine)

The main reason that some older participants did not want to enrol in a Polish school – and many did not – was the fact that they were about to graduate from the Ukrainian school, while in the Polish educational system, they would be expected to attend two more years before they could get their diploma. As S. (girl from Ukraine, 17) put it: "It's already the end, the last grade [in the Ukrainian school]. There is nothing to consider, just to graduate."

However, participants who were younger than 16 years old were generally more in favour of focusing on Polish school. An inspiration for their enthusiasm was the prestige of a Western education, as D. (girl from Ukraine, 13) put it: "I want to [study in a Polish school] because I want a European education and I already know where I want to go."

Knowing what path to choose after school was challenging for many participants. The majority of soon-to-be graduates admitted that relocation had destroyed any future plans that they had made in Ukraine, and they did not have a clear idea of what to do next. Many of them were simply not aware of the possibilities of higher education in Poland and Europe (costs, scholarships, language requirements) and the only sources of knowledge they mentioned were word of mouth from acquaintances of their parents and the internet.

Awareness of future educational opportunities can indeed be beneficial. The ambition to continue studies in Poland motivated N. (boy from Ukraine, 14) to perform well at his Polish school. He took a photo (pic. 11) of a green leaflet, pinned to the wall, and said about it: "This is the lyceum I want to enter, and one faculty is highlighted. This is such a reminder [of the things I want to do]."

Being motivated to enter the lyceum of his choice made him think strategically about achieving good grades at his current school, even though he had to attend Catholic religion classes, which he did not appreciate: **“You don’t have to go to a religion class. But when you do go to it and you get a good grade, it counts as a couple of other classes, and it raises your average.”**

CRITIQUES OF ONLINE UKRAINIAN SCHOOLS

Almost all the participants who were attending an online Ukrainian school at home were disappointed by the quality of their education, especially when they compared it to their education before the war. Indeed, participants who were receiving distance learning said they did not like it. The reasons for this varied, but the fundamental factor was that learning remotely was ineffective and discouraging at times. A. (girl from Ukraine, 15) felt that she **“doesn’t understand some subjects anymore.”** She used to be good at maths, but when she came to Poland that changed: **“Mathematics is just... I don’t understand maths remotely.”** The same went for biology – even though A. would need it for her future studies, and was **“genuinely interested”** in it, she admitted she **“doesn’t study it remotely because she doesn’t want to.”**

Some participants complained that distance learning was seldom well-organised. Instead of having proper online lessons, during which the teacher and the students join a virtual classroom, they just **“have to learn everything from a textbook or from the internet, or from the material [the teacher sends],”** (A, boy from Ukraine, 10), with little interaction. Even when online classes did take place, **“no one turned on their camera, you just saw these squares,”** said S. (boy from Ukraine, 17), highlighting the lack of engagement of his classmates.

However, according to participants, the quality of education was not the only factor that distinguished face-to-face Polish school from online Ukrainian school. This second factor is what A. (boy, 10, UA) defined as some sense of normalcy: **“Everything is just normal in a Polish school. You go to school, and you do your assignments.”**

A feeling of instability especially worried the older adolescents, and several of them manifested anxiety and preoccupation regarding their preparation for the Ukrainian national exam. Y. (girl from Ukraine, 17) said: **“The school is overwhelming us, and the teachers started to panic a bit, which puts a little pressure.”** She feared she was **“not going to pass anything, which is a disaster.”** Her friend S. (girl from Ukraine, 17), who was present at the same discussion, illustrated Y’s worry with a picture taken through the photovoice exercise (see pic. 12) and explained: **“There’s a bunch of papers, a laptop, and there’s just a huge workload in the 11th grade.”**

Furthermore, difficult access to digital tools was defined as an obstacle for the children and adolescents from Ukraine who tried to keep up with school online: **“I have no stable Wi-Fi, so I have to use the mobile internet, which is expensive.”** (O, girl from Ukraine, 11)

Moreover, the children said that the war in Ukraine caused occasional network breakdowns for both teachers and pupils who reside in Ukraine. This often led to the cancellation or postponement of lessons, as explained by K. (girl, 15, UA): **“My classmates went abroad, and only 25% of them stayed in Ukraine. Well, because there is no [internet] connection there [in Ukraine]. They have nothing to study with. That is, they simply did not connect to the lessons. And at some point, when only two other people and I were coming to the lessons, they [the teachers at the online Ukrainian school] refused to show up for lessons.”**

According to participant accounts, it was difficult for their Ukrainian teachers to find motivation to conduct lessons in half-empty online classrooms and to get used to distance learning methods. M. (boy from Ukraine, 14) pointed out that the teachers **“don’t communicate with each other”** and **“have very**



Pic. 13: **“This is the Polish and Ukrainian flag and so on, and this is the EU flag, I guess”.** (Fikus, 17, girl from Ukraine).

different views" on the mechanics of distance learning. He explained: "Some teachers want, for example, everything to be in Google Class, so that video lessons and everything else is there. And some, on the contrary, want everything to be separate. And it's very difficult, because when, for example, you look at the time and see that you have a lesson, you log in, and you don't have a lesson there. And it turns out the teacher dumped [the link to] this lesson into the chat, and then they won't let you in because you're late. So, in short, it's complicated."

At the same time, the poor quality of distance learning also brought advantages to their daily lives, especially for those who were simultaneously attending Polish schools: "It [the fact that the Ukrainian online distance learning system was poorly organised] helped me because it reduced my workload in terms of studies." Despite the perceived decline in the quality of online education, according to the participants no grades went down because "It became much easier, easier to cheat." (D, boy from Ukraine, 16)

TWO ALTERNATIVES TO DISTANCE LEARNING FROM HOME

Some of the participants in the study attended a Ukrainian school online, but not from their homes. They connected to their online lessons from a physical classroom, which was made available by various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) present in Poland. These children and adolescents explained that they were provided with laptops and headphones, as well as a spacious room, where they went every day to join lessons delivered online by their respective schools in Ukraine.

These participants, even if they shared negative feedback about the online Ukrainian education system, very much appreciated the possibility of meeting other peers from Ukraine face-to-face. M. (boy from Ukraine, 14) said: "It's fun to study online, especially in places like this, because you're sitting together in a classroom... and everyone helps each other as much as they can." It is exactly this social dimension of education that was very much missed by participants who attended an online Ukrainian school from home. In addition to the possibilities of connecting but with other peers around them, which made a substantial difference, they were positive about the educators at the centre, who supported them in their distance learning lessons, to the point that they were almost substituting their own teachers.

Four of the study participants attended a Ukrainian school in person, in Poland. After the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, a few Polish cities spared a building for a school, which was relocated from a Ukrainian city close to the frontline. These schools follow the Ukrainian curriculum and function independently from the Polish educational system, with the exception of the introduction of Polish language lessons, which is compulsory for all pupils from Ukraine.

S. (girl from Ukraine, 17) studied at such a Ukrainian school and explained that in the first few months, when she happened to be in a company of Poles, she "was a listener and pretended to understand everything." She explained: "People were telling me different stories, I was invited to different parties, you know, exhibitions, and I was like, yeah, super, super, super, I see, yes, but in fact I didn't understand anything at all." Even though her Polish got better over time, S. reported that she had not made close friends in Poland "yet," which might be because she did not attend Polish school.

However, the four participants who attended a Ukrainian school in Poland were generally happy about it, especially because it provided them with a stability that they felt an online education could not provide. A photo that S. (girl, from Ukraine, 17) took in her school hall (pic. X) represented for her "a certain interest in Polish-Ukrainian ties and relations, and a general interest in Poland," since this Ukrainian school in Poland was perceived by the student to be a good mix of the two cultures, somehow representing their own life situation.

BOX B: The work experiences of adolescents from Ukraine

At the time of the consultations, many older participants said they were working part-time in order to earn some money. However, some of them had found it challenging to find jobs as they did not speak competent Polish. A few participants shared accounts of exploitative work experiences.

Some of the participants from Ukraine who were aged between 14 and 17 years old, including both boys and girls, explained that they were working part-time or looking for a part-time job to earn some pocket money for themselves.

They mentioned a large variety of jobs that they carried out, especially during the summer or at weekends. Some of the participants' jobs were more traditional, such as serving in a restaurant, tutoring younger children in person or online, providing support in an accountancy office or selling flowers in a market. Other jobs were more unusual, such as participating on a local TV show and clapping when requested, as well as photography, video-editing and modelling. Two girls mentioned that they had done some volunteer work, one in a refugee centre and the other in a museum, and that they wanted to try to apply for paid jobs in the same sector or similar institutions.

Many of the participants who had part-time jobs told the facilitators that they had occasional jobs in Ukraine as well. However, they explained that in Poland they faced more difficulties because of their lack of knowledge of the local language.

B. (boy from Ukraine, 17) described his experience in delivering food: "If it's a school day, a lot of lessons, the tutor, and so on, then it's quite a bit. Maybe I can go out and work for an hour, two hours. But usually, when I have a lot of things to do, I'd rather have a little rest between chores than work. I literally did nothing in the summer. I found a job, the delivery job. I worked in delivery and that was it. Every day is like that: I sleep, get up, go deliver, come back, that's it."

B. talks about his work experience as something that goes beyond his need for an income and which fulfils his need to escape from a stressful reality: "The work distracts me quite a lot from this thing [the war]. When I went to work, almost all the problems in my life disappeared, [nothing counts] except for the fact that I'm driving and delivering now. You know how it works in war. Nothing bothers you except the fact that you are at war. I don't know what happened to me with the delivery. When I was driving, I had no problems. Even if we have a million debts [in Ukraine], even if I knew that I have

no future life, that I would soon be expelled from school. I still go and I feel 'but now I deliver.'"

However, not all the working experiences that the participants talked about were positive. One girl described her and her friend's internship in a factory, where they were not trained and spent the majority of their time cleaning and sweeping the floor. She explained that they were also forced to carry heavy weights that were not suitable for their body types, and narrated what seemed to be a case of sexual harassment:²²

"I had a job. I had a schedule like this: two days of internship and three days of studying. I had an internship at a local factory [...] We were treated terribly there. I don't mean us as Ukrainians, but us as interns, we were treated terribly. They didn't even take into account that I was there with another Ukrainian girl. They were not interested. We often carried boards as heavy as 10 kg, and sometimes 20, 30 kg. And I'm like, 'come on, my weight is 45 kg'. They were not interested, they were saying 'just take it and carry it.' The treatment was awful there, but at least they paid us [...] And after a week or two, we [my friend and I] are standing together at the factory, and she tells me, 'By the way, once I was sitting here and there was one [nationality of the person] guy working next to me. And he told me, 'it's really cool you are working here because you are improving your Polish and you might even marry me and [the name of another male colleague].' And [my friend] turns to that guy and answers: 'Are you for real? We are 16, and you are offering us to marry 45-year-old men?!' It was just disgusting. And that other guy came up to me five times, I think, and said, 'do you have a boyfriend?' I say 'no,' and he replies, 'I don't have a woman either.' [I thought:] Man, you're 45, I'm 16, calm down.'" (A, girl from Ukraine, 16)

This is an isolated case among the research participants, but it highlights the risks that older children from Ukraine might be subjected to, even when doing internships that are supported by the school system, as in this particular case.

Another participant, H. (boy from Ukraine, 17), described an alarming situation in a rural area where he was living with his mother. This situation might reflect how some children and adolescents from Ukraine are subjected to severely exploitative environments, even if not working in unhealthy and unsafe conditions themselves:

H: "I have a picture from the church²³ [...] In this church, there is a man who [...] He has Ukrainians working for him on the land. I mean, he had workers before, Polish workers. [...] The fact is that this man is a very bad employer [...] This person has uncontrollable anger. He can grab a person there, shout at them, say something rude. And so, he gives quite... very difficult working conditions."

Facilitator: "Does he pay?"

H: "Yes, he does. But I'll tell you now, I really want to tell you. The work is hard. Hauling stones, going here and there, chopping wood, cleaning bark from the brambles, I don't know, cleaning branches from the trees [...] like the Ostarbaiters."²⁴

H. described the housing situation of the families working there and, on a more positive note, explained how, together with his mother, he had talked to a Polish acquaintance who helped them to leave and find different accommodation. The same type of supportive figure, a Polish acquaintance, seemed to have played a positive role in the internship conditions of A., whose story was shared above:

"We had one man there, he was in charge and, well, he didn't say that to me, but he said that to [A's friend working as an intern at the same factory]. In short, he made a joke twice, such a joke which smells like paedophilia. And well. He was fired. Because I spoke out. Like, I told this to an acquaintance [...] Next day I come to the workplace, and during the break [my friend] writes to me, 'A, go to the toilet, quickly.' I go to the toilet, meet her and she says [name of the manager] is being fired [...] I'm like, 'what do you mean?' She says, 'he is packing.'" (A, girl from Ukraine, 16).

22) According to the study's referral protocol, the facilitators ensured that the participant was not in distress when narrating the incident, and that she was not working at the factory anymore. They shared information with the participant and the other people in the group about hotlines that support Ukrainian women and children in Poland.

23) At the end of the focus group discussion, the participant decided not to let the facilitators scan the picture of the church. This could be due to the fact that he did not want it to be linked to what he had said about his experience.

24) Ostarbaiters is a term used to refer to forced foreign labourers in Germany during the Second World War. The exact word used by the participant was "застарбайтер" [hastarbajter].

THEME 3: Integration of refugees from Ukraine in Poland: challenges and opportunities

“They haven’t had the good fortune to meet us.”

(Y, girl from Ukraine, 11)



Figure 4:
Core integration topics highlighted by children

SUMMARY

Almost all children from Ukraine who participated in the consultations explained that they did not feel a sense of belonging to Polish society, as if they “did not perfectly fit.” as D. (girl, 17, UA) describes:

“She [a fictional character] is not a person accepted by society [...] if you are not a person who perfectly fits the Polish understanding of the standards of society, then it is already much more difficult for you to find yourself here.”

During the consultations, it emerged that children from Ukraine had faced several challenges with integrating into the Polish societies where they had relocated. Notwithstanding the positive experiences of help and support that they had received from Polish people, a few participants also shared experiences of discrimination. During the discussions, nationalistic narratives of historical events, which feed stereotypes and create divisions, were mentioned by the children. Additionally, many children from Ukraine felt experiential and cultural differences with their Polish peers. Language is clearly a gatekeeper between the two groups, as is the quality time they spend together, which is necessary for getting to know each other better.



Pic. 14: “These are tomatoes. Because I thought of [name of a Ukrainian boy] who is in our class. He’s got red spots like that and he’s always scratching them and it’s so... disgusting. And when I see tomatoes, I want to throw up” (Gwiazdka, 11, girl from Poland).

EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION AND SUPPORT

Some participants from Ukraine shared their experiences of being subject to verbal violence and discrimination while in Poland. A few of these experiences were random episodes on public transport or in the neighbourhood where the participants lived, such as the following shared experience:

“At first, when I came here, I was walking with a friend in the street, we were talking in Ukrainian, and two adult men started following us and threatening us that they would hurt us. We ran away, we managed to get away, but they were looking for us for some time.” (A, boy from Ukraine, 15)

“I had a situation when we were walking with our classmates and a cyclist, a man, a Pole, he couldn’t just pass us for some reason. I don’t know why, he started swearing at us, telling us to ‘go back to our Ukraine.’ He told me that ‘you are not in Ukraine, you are in Poland.’ He started saying things like that.” (D, girl from Ukraine, 13)

“When I was walking my dog, he was a big dog, on a playground specially for dogs. And the Poles, I don’t know, maybe they were a little scared, they told my mother to go back to her Kyiv.” (V, boy from Ukraine, 14)

The participants shared some examples of discrimination by their Polish teachers. For example, A. (girl from Ukraine, 16) recalled her teacher saying to her Polish classmates, in front of other students from Ukraine: **“My God, these Ukrainians don’t do anything, they’re so stupid, damn it, they’re just [idiots].”** The participant said that she filed a complaint to her school’s principal, which led to a change of teacher. Another girl sadly described witnessing a sarcastic joke: **“Recently, a [subject] teacher says something like ‘[name of a Ukrainian pupil] is absent today, he isn’t in the classroom.’ And someone asked why he was not there, and the teacher is like, ‘I don’t know, he is probably fighting for his homeland.’ It was completely incorrect [...] He wanted to somehow... joke, but... then he was like, ‘oh, it was probably not correct.’ But still, it was very unpleasant, given the current situation. And the Polish students laughed at this.”** (Y, girl from Ukraine, 16).

The following exchange also shows that some participants from Ukraine expected their Polish teachers to be more sensitive to what constitutes painful topics for them:

O: **“I had many cases of Polish teachers discriminating against Ukrainians, somehow. Well, first of all, as soon as we got to school, many teachers came up to me and asked, ‘how is your house? Like, is it still standing? Didn’t the rocket hit there?’ And, as it were, thank God, my house is intact.”**

M: **“It’s a painful topic, and it’s not correct to talk about it. And, I don’t know, probably all the teachers at my school asked how my house is, and whether my dad is here or in Ukraine.”**

(O, girl, 16; D, girl 17; M, girl, 16; all from Ukraine)

A few participants from Ukraine who attended a Polish school also touched upon instances of bullying based on discriminatory attitudes towards Ukrainians, exemplified by this sentence that was recounted by A. (girl from Ukraine, 16): **“Speak Polish, you are in Poland, Poland for Poles.”** During a focus group discussion with Polish children, participants mentioned an instance where one of their classmates **“probably hit them [Ukrainian students], she did something uncool. And then she told us ‘my dad would be proud of me for hitting a Ukrainian.’”** (A, girl from Ukraine, 11).

T. (girl from Ukraine, 16), who attended an online Ukrainian school only, talked about bullying she had heard about from her friends from Ukraine: **“Bullying by some Polish teenagers. I haven’t experienced it myself, but my friends have told me that it happens when they go to school and it’s just a matter of luck [...] [Polish schoolmates] don’t realise the problem, that we came for a reason, not to take your money, your places, to use your services. We**



Pic. 15: **“I meant the fist because there were often quarrels during physical education... there was a kicking between students from Poland and students from Ukraine”.** (Kartofelus, 12, girl from Ukraine).

came here because of the war and cannot stay at home, and we feel bad too. But it happens they mock Ukrainians, and bully them.”

D. (girl from Ukraine, 13) explained that she did not like the attitudes of her Polish peers and felt excluded even though she made efforts to communicate: “I don’t like it very much, I don’t like that they always aggress you somehow, even though you speak Polish well, they don’t like something. I don’t know [...] Well, because I don’t feel comfortable, because I always try to communicate with someone, but they always push even though she made efforts to communicate: “I don’t like it very much, I don’t like that they always push me away.”

The feeling of exclusion was shared by V. (boy from Ukraine, 15), who said that when there were parties organised by his Polish classmates, students from Ukraine were “not invited. No, they don’t invite at all.”

Experiences such as those described above arose in only a few of the focus groups. On a more positive note, some children shared good experiences of support from their classmates, and especially from their teachers,²⁵ who understood their specific needs and challenges:

“Our teacher from Poland is very cool. As a person, she is very cool, and she is also loyal to Ukrainians. And recently I answered in Polish, I told someone about the work, and she said that my Polish has improved because I last answered a long time ago. And she’s cool, really.” (O, girl from Ukraine, 16)

“They [my classmates] treat me with understanding. They help. They help with praise, or with homework. They help at lectures.” (V, girl from Ukraine, 12)

“My Polish classmates were normal enough, they treated me normally. There was such a bond, I was always, for example, sitting somewhere [alone] and they would immediately [approach me saying], ‘integration, integration, come to us.’ I come here by train, because I don’t live in [the city where the focus group took place], but in [the name of a suburban town], and there is such a town as [the name of another suburban town], and it is one stop away. We always somehow went together on this train after school, and we spent time together. So, they were quite friendly.” (M, girl from Ukraine, 15)



Pic. 16: “I took a picture of weeds to... because weeds need to be pulled out, and... they [Ukrainians] have bad habits. Disgusting habits that should be weeded” (Serduzsko, 12, girl from Poland).

EMPATHY OVERSHADOWED BY STEREOTYPES AND NARRATIVES THAT FOSTER DIVISION

The focus groups with Polish participants²⁶ unveiled a range of attitudes towards their peers from Ukraine. Most Polish children recognised the difficult situation of their classmates from Ukraine, including leaving their country and separating from their loved ones, as explained by J. (girl from Poland, 12): “Today I am mostly worried about my family, friends and pets, because I have a lot of pets in my family. I don’t want to run away from the country at all... because we say that the Ukrainians are doing well here now, but they also don’t feel good here because of the language... Their friends are scattered all over the world.”

Another example of empathy was provided by K. (boy from Poland, 11): “I had sadness and I felt sorry for the children from Ukraine because, for example, everyone would be sad if they knew that their dad was abroad with a gun...”

However, in both focus groups with Polish children, another narrative was revealed as the discussion progressed. Indeed, empathy for their Ukrainian peers was replaced by aversion towards diversity: “Just when there are people from Poland in Poland, it’s good... and when someone else comes, when I hear a different language, I feel bad somehow. I don’t know, we’re not used to these languages and we just don’t know them.” (S, boy from Poland, 12). A couple of participants used stereotypes to describe Ukrainians, for example that they are “so aggressive because they follow the example, from the war” (A, girl from Poland, 11) or that they have “disgusting habits.” (R, girl from Poland, 12)

25) For more on the opinions of children from Ukraine of their teachers, see Theme 2 on p. 23.

26) Only two focus group discussions were conducted with Polish participants and therefore considerations, experiences and opinions are far from generalisable. However, they are worth further reflection.



Pic. 17: "I have a picture of a teddy bear with a heart, because I mean that other countries have seen what kind of heart we have, like this teddy bear. And that's why I wanted to show this photo" (Gwiazdka, 11, girl from Poland).

27) Participants referred to the massacres carried out in German-occupied Poland by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army from 1943 to 1945 with the support of some of the local Ukrainian population against the Polish minority in Volhynia, Eastern Galicia, parts of Polesia and Lublin region. The peak of the massacres, which resulted in between 50,000 to 100,000 deaths, took place in July and August 1943. This version of events is challenged by Ukraine, which insists on the mutual character of the massacres.

During the focus group discussions, there were some stereotypical arguments that used anti-migration rhetoric, such as references to refugees being lazy: "For example, now when Ukrainians come to us, instead of going to work, they simply stay at home, others have to provide for them" (K, girl from Poland, 12), or being ungrateful: "There is an increasing greed and ungratefulness of Ukrainians for what Poles give them. So they just come, make the most of it, destroy things, and that's it. And they just run away as if they were never there" (M, boy from Poland, 12).

Additionally, W. (boy from Poland, 12) underlined that many refugees from Ukraine are well-off and do not need the support that is given to them: "There are also a lot of Ukrainians who are really rich... It is said that they fled from Ukraine... and I meet, I often meet, such cool cars with Ukrainian license plates, and just like that, I heard everywhere on TV that the Ukrainians just ran away, that they didn't take anything, just got in, I don't know how... and ran away. And now I see [brands of luxury cars] very often on the roads."

These quotes resemble conservative discourses about refugees, which do not exclusively belong to Polish children but are generally present in society. Some of the participants from Ukraine perceived such feelings towards them and spoke of "having fallen in the eyes of the Poles" after an initial perception of a welcoming attitude, as explained in the following exchange:

A: "The latest statistics show that only 55% of Poles support the stay of Ukrainians in Poland. This statistic seems to be from this winter. We are already falling quite a lot in the eyes of Poles."

Facilitator: "What does it mean that 'we are falling'?"

A: "Well, I mean as a nation. Almost all Poles have a much lower opinion [respect and compassion] of us. They treat us more like some kind of... I don't know... slaves [...] I think it's because they joined the war and started helping Ukraine. And because of that, taxes increased. And they have to pay more."

(A, boy from Ukraine, 17)

Historical events, especially relating to the Second World War, were a trigger for discriminative discourses. In particular, the Volhynian slaughter,²⁷ as it is known in Polish historiography (referred to as the Volyn tragedy in Ukrainian official discourse) was referenced in more than one focus group: "Very often, even at lunchtime, they also swore at me that Ukrainians killed Poles during the Volyn Massacre and that we are all guilty, but they are helping us now." (D, boy from Ukraine, 15).

The historical identities of the nations of Poland and Ukraine seemed to play an important part in driving a more divisive discourse, which is antithetical to inclusion and collaboration. The spectres of the past kept re-emerging during the discussion groups and nationalism was evident on both sides, based on an understanding of historical events that marked the members of one's own group as the "victims." For example, in the following extracts from focus group discussions with Polish children, the Volhynian slaughter is the starting point for stating that Ukrainians should not "interfere" in what should be considered as Polish affairs:

S: "To go back in time a bit... from what I know, Ukrainians used to murder Poles."

W: "Well, that's why I don't really respect them."

S: "They were murdering us; we're helping them now... it's like... we're helping them and they're murdering us."

M: "And they are still ungrateful."

W: "They don't need to be grateful, as far as I'm concerned [...] they just have to respect that it's someone's work, that it's just someone's effort, someone's money and that someone did it for them, so that they could feel as well as possible in our country."

K: "Yes, but not to interfere in any way."

(S, boy, 12; W, boy, 12; M, boy, 12; K, girl, 12; all from Poland)

Nationalistic narratives also appeared in the discourse of some participants from Ukraine and were often visible in their language, especially the pronouns

they used, with “we” meaning Ukrainians and “them” meaning Poles. History was also used to create narratives about the superiority of one country over another, as O. (girl from Ukraine, 11) put it: **“Because Poles are very jealous of Ukraine, because Ukraine is very deep, the best language in the world. It has very good land, let’s say, fertile land. And you could say that Ukraine built Russia. And half of Poland belongs to Ukraine. My mum told me that Poland had taken a lot of land from Ukraine. Something like that [...] And that Poland was attacking Ukraine on the side of Russia.”**

PERCEIVED EXPERIENTIAL AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

When participants from Ukraine narrated their experiences and discussed their opinions about relationships with their Polish peers, most of them underlined that experiential and cultural differences were barriers to spending time together, getting along, and building trustworthy and solid friendships. It seemed obvious and easier for them to connect to other Ukrainians because they shared the same traumatic experiences: **“When you and a person have a serious problem in common, it makes you closer and your friendship stronger. Problems unite people.”** (V, girl from Ukraine, 16, UA).

On the other hand, Polish peers, even when attempting to be closer and interested, were often perceived as “not understanding,” to the point that some Ukrainians implied that it was not even worth trying to share their experiences or concerns with them. The following are a few examples that show how participants from Ukraine described their feelings connected to the war and their displacement as important barriers to developing connections with their Polish peers:

“When you are feeling a little bit sad, when you are not in the best mood, they [Polish peers] can say, ‘oh my God, it’s not a problem at all, you can go to Ukraine later, when it will be over,’ but they don’t understand that it’s not quite like that, it’s not quite that simple. It’s very complicated.” (Y, girl from Ukraine, 11)

“If we talk about the emotional context, it’s very difficult to explain, about the war. [Polish peers] ask what happened there, how it was. I tell them the whole story, how I arrived, how I travelled through these shot houses, through these checkpoints. But they do not think it’s so serious, some of them don’t believe it, some don’t understand. I think it’s better not to talk to them about the war at all [...] Because it’s a difficult topic in general, they didn’t live through it, and they think that it can just... Well, they see it in the way that: someone came to them, and why is he sitting here with me? Why did he come, why does a Ukrainian have to occupy a certain place, for example, at school?” (S, boy from Ukraine, 17)

The need to be close to people who can easily empathise with what they are going through, is probably one of the factors that drove almost all participants from Ukraine towards connections and relationships with other Ukrainians. On the other hand, some Polish participants perceived this behaviour as lack of openness towards them, as explained by A. (girl from Ukraine, 12): **“I noticed that some people from Ukraine don’t seem to want to know people from Poland too much. For example, we have a classmate from Ukraine and instead of, for example, asking someone from Poland if they want to do something with her and then do something with a person from Poland, she meets these two Ukrainian girls and they write to each other all the time.”**

Some of the participants from Ukraine also pointed towards cultural differences which, in their opinion, make their inclusion in Polish society difficult. However, they could not clearly define such differences, but just expressed the feeling of being an “outsider” or “not fitting in”:

Y: **“Desocialisation is when you’re not accepted in society. There’s such an**



Pic. 18: Some participants were subject to religious discrimination and being forced to attend rituals in Catholics schools even if they are not Catholic. (S, 17, girl from Ukraine).



Pic. 19: "I don't have a photo of this [Polish] man, of course, because he's at work right now. I do know that he loves sweets very much. He helped us a lot with housing. He is very kind. And he brings me all kinds of sweets from the candy shop. And he has new clothes" (Limon4ik, 10, girl from Ukraine).

alienation from society, as if they were all the same, and you are completely different. You don't fit in that way."

L: "An outsider."

Y: "Yes, you are. When you think like that, it seems that society is somehow, well, a little different, and you don't fit in there, well, a little bit. There, by moral criteria, or by some other criteria."

(Y, girl, 11; L, girl, 11; both from Ukraine)

B: "It feels like you don't fit in here, and you really want to, but you want it to be like it used to be, but you know it's not going to be [like that]."

Facilitator: "And 'you don't fit in here' – why, what does that mean?"

B: "Well, it's just a psychological feeling that there is you, there is the environment, and this environment is such that they don't really understand you yet, because of the language. In the end, though, in some ways Poland is similar to Ukraine, but not really. Traditions, everything else, everything is a bit alien."

(B, girl from Ukraine, 17)

Only in one focus group did participants from Ukraine elaborate on what many had defined as cultural differences or differences in traditions, morals and language. According to these participants, it is faith that constitutes an important cultural barrier, since the majority of the population in Poland is Catholic. However, reflecting on their words, it can be elicited that rather than religious differences, what the participants from Ukraine were pointing to was a feeling that their right to freedom of religion and belief had been breached:

D: "Well, I don't want to talk about Catholics now, but this is mainly about them. I don't even know how to explain it [...] People here are very religious."

A: "It is some sort of voluntary-compulsory."

S: "In general, I had nothing to do with the church. And here I sit in the religion [classes], learn something about God, go to this church. And their worship of God is very visible. If you follow it, then follow it, but if you also involve Ukrainians who are not Catholics, but Orthodox... They don't invite, they force." [...]

S: "When I first started, we used to go [to the school church] and when the bell rings there, everyone kneels down. I didn't do that. I did not understand at all why I should kneel. If you come to church, you stand, pray, say something to God and that's it. But I don't understand kneeling, falling, praying, asking for forgiveness [...] The principal asked why I am not doing this. I said that I have a different faith. But then I was not so strong... Bold to answer, and I did it. And now I'm already thinking why I'm doing it, I won't."

A: "Did you have any fear to say 'no, I won't do it'?"

S: "Because they would kick me out, maybe."

(D, girl, 17; A, girl, 16; S, girl, 16; all from Ukraine)

LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES AND LACK OF QUALITY TIME AS KEY BARRIERS

During the consultations, many participants, both Polish and Ukrainian, pointed to language as an important gatekeeper for interaction between the two groups, in addition to cultural differences. As S. (girl, 14, UA) put it: "When I chat with the girls from my school, from the Polish lyceum, I chat so much, chat, and then I realise that I don't know the words and I get so upset, and this happens often, I often get upset that... it seems that I will never learn [Polish]."

Language was perceived by the Ukrainian participants as a barrier to making friends, succeeding in the Polish education system and accessing cultural activities and opportunities (such as cinema, theatre, book clubs, etc.). Among these participants, Ukrainian was the preferred language, while Russian was deliberately avoided as a political statement, and Polish and English were both considered to be challenging.

According to their accounts, it seems that the children from Ukraine interacted more meaningfully with certain Polish adults than with their Polish peers.

The Polish adults that they interacted most meaningfully with were typically educators, landlords or social workers who consciously helped them and did something in order to gain their appreciation (e.g., helped them at school or with housing), to the extent that some were seen by the participants as role models.

Due to the communist education that was in place in Poland before 1989, some middle-aged or older Polish adults had retained some vocabulary in Russian and therefore had at least one language in common with those refugee children from Ukraine, who also spoke Russian. Participants from Ukraine therefore managed to communicate with them, as A. (boy from Ukraine, 16) explained: **“A man, about 70 years old, came up to me. I was just standing on the phone, he scared me. He asked if there was a bus stop on one side or the other. I tried to explain to him in Polish, but I sounded more like a Ukrainian. I was in shock there. He understood what I was talking about because he used to study in Ukraine in Russian language. He said himself that he did not speak Russian 40 years ago, but he thanked me. He left. And I stood there in shock for half a minute. You have to talk to them, to Poles, so that they can understand how to talk to you.”**

Even if they did not feel particularly comfortable, many of the children from Ukraine who participated in the study were able to understand and speak Polish at a competent level. In all the focus groups, across all age groups, many of the children addressed their Polish-speaking facilitator in fluent Polish. Those who were attending Polish language courses, were enrolled in Polish school, or had contact with Ukrainians who had previously emigrated to Poland and served as cultural brokers, had successfully learned to navigate the new language.

Therefore, while being confronted with a new language can be an important gatekeeper for effective inclusion, learning it can represent a key opportunity for successful adaptation and inclusion. Another tangible barrier to the integration of Ukrainian children in Polish society is that according to the children who participated in the study, Ukrainian and Polish children do not spend enough quality time together. The participants from Ukraine who only attended an online Ukrainian school did not seem to have much contact with their Polish peers. Furthermore, most participants from Ukraine who were enrolled in a Polish school expressed that they did not meaningfully engage with their Polish classmates.

During consultations, both Ukrainian and Polish children gave the impression that, even if they were spending a lot of time together, this seldom extended beyond school activities – with the significant exception being football, which was mentioned by boys as an activity where children from Ukraine and Poland could interact, as K. (boy from Poland, 12) reported: **“Until Ukrainians came to Poland from Ukraine, I didn’t like football and I wasn’t interested in it, then they taught me how to kick the ball and I just became more interested in it than before.”**

Even at school, although possibly in the same classroom, transitional educational spaces such as corridors, toilets and bathrooms, etc. are characterised by the two groups being apart. What’s more, none of the participants from Ukraine shared examples of profound engagement with Polish peers during lessons. The following quotes exemplify this:

“In my class, I exist like a cat by myself. I am somehow separated there. We have the same task, the same lessons. And for the rest of them, I just exist, they just exist. Nobody touches anyone, we coexist peacefully, and that’s the end of it.” (Y, girl from Ukraine, 12).

“Well, I don’t know, for example, you come to a classroom, everyone has been studying for a certain number of years. And they have no language barrier, they understand each other, they have their own jokes. Maybe they even have their own chats separate from you. And you just come in and... It somehow looks like... I don’t know how to explain it.” (N, boy from Ukraine, 13).



Pic. 20: **“I made this. This is what I like about Polish school. This is me, and these are my friends and teachers. A characteristic feature here is the bracelets in the colours of Ukraine and Poland”** (Capybara, 11, girl from Ukraine).

These reflections were also shared by Polish participants, as K. (boy from Poland, 12) said: **“And this girl [from Ukraine], for example, we don’t know anything about her at all, she just sits quietly in class...”** His classmate, S. (boy, 12, PL) added: **“I think I am the only person from our class, I mean from our group of Poles, who exchanged any word with her.”**

During consultations there was only one case reported of a close friendship between a Polish child and a girl from Ukraine, who had met by chance. At school there was an activity to be done in pairs, and their respective friends – of their same nationality – were not there. Therefore, they decided to pair up, spent time together, got to know each other, and now they seem to have a very good relationship. Polish participants stated this themselves, suggesting that more activities should be organised that would bring children of both nationalities together:

N: **“Well, I don’t know, for example, there is a Pole with a Ukrainian, and they go, I don’t know, you told them to do something together. And that’s cool because they can be friends and stuff. And a Ukrainian can feel better in this country.”**

A: **“Not forcing, just...”**

K: **“Offer them something so that they can... Make friends, understand.”**

Facilitator: **“And for example, what could they do together?”**

J: **“Make a garden.”**

N: **“Art work.”**

K: **“A larger, additional project, for example, a poster.”**

A: **“Talk.”**

(N, girl, 11; A, girl, 11; J, boy, 12; K, boy, 11; all from Poland)

As Y. (girl from Ukraine, 11) simply put it: **“It can change, or it can stay there. Life gets better. This happens because Poles, not all of them, of course, but there are a number of them who are either afraid of us or think that our problems are not their problems. But simply they do not understand us, because they haven’t had the good fortune to meet us.”**



Pic. 21: Ukrainians and Poles shaking hands (J&N, 11, girls from Poland)



Pic. 22: **“This beautiful tripod used to be used just to shoot all kinds of videos and record all kinds of cool stuff. But he [fictional character] took on the Ukrainian school, it’s hell, online, after the Polish lessons, so now he uses it as a tripod so that he can be seen properly in class”** (Werter, 14, boy from Ukraine)



Pic. 23: **“The table tennis. He [fictional character] just goes to play table tennis during breaks. There is a table at the school. And he just plays there. He plays with his friends, with his Polish classmates. Well, to be precise, he usually plays with one person only, because that one has rackets. The rackets were the reason for the friendship.”** (Miles Morales, 17, boy from Ukraine)

BOX C: Opinions on child participation

PARTICIPATION IN POLISH SCHOOL

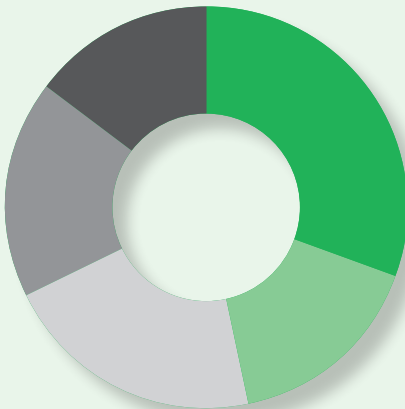
Based on the survey conducted during consultations, less than half (47%) of the participants from Ukraine feel that they can speak their mind openly at school in Poland and an additional 21% are unsure. Older participants who attend a Polish school were more confident about expressing their opinion in their new educational setting than younger children (57% of 14- to 17-year-olds fully or somewhat agreed that they could speak their mind openly in their school in Poland, compared to 42% of 8- to 13-year-old participants).

According to M. (non-binary child from Ukraine, 15), a **“lack of discrimination [and of] homophobia”** are the necessary conditions for speaking their mind at school, while D. (girl from Ukraine, 15) thinks that **“equality between elders and children”** is fundamental. Y. (girl from Ukraine, 15) instead feels that many students lack the **“self-confidence”** to speak their mind.



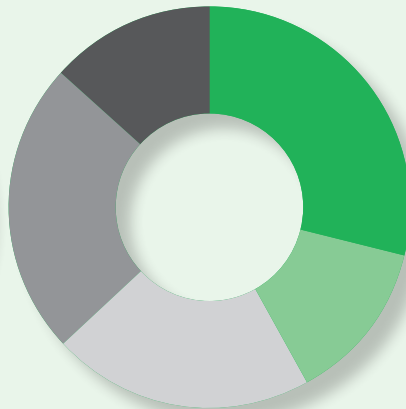
“I CAN SPEAK MY MIND OPENLY IN MY SCHOOL IN POLAND”

8 TO 17-YEAR-OLD



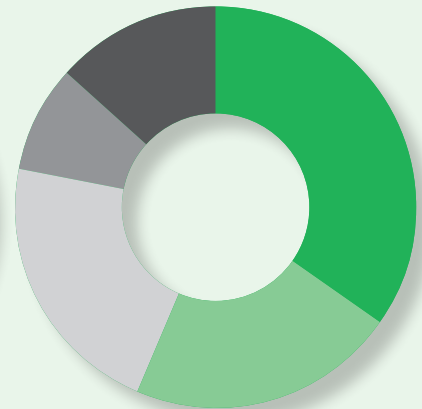
- 30.7% Fully agree
- 16.1% Rather agree
- 21% Not sure
- 17.7% Rather disagree
- 14.5% Fully disagree

8 TO 13-YEAR-OLD



- 28.9% Fully agree
- 13.1% Rather agree
- 21.1% Not sure
- 23.8% Rather disagree
- 13.1% Fully disagree

14 TO 17-YEAR-OLD



- 34.8% Fully agree
- 21.7% Rather agree
- 21.7% Not sure
- 8.7% Rather disagree
- 13.1% Fully disagree

PARTICIPATION IN FAMILY DECISIONS REGARDING MIGRATION

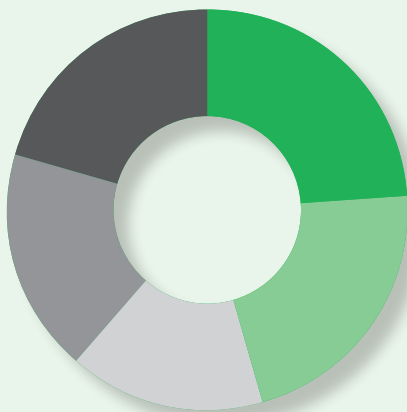
When asked if they and their families would like to remain in Poland, less than half of the participants responded positively (46%) and 16% said that they were not sure. Older participants were more positive about staying in Poland than younger children (54% of 14- to 17-year-olds fully or somewhat agreed that they and their family would like to stay in Poland, compared to 38% of 8- to 13-year-old participants). Several participants highlighted that their opinions were different to their mother's opinions. As V. (girl from Ukraine, 14) explained: **"My mum really wants to stay here. She wants me to study here. And then work here. But I really want to go back to Ukraine."** On the contrary, A. (girl from Ukraine, 16) said: **"Only my mother wants to return. And, simply, I, for example, believe that there is no point in returning to the city now, because, well, there will be nothing to do there for those few years, because a lot of people have left."**

According to S. (girl from Ukraine, 17), opinions differ on the basis of opportunities, roles and age: **"In my family, my mum doesn't have a job there [in Ukraine]. But I, for example, as a student, I am all for it [going back to Ukraine]. And it very much depends on the age of the family members, on investments, on anything. But even in one family there can be 150 different opinions."** V. (boy from Ukraine, 15) had a more radical view on the subject, stating that children do not have the possibility to participate in migration choices: **"Well, I was just forcibly taken away [from Ukraine]. If you are an adult and you don't want to move, you simply don't do it. But if you are still small, your relatives decide for you. And you can't do anything. And they just transport you [...] I did not choose Poland as a future for life, as a country where to live."**



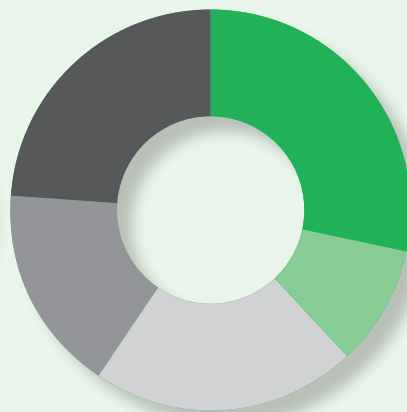
"I AND THE OTHER PEOPLE IN MY FAMILY WOULD LIKE TO STAY IN POLAND"

8 TO 17-YEAR-OLD



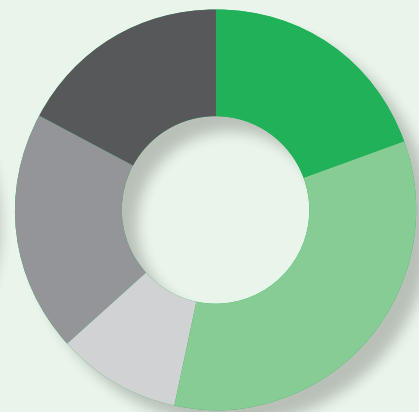
- 24.1% Fully agree
- 21.6% Rather agree
- 15.7% Not sure
- 18.1% Rather disagree
- 20.5% Fully disagree

8 TO 13-YEAR-OLD



- 28,6% Fully agree
- 9,5% Rather agree
- 21,4% Not sure
- 16,7% Rather disagree
- 23,8% Fully disagree

14 TO 17-YEAR-OLD



- 19,5% Fully agree
- 34,1% Rather agree
- 9,8% Not sure
- 19,5% Rather disagree
- 17,1% Fully disagree

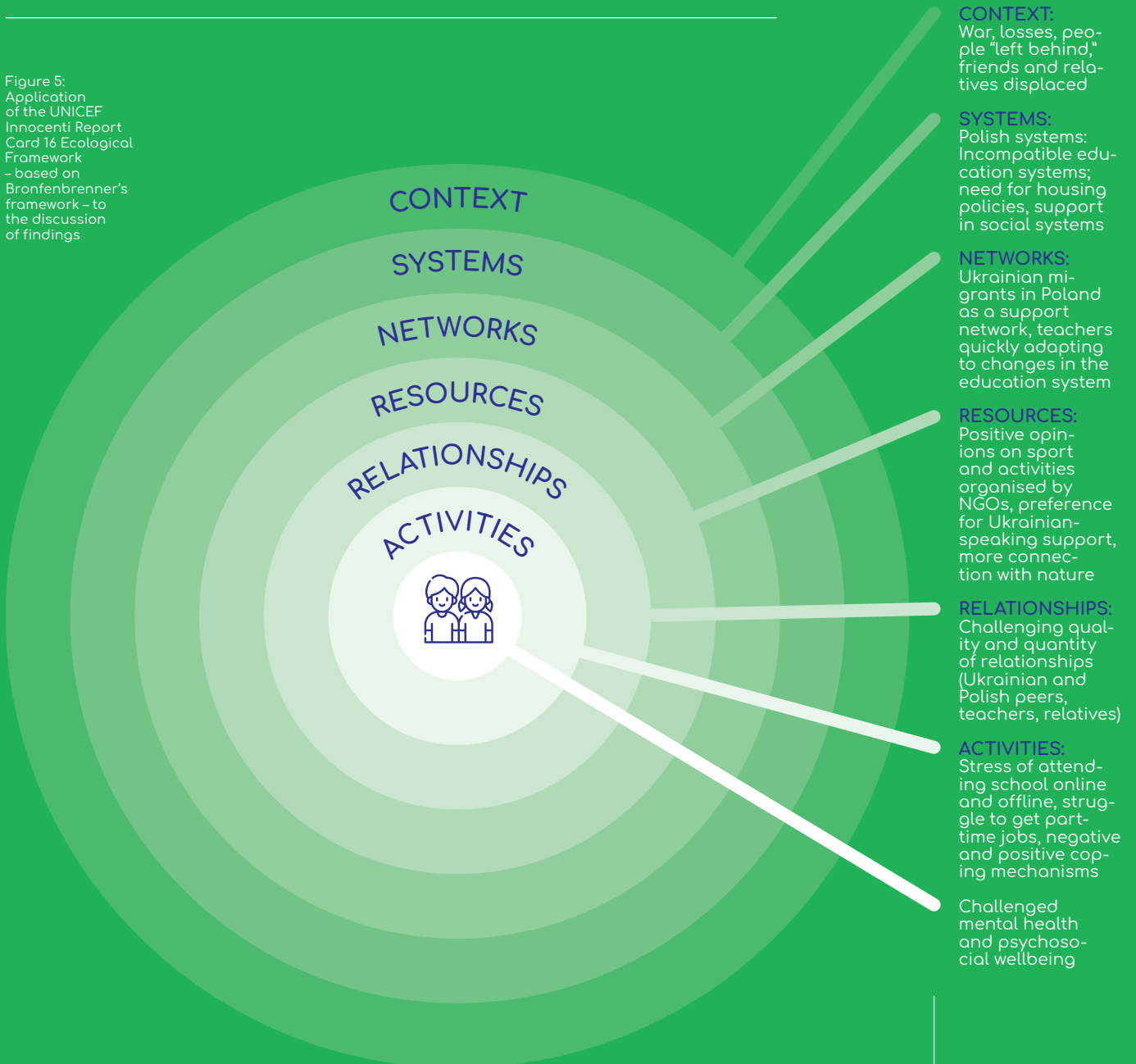
Discussion of findings

This section discusses the findings of the consultations within the context of recent literature and a social ecological framework.

The ‘world of the child’ (which includes their key activities and relationships) was investigated during the consultations by talking directly with participants and is connected to data related to the ‘world around the child’ (resources and networks) and ‘the world at large’ (systems and context).

We also examine the study findings through the lenses of child wellbeing and social cohesion, to identify challenges and opportunities for the overall wellbeing of refugee children from Ukraine living in Poland.

Figure 5:
Application of the UNICEF Innocenti Report Card 16 Ecological Framework – based on Bronfenbrenner’s framework – to the discussion of findings



THEME 1: MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL WELLBEING

The consultations found that some mental health and psychosocial problems were common among the participants from Ukraine. The large majority of these children talked about stress, nostalgia and loneliness when describing the daily lives of fictional characters that they created during the focus group discussions, or when elaborating on their own experiences.

The reasons for these feelings relate to both what they left behind in Ukraine and their lived experiences in Poland. They miss their friends, relatives and pets who were part of their daily lives in their country of origin. They are preoccupied with the housing and financial situation of their families in Poland, the majority of them having only their mothers as breadwinners. They reported feeling lonely and lacking real and meaningful friendships in Poland, a concern that has also been highlighted by previous research (Impact Initiatives & Save the Children International, 2023).

The psychosocial distress and deteriorating mental health which emerged from the consultations is in line with other studies carried out with children from Ukraine in Poland. For example, a study by Tyler- Rubinstein et al. (2022) found that the majority of refugee children from Ukraine that they surveyed (57%) said they felt less happy since leaving Ukraine, with older children (aged 16 years or over) seemingly the most affected. The EU Fundamental Rights Agency (2022) states that depression among refugees from Ukraine in Poland is common, with around half of 12- to 15-year-old respondents to their study reporting that they had difficulty sleeping and/or concentrating, a loss of self-confidence, or felt vulnerable.

In terms of stress in relation to accommodation, participants in this study shared their families' difficulties in finding a place to stay, and explained that they suffered from a lack of privacy in comparison to when they were living in Ukraine. These results mirror data from the EU FRA (2022) showing that a lack of privacy was an issue for 48% of 16- to 17-year-olds surveyed, and for 42% of 12- to 15-year-olds, while not having a comfortable room to study in was a problem for 45% of 16- to 17-year-olds and 40% of 12- to 15-year-olds. This is not unexpected, since Poland has the lowest ratio of rooms per person (1.1) in the EU.²⁸

As of May 2022, out of 1.5 million refugees from Ukraine in Poland, 19% stayed for free with families from Ukraine, 18% stayed for free with Polish families, 11% stayed for free in a hotel or a shelter paid for by the state or local government, and 9% stayed in adapted communal spaces, such as stadiums and halls (Chmielewska-Kalińska et al., 2022). Notwithstanding the lack of privacy, participants of the consultations expressed gratitude towards the people who hosted them or rented an apartment to them, who they often identified as "an adult who helped me since I arrived in Poland." At the time of data gathering, rental prices in the country had increased by 20-30% since the outbreak of the war (Ibid.), making accommodation in cities less affordable. This helps to explain the preoccupation shared by participants for the financial situation of their families.

In March 2022, 97% of Polish Members of Parliament, across the entire political spectrum, supported granting Ukrainians special rights to Poland's education, health, labour market and social security systems. The latter implied an unprecedented move in terms of including Ukrainians in the Polish universal child monthly benefit of 500 PLN (€120) per child.²⁹ However, according to consultation participants, this support was not enough to meet their needs; many older participants (14-17 years of age) explained that they were working part-time in order to earn some extra money, but had struggled to find jobs because they did not speak competent Polish, which added to their worries.

The children showed awareness of their psychosocial struggles, with over half of them saying that they wanted "to talk to someone professional," underlining

28) OECD Stat accessed on 13 Aug 2023: <https://stats.oecd.org>

29) Polish Parliamentary vote, accessed on 13 Aug 2023: <https://www.sejm.gov.pl>

the importance of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) as a fundamental component of support for children from Ukraine, as previously highlighted by other studies (Martin, 2022). Some participants said that they had access to psychosocial support, but the service was appreciated only when it was available in Ukrainian, for free and with little waiting time. The main reason that the participants gave for attending psychological sessions was to cope with their distress and behavioural problems. The majority said that they experienced high levels of stress at home, occasionally resulting in arguments with their mothers (as also previously highlighted by Tyler-Rubinstein et al., 2022), highlighting the need to foster positive communication between refugee children and their caregivers.

Most of the study participants from Ukraine said that they kept themselves busy with several activities and tried to find positive coping mechanisms to support them in dealing with stress, nostalgia and loneliness. Playing sport and participating in craft workshops were identified as pleasurable activities, as well as spending time in nature and with pets. The majority of the children responded positively to the idea of receiving information via social media about activities organised for young people from Ukraine in Poland, and expressing appreciation for the work of the third sector in this regard. These activities are of high value to refugee children from Ukraine because they constitute an arena of support outside the family where the participants can build friendships, at least with other children from Ukraine, and where they can develop attitudes and skills, experiment, and learn to help one another. Friendships become especially important during adolescence and mitigate the negative effects of adversity, contributing to children's self-esteem (Boyden & Mann, 2005).

The data from the consultations reveals the deteriorating mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of children from Ukraine living in Poland, which needs to be addressed as a priority to ensure the psychosocial safety of refugees from Ukraine and to meaningfully reduce the vulnerabilities that can result in a child due to their displacement and improve their wellbeing.

THEME 2: EDUCATION

The children from Ukraine who participated in the consultations navigated their educational options in Poland in multiple ways, with some of them attending Polish school and some of them attending an online Ukrainian school, while almost half of them were enrolled in both educational systems at the same time.

Children from Ukraine who attended a Polish school explained that mastering the language was the biggest difficulty that they faced, especially at the beginning, and in their opinion, it was the main reason why their grades were often lower than those they had received in Ukraine. Furthermore, they reported having to adjust to different programmes and to a new grading system, besides integrating themselves in a new social environment with teachers and classmates who were not necessarily empathising with their situation. These challenges expressed by the participants of this study are in line with those highlighted by recent research with Polish teachers, who mentioned communication and cultural differences, as well as the emotional status of refugees, as the main barriers to delivering quality education (Pyżalski et al., 2022).

Additionally, Pyżalski et al. (2022) explain that the large influx of students from Ukraine into Polish schools within a short period of time required rapid and ad hoc organisational changes, which were difficult for teachers to cope with, especially considering their lack of previous exposure to cultural diversity. Notwithstanding this, the study participants from Ukraine generally found their teachers in Polish schools to be supportive and praised the help that was provided by intercultural assistants, who were seen as trusted figures that provided them with a sense of safety. The positive feedback from participants on intercultural assistants from their own cultural environment reflects the

results of several studies on the role of Roma teaching assistants in Poland (Weigl, 2016), defining it as a good practice.

While the majority of children from Ukraine who participated in this study attended a Polish school (sometimes in addition to a Ukrainian school), overall in Poland the proportion of children from Ukraine attending Polish schools declined in 2023.³⁰ The EU FRA (2022) survey shows that language issues are the main reason that some Ukrainian children are not participating in the Polish educational system.

In addition, this study shows that older refugee children from Ukraine often prefer to remain in the Ukrainian educational system as enrolling in the Polish system would lead them to graduate later. This finding highlights the need for a detailed investigation into the models of educational inclusion in operation in Poland,³¹ as an integration model – rather than a separation model – could reduce the permanence of children from Ukraine within schools, thus encouraging them to enrol in the Polish education system.

Participants who attended a Ukrainian school online shared relatively negative feedback about the quality of education, compared to the feedback that participants shared about Polish schools. They said they were tired of excessive screen time but especially frustrated because, in their opinion, the lessons were not well organised. This is the main reason why children said they preferred to focus on a Polish school which also appeals to some of the participants from Ukraine because they believe it will open doors to higher education within the European Union, as well as providing a sense of “normality,” according to some children.

Within the Ukrainian educational system, a highly appreciated practice was learning centres where participants could attend their own online classes, while meeting peers and getting face-to-face support from Ukrainian educators. A significant amount of literature about remote education that was developed during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates that when learning remotely, children miss transitional educational spaces – corridors, bathrooms, courtyards, the route to and from school, etc. – where they experience education beyond didactics (Mascheroni, 2021; Ramey et al. 2022; Viola et al., 2022). Children from Ukraine are no exception to this and consider schools as a place where they can interact with peers and teachers, and develop critical social and emotional skills inside and outside the classroom. Children from Ukraine who are attending a Ukrainian school online have been limited to online learning since the outbreak of COVID-19, adding to the challenges they are experiencing because of the impact of war and their displacement.

30) <https://www.rp.pl/cudzoziemcy/art38430891-ukrainscy-uczniowie-rezygnuja-z-polskich-szkol>

31) There are two basic models of inclusion policy concerning access to education in Poland: an integration model and a separation model. The first assumes the integral education of children with multicultural backgrounds as well as children from the host country with additional lessons in the Polish language of the host country and, at times, classes teaching the traditions and culture. The second prescribes the early education of migrant children in separate classes. As soon as the children learn Polish to a level which allows for active participation in lessons, they are transferred to integrated classes. Certain schools apply a mixed model (Markowska-Manista & Januszewska, 2016).

THEME 3: INTEGRATION

Almost all children from Ukraine who participated in this study did not report a sense of belonging to Polish society. Poland, compared to other Western European countries, has a low level of cultural diversity across the population (Markowska-Manista & Januszewska, 2016). This contributes to the challenges that participants from Ukraine described in relation to feeling included in the society where they had relocated.

Some participants shared experiences of discrimination in different settings and during the focus group discussions, both Polish and Ukrainian children referred to nationalistic narratives of historical events, which feed stereotypes and create divisions between people from Ukraine and Poland. A few participants from Ukraine who attended a Polish school mentioned that they had expected more sensitivity from their teachers with regards to their situation, such as having lost their homes or their fathers being in areas of armed conflict. Indeed, Pyżalski et al. (2022) state that it is difficult for teachers in Poland to recognise and capture subtle discriminatory attitudes such as those elicited by the consultations. As the EU FRA (2022) underlines, it is possible that children from Ukraine will experience more discrimination as the war con-

tinues, as communal resources become more strained and they have more interactions with local people. Considering that data gathering for this study was conducted more than one year after the beginning of the war, the discriminatory accounts by participants might be part of an increasing trend towards more difficult interactions between Ukrainian refugees and their host population.

Beyond discriminatory attitudes, children from Ukraine feel experiential and cultural differences with their Polish peers strongly. According to their accounts, language is a gatekeeper between children from Ukraine and their Polish peers, as is the quality time they spend together, which is necessary for getting to know each other better.

On a positive note, the children from Ukraine who participated in this study underlined the support of other Ukrainians, usually people who had arrived in Poland long before them, as instrumental to understanding and navigating Polish society. Before the war, Poland already hosted 1.5 million economic migrants from Ukraine (Chmielewska-Kalińska et al, 2022). By the start of the war in February 2022, many of these Ukrainian migrants spoke fluent Polish and had managed to secure jobs, houses and social circles. As of May 2022, 14% of refugees from Ukraine had previously worked in Poland, 28% had family members who worked in Poland, and 12% had friends who already lived in Poland (Ibid.). The importance of migrant networks is well-recognised in literature about migration, including for children and young people (Huijsmans, 2012), and the findings of these consultations reflect this.



Figure 6: Consultation findings in relation to the pillars of social cohesion

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOCIAL COHESION

The narrative arc that runs throughout the findings of the consultations is the concept of social cohesion. Social cohesion indicates the quality of “collective togetherness” and consists of three overlapping and non- mutually exclusive pillars: social relations, belonging, and orientation towards the common good (Schiefer & Van der Noll, 2017). Reflecting on the findings of this study in terms of these three dimensions, it is possible to identify potential areas of intervention that could enhance the wellbeing of children from Ukraine.

Social relations are “the most prominent aspect of social cohesion,” and primarily refer to the quantity and quality of social interactions with friends, family and others (Schiefer & Van der Noll, 2017). The ties of children from Ukraine with their families and friends have been disrupted by their displacement, since many of their family members and friends are in Ukraine or in another country. In Poland, mothers and siblings provide the main social interactions for children from Ukraine, but these social interactions are often difficult because of the stress caused by financial and accommodation challenges. The quantity and quality of their friendships, with both Ukrainian and Polish peers, is not considered sufficient by the participants from Ukraine, who expressed feeling lonely.

Trust and tolerance towards others are further components that are used to measure social relations (Schiefer & Van der Noll, 2017). Children from Ukraine who participated in this study show trust towards their family members, other Ukrainians who have been living in Poland for some time, and personnel at the social hubs in their city. However, trust towards their peers and Polish teachers was seldom openly expressed during the consultations. When it comes to relations between children from Ukraine and their Polish peers, it appears that there is generally, but not always, tolerance, but according to the research participants there is no relation of trust.

Participation, whether through membership in sports clubs, voluntary work, or participation in demonstrations or citizen movements, is also an indicator of the quality of social relations (Schiefer & Van der Noll, 2017). In these consultations, children from Ukraine reported a high level of participation in the activities organised by the social hubs and interest in receiving more information about these activities via social media. They also talked positively about staff at the social hubs, and voluntary work was also mentioned as a means of engagement with the local Ukrainian community. Participation at school was scarcely mentioned; children from Ukraine described feelings of alienation from Polish school communities and difficulties interacting and engaging with their Ukrainian school community online.

The second dimension of social cohesion is belonging, or identification with social entities, be that communities, cultural groups, neighbourhoods, countries, or transnational entities (Schiefer & Van der Noll, 2017). It emerges from the consultations that children from Ukraine strongly identify with their own community – mainly other refugees from Ukraine, but also other Ukrainians who live in Poland. According to their accounts, even those who attend a Polish school do not feel that they ‘belong’ to any Polish community.

Language is the main issue that affects participants sense of “belonging”: children from Ukraine said that they would like to receive psychosocial support in Ukrainian; they praise the work of cultural assistants in Polish schools (who speak Ukrainian); they report that their grades are lower in Poland because they are not competent enough in the Polish language; they explain that they have experienced difficulties finding part-time work as they lack good knowledge of the local language, and so on.

Other important factors that lead to limited identification with the local population are their perceived experiential differences (including war and fleeing their home) and cultural differences (including their religion and their narra-

tives about historical events). However, for some participants from Ukraine their sense of belonging in Poland is boosted by their thoughts of a future in the European Union or other Western European countries.

The third dimension of social cohesion is "orientation towards the common good" or in other words, solidarity and compliance with social rules and norms (Schiefer & Van der Noll, 2017). Considering solidarity as care for others, including those whom one does not personally know, the consultations demonstrate a low level of solidarity between children from Ukraine and their peers, with generalised indifference and a few cases of discrimination. However, some of the participants from Ukraine perceived major support and solidarity from Polish adults, in particular the people who helped them at the beginning of their stay. Compliance with social rules is challenging in a school setting, for example, in relation to the use of translators, but also in the case of religious schools with specific regulations and practices.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the study findings and respond to the challenges and opportunities shared by refugee children from Ukraine and their Polish peers.

National and local authorities in Poland, UN agencies, NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs) must take the following concrete and practical steps to ensure the wellbeing and integration of refugee children and adolescents from Ukraine in Poland, so that they can grow and develop in an environment where they feel safe, have a sense of belonging, have a say on decisions that affect their lives and fulfil their future potential:

MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL WELLBEING

International Aid Agencies, NGOs, CSOs, Local and National Governments, and Educational Institutions should:

1. Mainstream mental health and psychosocial support into the provision of education, healthcare and social services for refugees from Ukraine through culturally sensitive services for children and their families.

Local and National Government and Educational Institutions should:

2. Raise awareness of and share reliable information about the availability of mental health and psychosocial (MHPSS) services for refugees from Ukraine. Increase access to specialised, free of charge mental health care and other targeted support for children in need and, in particular, invest in:
 - a. Culturally sensitive information to destigmatise mental health issues and services and support refugees to deal with the psychological distress resulting from experiences of conflict and displacement.
 - b. Culturally appropriate mental health services, for example through recruitment of Ukrainian mental health experts and investing in their capacity to become specialised mental health service providers in Poland.

Local and National Government, Health Care institutions, International Aid Agencies, NGOs, CSOs and local associations should:

3. Champion mental health and psychosocial support models that break down barriers stemming from stigma. Strengthen focused, non-specialised MHPSS interventions (layer 3) for refugees from Ukraine within spaces offered by humanitarian organisations, such as learning environments and child-friendly spaces.

International Aid Agencies, NGOs, CSOs, Local and National Governments, and Educational Institutions should:

4. Enhance family and community support initiatives (MHPSS layer 2) for refugees from Ukraine across household, educational, and communal settings. Foster parenting programmes, elevating the capabilities of educators, intercultural assistants and volunteers to effectively address the mental health and psychosocial needs of mothers/caregivers and children from Ukraine. Facilitate and support community empowerment and participation in promoting and protecting the wellbeing of children.

International Aid Agencies, NGOs and CSOs should:

5. Explore the possibility of delivering specialised psychosocial support

to refugees from Ukraine who are primary caregivers, mostly mothers, encompassing stress and budget management.

International Aid Agencies, NGOs and CSOs, mainly Ukrainian associations should:

6. Secure funding for the development of extracurricular activities and initiatives that enable children from Ukraine, especially those who only attend an online school, to maintain connections and build meaningful relationships with their peers in Poland. Consider investigating and researching ways to support children to maintain their relationships and connections with relatives and friends who stayed in Ukraine.

EDUCATION

International Aid Agencies, NGOs, CSOs, Governments, Educational Institutions, and School Management should:

1. Enhance and integrate social-emotional learning components across the curricula of all educational institutions and learning centres. Enrich teacher training content with modules on social and cultural cohesion, conflict sensitivity, anti-discrimination practices and wellbeing.

Educational Institutions and School Management should:

2. Establish peer-to-peer cohorts to support the exchange of knowledge, skills and culture between children from Ukraine and Polish children, to boost integration between students and facilitate the sharing of best practices and lessons learned among teachers and instructors.

Local and National Governments, the Ministry of Education, and School Management should:

3. Deploy more Ukrainian intercultural assistants in Polish schools, reinforce their training and help to enhance their collaboration with teachers. Develop a practical guide for school personnel on how to best assess and address the specific needs of children from Ukraine (to include provision of language support, adapting the curriculum to treat specific topics in a sensitive manner, etc.).

Local and National Governments and Humanitarian Actors should:

4. Provide comprehensive and accurate information about education options for children from Ukraine and disseminate this through the communication channels that are most used and trusted by children. This should include information about pathways to higher education in Poland.

Local and National Governments and Humanitarian Actors should:

5. Strengthen the Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) to lead advocacy efforts for refugee integration by standardising Education in Emergencies (EiE) approaches across the sector. Additionally, advocate for the enhancement of the long-term national strategy for refugee integration within the Polish education system.

SOCIAL COHESION

International Aid Agencies, NGOs, CSOs should:

1. Advocate and fundraise for programmes that strengthen trauma awareness, peacebuilding and social cohesion.

International Aid Agencies, NGOs, CSOs should:

2. Advocate, fundraise and partner to create recreational spaces where children from Ukraine, especially those who do not attend a Polish school, can spend time with their peers. Tailor activities based on children's preferences, needs, and priorities. Promote such events through social hubs and social media platforms that are popular among refugees from Ukraine, such as Telegram and Viber.

International Aid Agencies, NGOs, CSOs, Local and National Governments, School Clubs, and School Management should:

3. Create opportunities for Ukrainian and Polish children to meet in semi-formal contexts (e.g., extracurricular school activities, organised school trips) and informal contexts (arts and crafts, sports, public spaces) and/or through initiatives not primarily based on language (e.g., sports, mimic theatre, dance). Incorporate activities that promote adaptation to their new environment and offer practical insights on navigating cities and accessing initiatives and services. Prioritise peer- to-peer approaches and mentoring programmes, and involve children in the design of such initiatives.

International Aid Agencies, NGOs, CSOs, Local and National Governments, School Clubs, and School Management should:

4. Boost refugee children's access to recreational and leisure activities, particularly those that enable children to be in contact with nature, by enhancing the dissemination of information about available initiatives and services (including guidance on enjoying free sports or cultural activities) and by minimising access barriers (e.g., by liaising with the private sector and public providers to secure discounts).

Local and National Governments, International Aid Agencies, NGOs, CSOs, and local Ukrainian associations should:

5. Increase access for children from Ukraine to Polish language classes and remedial support to better support their integration into Polish schools. Consider offering free-of-charge Ukrainian speaking clubs to support refugee children from Ukraine who have recently switched from Russian to the Ukrainian language.

ACCOUNTABILITY TO AFFECTED POPULATIONS (AAP) – EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

International Aid Agencies, NGOs, CSOs should:

1. Ensure child participation in all stages of developing, planning, designing and implementing activities and programmes for refugee children from Ukraine, to make sure that children's voices are heard and inform decisions that affect their lives.

International Aid Agencies and NGOs should:

2. Conduct further research through child participatory methods to better understand the information needs of children as well as their preferred communication methods to voice their opinions, concerns and suggestions. Based on the results, advocate and/or fundraise to ensure that children's preferred channels and platforms are set up, adequate and equipped to channel and promote children's voices.

International Aid Agencies, NGOs, CSOs, Local and National Governments, School Management, and the Media should:

3. Create platforms where the voices and opinions of children from Poland and Ukraine can be amplified, heard and taken into account by decision makers.

International Aid Agencies, NGOs, CSOs, Local and National Governments, Education Institutions, and School Management should:

4. Provide anonymous and child friendly feedback and reporting mechanisms in schools and child friendly spaces, to ensure that children have opportunities to safely report concerns and feedback regarding child protection and safeguarding.

International Aid Agencies, NGOs, CSOs should:

5. Advocate with local authorities for the establishment of consultation forums in which refugee children can participate and provide opinions and suggestions on decisions/activities affecting their lives and their positive integration and adaptation in Poland.

BOX D: Suggestions for replicating this study in other contexts

APPROACH

- Consider narrowing the scope of consultations to focus on specific areas such as relations with peers or family members, evaluation of services in social hubs or barriers to inclusion; and/or the creation of advocacy products, or exploring new participatory methodologies to understand how children want to participate in decisions that affect their lives, through which channels or platforms, on which themes, etc.
- Consider additional data gathering activities such as consultations with other stakeholders, quantitative data gathering, a desk review, participatory action research with artistic outcomes, etc.
- Assess your strengths and limitations when determining the study approach, such as presence in certain geographical areas or cities; access to participants with specific characteristics; relations with local partners; time constraints; etc.
- Consider an approach that enables children who are not attending school or a community centre to participate, even though they may be harder to reach, to shed light on their situation.

SAMPLE

- Consider disaggregating data for participants from Ukraine based on the geographical area that they come from in Ukraine (East/West, metropolis/rural areas) or how much time they have spent in their host country.
- Ensure that the age range within each focus group discussion is kept to a minimum (e.g., age 8-10; age 11-13; age 14-17).
- Explore the experiences and perceptions of children with disabilities and children living in rural areas, as well as children belonging to other vulnerable groups.

METHODOLOGY

- Consider participatory methods or approaches and/or invite children to be part of the methodology discussion and selection.
- Consider conducting in-depth interviews with some of the participants of the consultations to get further insight on the topics discussed and explore more intimate issues.
- Consider conducting a systematic analysis of focus group transcripts based on coding and with the support of software.
- Limit the number of survey questions for focus group participants to a maximum number of three in order to have sufficient time to discuss them.
- Consider organising a validation workshop with the participants before publishing the results of the consultations.

USE OF THE PHOTOVOICE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- Dedicate sufficient time to teach children how to use instant cameras in order to avoid low quality pictures.
- Consider keeping some of the original pictures to be able to scan them properly (not all, as children generally enjoyed keeping their favourite pictures as tokens of their participation).

PARTNERSHIPS AND LOGISTICS

- Liaise with gatekeepers who have direct contact with the participant children and families as early as possible and introduce them to the focus group facilitators in advance of the discussions – and minimise the number of intermediaries in the research process.
 - Ensure meaningful participation of children and their families throughout all phases of the project. For example, provide an introductory presentation, give them opportunities to ask questions during the consultations, validate and discuss the study findings with them, etc.
-

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Annex 1: Detailed methodology

This report is based on consultations with more than 100 children – including displaced children and adolescents from Ukraine who were living in Poland and their Polish peers – and aimed to understand their subjective wellbeing³² in the face of the war in Ukraine. In particular, the consultations aimed to gain insight into the daily lives of the participants, by exploring their experiences, perceptions and opinions regarding school and other learning environments, their daily activities, their relationships and the quality of integration of children from Ukraine into Polish society.

A qualitative study design with an open approach was chosen as it enables investigation without imposing restricted and predefined concepts on the study participants (DeJaeghere et al., 2020). A participatory research method called photovoice was used. This involves asking children and adolescents to take photos that relate to certain topics, which can then be used as the starting point for focus group discussions. These discussions were facilitated following semi-structured guidelines, which included a series of activities based on projection techniques and a closing survey.

In preparation for the consultations, a package was developed containing tools for the focus group facilitators, the participants, their caregivers and local organisations who supported outreach to children and provided spaces for the focus group discussions to take place. Almost all of these documents were translated into Ukrainian and/or into Polish.³³ Two facilitators, one of Ukrainian nationality and one of Polish nationality, and both authors of this report, conducted the consultations with children in May and June 2023.

The consultations were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were subsequently anonymised and translated into English. The data were analysed following the thematic analysis (TA) approach of Braun and Clarke (2012) by the three authors of this report. The transcripts were coded, paragraph by paragraph, both inductively and deductively, under the categories of (i) mental health and psychosocial wellbeing; (ii) school/education; (iii) relations; and (iv) participation/engagement. Subsequently, topics were elicited and three main stories about the data were identified, which are the three themes presented in this report, alongside other connected topics that are described and explained in the report's sub-sections.

This report also contains results from a short survey that the participants responded to on-the-spot at the end of each focus group. The results of the survey were analysed quantitatively and are based on a total sample of 81 out of 90 participants from Ukraine. The number of survey respondents is lower than the total number of study participants from Ukraine because the survey was not completed by the children in first focus group discussions that were carried out for testing purposes.³⁴

The language used in this report stems from the reflexive TA approach, which considers analysis to be “an interpretative activity undertaken by a researcher who is situated in various ways, and who reads data through the lenses of their particular social, cultural, historical, disciplinary, political and ideological positionings” (Braun and Clarke, 2021). Therefore, in the description and explanation of the findings, the three authors do not hide their presence behind the participants’ voices but place themselves as visible intermediaries between the children and the reader, aware of their positionality as researchers.

PROJECT FRAMEWORK

As a general framework for addressing the research questions, developing the tools for the consultations and making sense of the data, reference was made to Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system theory (1979)³⁵ and its adaptation for the UNICEF Innocenti Report Card 16 Worlds of influence (2020). This is a multi-level approach with the child placed at the heart of the framework. The ‘world of the child’ includes their key activities and relationships. The ‘world around the child’ consists of resources and networks, while the ‘world at large’ entails systems and context.

32) “Subjective well-being is the reported experience of positive emotions (such as optimism), negative emotions (such as sadness), satisfaction related to specific domains (such as work or relationships) and overall judgements of life satisfaction.” (UNICEF Office of Global Insight and Policy, 2021).

33) For a more detailed overview of the tools used to organise and carry out the consultations, see Annex 2 on p. 63.

34) The survey included in the first version of the focus group discussion guidelines was considered too long following testing. The final version of the guidelines contained fewer and different questions.

35) Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory views child development as a complex system of relationships affected by multiple levels of the surrounding environment, from immediate settings of family and school to broad cultural values, laws and customs. According to this framework, to study children’s wellbeing, researchers must look not only at the child and their immediate environment, but also at broader environments as well.

The consultations mainly investigated the ‘world of the child from Ukraine’ through talking with participants about their daily activities, their key relationships, life satisfaction and their perceptions – their subjective wellbeing. However, information was also collected about the ‘world around the child from Ukraine’ from their perspective. For example, opinions were gathered from participants about the quality of the school they attended (resources) and on the attention that teachers dedicated to them (networks). The ‘world at large’ represents the context of the consultations because they took place in the face of the war in Ukraine, during the refugee crisis, and in Poland.

SAMPLE

A total of 104 children and adolescents (90 from Ukraine and 14 from Poland) participated in the consultations, which were carried out 15-16 months after the beginning of the war in Ukraine. 54 participants were between 8 and 13 years of age, and the remaining 50 were between 14 and 17 years of age. 64 children identified as female, 39 as male, and 1 as non-binary. The participants were living in three cities in Poland³⁶ and were involved in the study through the support of local partners. They were selected through a purposive sampling strategy on the basis of specific characteristics (age, gender, nationality, type of school attended).

A total of 17 focus group discussions³⁷ were conducted, each with between 4 and 8 participants. The focus groups had the following characteristics:

- 15 focus groups with children and adolescents from Ukraine and 2 focus groups with their Polish peers;
- 9 focus groups with participants aged 8-13 and 8 focus groups with participants aged 14-17;
- 8 focus groups in Krakow, 5 focus groups in Warsaw and 4 focus groups in Wroclaw;
- 11 focus groups with children and adolescents from Ukraine who attended Polish schools face-to-face school and 4 focus groups with children and adolescents from Ukraine who attended Ukrainian schools online;
- 4 focus groups with female participants, 3 focus groups with male participants and 10 focus groups with a mix of genders.

Thanks to support from local professionals (school teachers and local NGO staff), a diverse group of participants was involved in the study in terms of socioeconomic background, time spent in Poland, geographical origin in Ukraine and family characteristics. All the children and adolescents chose to participate in the study on a voluntary basis. The majority of them knew at least some of the other participants in their focus group discussion.



Figure 7: Cities in Poland where the consultations took place

36) In August 2023, 103,736 Ukrainian refugees were living in Warsaw, 45,971 were living in Wroclaw, and 31,866 were living in Krakow (UNCHR Operational Data Portal, accessed on 10 August 2023: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine/location/10781>).

37) Four consultations were used to test the tools, especially the instructions for the photo-voice and the focus group discussion guidelines. However, since the modifications that were made after testing were minimal, the findings from these consultations were included in the report.

38) It is important to note that, when the sample was conceived, it was expected the groups would be formed exclusively of children and adolescents attending either Polish school face-to-face or a Ukrainian school online. However, at the time of the testing, it became apparent that many participants attended both schools.

FOCUS GROUP	AGE RANGE	GENDER	CHILDREN FROM	LOCATION	SCHOOL TYPE	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
1.	8-13	Mixed	Poland	Kraków	Polish school	7
2.	8-13	Mixed	Ukraine	Kraków	Polish school	6
3.	8-13	Mixed	Ukraine	Kraków	Polish school	7
4.	8-13	Mixed	Ukraine	Kraków	Polish school	5
5.	8-13	Mixed	Poland	Warsaw	Polish school	7
6.	8-13	Female	Ukraine	Warsaw	Polish school	7
7.	8-13	Male	Ukraine	Warsaw	Polish school	6
8.	8-13	Female	Ukraine	Wroclaw	Polish school	4
9.	14-17	Mixed	Ukraine	Warsaw	Polish school	8
10.	14-17	Male	Ukraine	Kraków	Polish school	6
11.	14-17	Female	Ukraine	Kraków	Polish school	5
12.	14-17	Male	Ukraine	Kraków	Polish school	6
13.	14-17	Female	Ukraine	Kraków	Polish school	6
14.	14-17	Mixed	Ukraine	Wroclaw	Ukrainian school (online)	6
15.	8-13	Mixed	Ukraine	Wroclaw	Ukrainian school (online)	5
16.	14-17	Mixed	Ukraine	Wroclaw	Ukrainian school (online)	6
17.	14-17	Mixed	Ukraine	Kraków	Ukrainian school (online)	7

Table: Details of the focus groups and their participants



Pic. 24: The instant cameras provided to the participants

APPLICATION OF PHOTOVOICE

Photovoice is a research methodology developed by Wang and Burris, through adaptation of Paulo Freire's model of educational development in which drawings were created through the hearing of stories (Carlson et al., 2006). The basic elements that make up photovoice are: (i) putting cameras into the hands of participants; (ii) allowing them to have a say in the research subject, since they are the ones taking the photos; (iii) obtaining informed consent from photographed subjects, if any; (iv) giving a 'voice' to the images by describing them in a written or verbal form. The pictures can be shared within a community or among stakeholders to re-enforce the voices of the participants and promote change.

For our consultations, the facilitators met with the children and adolescents prior to the focus group discussions. During this preliminary meeting, the facilitators gave the children instant cameras and explained how to use them.

They also gave the children photovoice instructions written in Ukrainian or in Polish, which contained:

- A few sentences explaining what photovoice is;
- The questions that children were invited to answer with their photos;
- Some tips on how to take good quality photos;
- Instructions related to ethics and safety.



QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS FROM UKRAINE

- Think about the last few days and how you spent them. Think about something you enjoyed doing, something that felt good. Can you take a picture of it?
- Think about the last few days and how you spent them. Think about something you did NOT like doing, something that did NOT feel good. Can you take a picture of it?
- Think about your school here in Poland. Think about something you really like about it. What is it? Can you take a picture of it?
- Think about your school here in Poland. Think about something that you do NOT like about it. What is it? Can you take a picture of it?
- Think about your life here in Poland. Think about all the new adults you met since you arrived here. Among them, is there any person who has helped you to solve a problem you had? Please take a picture of him/her/they. If s/he is not around and easily reachable, you can take a picture of something that represents him/her (something s/he likes or often does, his/her job, hobby, favourite book, etc.).



QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS FROM POLAND

- Think about different feelings that you had since the war in Ukraine started last year. Can you take a picture of something that symbolises one or more of these feelings?
- Think about people your age who arrived in Poland from Ukraine over the past year. Can you photograph an object, an activity or a place that you associate with them?
- Can you take a picture of something that has positively changed in your city, your school, or any youth centre/association that you are part of, since children from Ukraine joined/arrived?
- Can you take a picture of something you do NOT like in your city, your school, or any youth association that you are part of, since children from Ukraine joined/arrived?
- In your opinion, what could be done to improve the relationship between Poles and Ukrainians? Can you take a picture that represents your suggestion?

39) Referring to those characters, the children and adolescents often spoke in the third person during the focus group discussions.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

Facilitators of the focus group discussions followed semi-structured, scripted guidelines when conducting the consultations. Different guidelines were developed for children and adolescents from Ukraine and Polish children, however both aimed to facilitate discussions among the participants using the pictures they had taken as a starting point.

Most activities relied on projection techniques, such as asking participants to create fictional characters who were similar to them. This allowed participants not to speak about their own experiences in the first person, if they did not want to.³⁹ Both sets of guidelines started with an ice-breaker, which was followed by an outline of the rules for a meaningful and respectful conversation, and a reiteration of the participants' assent. Both guidelines ended with short surveys that the participants completed online on-the-spot, discussing some of their answers anonymously in the focus group.

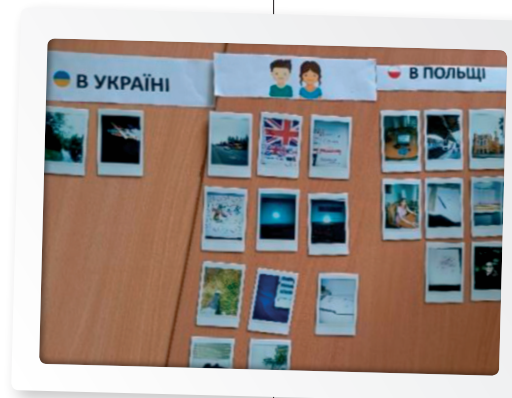
ACTIVITIES FOR THE CONSULTATIONS WITH PARTICIPANTS FROM UKRAINE

In the first part of the focus groups, participants were asked to create a fictional character, a boy or a girl of their age, who comes from Ukraine and lives in Poland. They were invited to think about all the activities that s/he does in Poland and all those that s/he used to do in Ukraine but s/he does not do anymore since s/he moved. The children and adolescents were invited to use the pictures that they had taken with an instant camera to identify the activities they wanted to talk about.

Secondly, the facilitators asked participants to reflect on what might have worried their fictional character during the past year and invited them to write or draw their worries on blank cards. The children and adolescents placed these cards on a poster divided into three different columns:

- The things [name of the character] can solve alone;
- The things [name of the fictional character] can solve with the help of others;
- The things only others can solve.

The third activity focused on the school environment. The participants used the pictures they had taken with an instant camera to start conversations about their preferred subjects, placing them under placards with predefined categories. There were different discussion prompts for participants who attended online Ukrainian school, which highlighted the specificities of distance learning.



Pic. 25: Example of activity 1, part A: 'somebody like me' (focus group discussion with participants from Ukraine)

→ OUR TEACHERS
→ OUR CLASSMATES
→ THE THINGS WE HAVE TO STUDY
→ OUR SCHOOL SPACE
→ THE RULES WE HAVE TO FOLLOW
→ HOW WE SPEND OUR BREAKS
→ THE DIGITAL LEARNING TOOLS WE USE
→ HOW WE FEEL WHILE LEARNING



Figure 10: Categories that participants were invited to discuss relating to education

Figure 11: The poster provided to the Polish participants as a framework for their story

HOW DID THEY MEET?

- When?
- Where?
- What were they doing?

HOW DID THEIR RELATIONSHIP GROW?

- How did they spend time together?
- How did they communicate?
- What do they like about each other?

SOMETHING HAPPENS AND CHALLENGES THEIR FRIENDSHIP

- How? Where?
- Who else is involved?
- How do they feel?

HOW DOES THE FRIENDSHIP EVOLVE? HOW ARE THINGS GOING NOW?

ACTIVITIES FOR THE CONSULTATIONS WITH POLISH PARTICIPANTS

In the first part of the focus groups, the facilitators asked the Polish children to create the story of a friendship between two imaginary young people of their age living in their city, one from Poland and one from Ukraine. The facilitators supported them to develop the story by posing various questions and providing them with a sort of 'framework' designed on a poster. The participants were invited to use their photos in their story, by placing them on the poster. The story was used as a basis to trigger conversations about the relations between Polish children and adolescents and their peers who were displaced from Ukraine and living in Poland.

In the second part of the focus group discussion, the facilitators invited the participants to share their suggestions for how to improve the relationship between Poles and children from Ukraine, and eliminate barriers for inclusion. They used the photos that they had taken using an instant camera and explained their ideas by placing the photos under one of the following columns on a poster:

- The things Polish young people should do
- The things young people from Ukraine should do
- The things adults should do

ETHICAL APPROACH AND DATA PROTECTION

The entire consultation process was conceptualised and developed following an ethical approach that is procedural and relational at the same time (Ellis, 2007). During all phases of the project, the following key ethical principles (Berman, 2020) were taken into consideration:

- Assessing and minimising risks;
- Informed assent of participants and the consent of their parents/guardians;
- Confidentiality, privacy and anonymity;
- Respect for diversity;
- Data protection and security.

The principle of "do no harm" was at the heart of all the study activities, to ensure safe and meaningful participation. The study approach and the tools used were approved by Save the Children International's Ethics Committee before consultations started. The consultation tools included a referral pathway protocol that the facilitators should follow if any participants reported that they were in danger or showed a state of psychosocial distress of concern. Furthermore, prior to the consultations, the facilitators attended training conducted by Plan International and Save the Children on safe identification and referral of safeguarding and child protections cases.

All the consultations were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. After transcription, anonymisation and translation into English, all audio recordings were destroyed.

At the end of each focus group discussion, the participants were asked to indicate which photos they wanted to be published, if any, and to suggest a nickname to accompany them, near the copyright. This is a way to recognise the children's creation of their photos. You can read their chosen nicknames near the pictures and quotes selected, with an indication of their gender, age and nationality.⁴⁰

40) Almost all participants chose to use a nickname, while a few decided not to. Therefore, near certain pictures you can see the initial of the child who took the photo instead of a nickname. (Initials were used for all quotes)."

STAGED ASSENT/CONSENT

The assent of the participants was acquired in four stages and modalities:

• ASSENT TO VOLUNTEER (VERBAL)

The participants were selected on a voluntarily basis by local partners, who were provided with: (i) a flyer for children and adolescents⁴¹ that provided basic information about the project and invited them to volunteer; and (ii) an informative note with instructions for local partners.

The children who wished to volunteer for the study informed local partners verbally by expressing their interest in participating. At this point, no personal contact details or information about the child was collected or stored.

If the number of children who wished to participate exceeded the maximum allowed for that focus group, the participants were selected on a random basis through a public draw.

• FORMAL CONSENT (WRITTEN)

After expressing their interest in participating in the study, selected children received an informative note and consent form from the local partner. This form had to be signed by their parent/guardian and outlined: (i) the objectives of the project; (ii) the voluntary nature of participation; (iii) the children's rights and responsibilities; (iv) arrangements for processing and storing of data, highlighting that the focus groups discussions would be audio recorded and verbatim transcribed; (v) the benefits and risks associated with their participation; and (vi) details about the publication of pictures and their copyright.

• REITERATING ASSENT DURING PRELIMINARY MEETING (VERBAL)

The focus group facilitators had a preliminary meeting with participants to explain photovoice. This meeting was also used to reiterate assent, especially in relation to recording and transcription of the data⁴². The facilitators talked through the main points on the assent form with the participants, answered their questions and clarified any additional doubts they might have had.

• REITERATING ASSENT DURING THE FOCUS GROUPS (VERBAL)

At the beginning of every focus group, the facilitators reminded the children of their rights, including their right to stop the discussion and leave it without giving a reason. At the end of the focus group, the facilitators reminded the children of their right to choose the pictures they wished to be published and to keep the original photos.

LIMITATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

A key limitation when reflecting on consultation findings and the related sample is the risk of selection bias. Participants chose to join the project autonomously, but their selection was carried out with the support of intermediaries – teachers, educators and staff from NGOs – who hold power relations with them. Additionally, it is highly probable that the decision to participate reflected the children's personal predispositions towards the situation in Ukraine. For example, children who were very severely affected by the war may have chosen not to join the project for fear of recalling challenging and painful memories.

While the selection of participants followed a targeted strategy and aimed to include a group as heterogeneous as possible by ensuring the participation of people with different characteristics, it did not manage to include children with disabilities or children living in rural areas, as initially envisaged.

41) The mobilisation flyer was aimed at adolescents aged between 14 and 17 years old. However, if local partners wished to do so, they could also use it to mobilise younger children.

42) During testing, one group of children asked extensive questions about the audio recording and transcription of focus group discussions. The facilitators took their time to explain the process and showed the children other qualitative research where children's words are reported. Following this, the facilitators used the preliminary meeting about photovoice to outline the recording and transcription process to the participants, to ensure they understood it, had time to ask questions or raise any doubts, and actively assented to it.

It is recommended that the experiences of these children be properly investigated in future projects.

It is also important to underline that the sample is not representative of the overall population of children and adolescents from Ukraine in Poland or of their Polish peers. In particular, only two focus group discussions were conducted with Polish children because of difficulties finding Polish children and adolescents who wished to participate in the study; therefore their voices are not as prominent in this study as the voices of participants from Ukraine when analysing the relations between the two groups.

In terms of analysis, a quantitative analysis is present only when data from the survey are discussed (e.g., BOX A: Attitudes towards mental health and psychosocial support). Qualitative data (transcripts and pictures taken and shared by the participants) was not analysed quantitatively. During coding, data from participants of different ages were disaggregated, but no significant differences were identified between them, with the only exception being attitudes towards school, as highlighted in Theme 2. In terms of the differences between boys and girls, no significant differences were noted in the data, perhaps due to the low number of consultations that were disaggregated by gender; it was therefore considered misleading to present male/female differences across themes.

Annex 2: Overview of consultation tools

Articolo12 developed the following consultation tools:

- **Informative note for local partners** → This document was translated into Polish. It provided local partners with an overview of the project and clear indications and suggestions for how to carry out their role within it. It also provided the contact details of focus group facilitators.
- **Mobilisation flyer for older children (aged 14-17)** → This document was translated into Ukrainian and Polish and was made available to local partners, who shared it with older children to invite them to participate in the study. Local partners could also use this flyer to mobilise younger children if they wished to do so.
- **Informative note and consent form for parents** → This document was translated into Ukrainian and Polish and was shared with the parents/legal guardians of children who volunteered to participate in the study. The first part of the document contained information about the project, while the second part had to be completed and signed by the parent/legal guardian.
- **Assent form for research participants** → This document was translated into Ukrainian and Polish and shared with older children (aged 14-17 years old) who volunteered to participate in the study. The first part contained information about the project, while the second part had to be completed and signed by the participant.
- **Photovoice explanation – guidelines for facilitators** → This document was used by the two focus group facilitators during their first meeting with study participants.
- **Photovoice instructions from Ukraine** → This document was translated into Ukrainian. It was given to all study participants from Ukraine during their first meeting with the focus group facilitators. It contains the five questions that the children were invited to answer with pictures and the instructions they had to follow when taking photos.
- **Focus group discussion guidelines – children from Ukraine** → This document was translated into Ukrainian. It was used by the facilitators to guide the focus group discussions with children from Ukraine. It is a scripted text, which was adapted by the facilitators as required by the circumstances.
- **Posters for focus group discussions – children from Ukraine** → This document shows all the posters that were used during focus group discussions with children from Ukraine. It was printed and included in the list of materials for the consultations.
- **Photovoice instructions – Polish children** → This document was translated into Polish. It was given to all study participants from Poland during their first meeting with the focus group facilitators. It contains the five questions that the children were invited to answer with pictures and the instructions they had to follow when taking photos.
- **Focus group discussion guidelines – Polish children** → This document was translated into Polish. It was used by the facilitators to guide the focus group discussions with children from Poland. It is a scripted text, which was adapted by the facilitators as required by the circumstances.
- **Posters for focus group discussions (children from Poland)** → This document shows all the posters that were used during the focus group discussions with children from Poland. It was printed and included in the list of materials for the consultations.
- **Referral pathway protocol** → This document was provided to focus group facilitators and indicated how to proceed in cases where a child disclosed information indicating that s/he had been a victim of or was at risk of abuse, violence or serious harm.

