

EDUCATION ASSESSMENT CONSULTANCY:

RELATION BETWEEN CHILDREN'S WELLBEING AND
LEARNING OUTCOMES

Final Report, 29th of January 2026

NRC

NORWEGIAN
REFUGEE COUNCIL


scruples
research

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AGD	Age, Gender and Diversity
BOND	British Overseas NGOs for Development
CAWI	Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing
CC	Core Competency
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standards
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
DLC	Digital Learning Centre
EU	European Union
EiE	Education in Emergencies
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HNRP	Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
I/NGO	International/Non-Governmental Organisation
KII	Key Informant Interview
KSE	Kyiv School of Economics
MERL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
PSHEA	Prevention of Sexual Harassment, Exploitation and Abuse
RCTs	Randomised Controlled Trials
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound
SEN	Special Education Needs
SoP	Standard Operating Procedures
ToR	Terms of Reference
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations

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Acknowledgements

This Education Assessment on the Relation Between Children's Wellbeing and Learning Outcomes was commissioned by NRC Ukraine and implemented by Scruples Research to generate robust, actionable evidence on the interlinkages between children's psychosocial wellbeing and their learning outcomes. The assessment was designed and implemented using a participatory and adaptive approach that places children at the centre of knowledge generation. The assessment focused on displaced and at-risk children aged 6–17 years across the North, East, and South of Ukraine, with particular attention to Khersonska, Mykolaiivska, Sumska, Dnipropetrovska, Zaporizka, and Kharkivska oblasts.

We extend our sincere appreciation to the eight youth facilitators who contributed to this assignment, building on their previous engagement in the Youth Needs Assessment, commissioned by NRC Ukraine in 2024-2025. Their continued commitment, professionalism, and sensitivity in engaging with children and adolescents were central to the successful implementation of field activities with children aged 12–17. Through peer-to-peer facilitation, the youth facilitators played a critical role in creating safe, relatable spaces that enabled children to openly share their experiences related to wellbeing, education, and learning challenges.

In preparation for this assessment, the youth facilitators participated in a comprehensive training programme delivered by senior Scruples researchers. The training built on key components previously covered during the Youth Needs Assessment, including participatory research principles, ethical data collection, effective facilitation techniques, probing skills, and management of group dynamics, serving as a structured refresher to ensure consistency and quality. In addition, the training introduced new, assessment-specific content, with a strong emphasis on working with children in research settings, child safeguarding and protection principles, and age-appropriate engagement approaches. Further modules addressed data protection, informed consent and confidentiality, field safety, communication and reporting protocols, and familiarisation with the FGD tools through practical simulations. This blended approach ensured that youth facilitators were both technically prepared and ethically equipped to support peer-to-peer engagement with children aged 12–17, while activities with children aged 6–11 were conducted exclusively by senior Scruples researchers due to the need for specialised child-centred and play-based methodologies. By engaging young people not only as respondents but also as facilitators, the study strengthened community-level ownership, enhanced the depth and authenticity of findings, and contributed to the longer-term sustainability of learning through civil society engagement and future programming.

Therefore, this assessment would not have been possible without the meaningful participation of children and adolescents across the targeted locations, who generously shared their experiences, perspectives, and reflections on wellbeing and learning in the context of ongoing displacement and uncertainty. We also extend our sincere appreciation to parents and caregivers for their trust, cooperation, and support through their participation and as well as enabling their children's engagement in this study. In addition, we are grateful to school administrations across the study locations, including school managers, teachers, and psychological counsellors, for their facilitation of participant recruitment and coordination with children, parents/caregivers, and relevant education staff. Their openness, collaboration, and commitment to children's well-being significantly enriched the quality and relevance of the findings.

We also acknowledge the dedication and endless efforts given by the NRC Ukraine and Scruples team members throughout this assignment. From leading trainings and coordinating fieldwork to piloting, refining, and overseeing the implementation of data collection tools, their consistent technical and operational support to the youth facilitators and field teams was central to the successful delivery of this assessment. The assignment was led by Serap Merve Dogan, Lead Consultant from Scruples Research, with the invaluable technical guidance and support of Marco Fuduli, Education Specialist at NRC Ukraine.

Please note that the views expressed in this study do not necessarily reflect NRC's official position.

Executive summary



Wellbeing as a Binding Constraint

Emotional wellbeing directly determines children's ability to learn, not just how they feel.

Education responses that do not integrate psychosocial support risk limited impact in protracted crisis settings.



Educational Burden on Families

Learning support has shifted from schools to households, placing disproportionate pressure on families with limited capacity.

Structured academic support is needed to rebalance this responsibility.



Critical Gap in Math Confidence

Repeated disruptions are compounding learning loss in cumulative subjects, especially mathematics during the transition to secondary education.

Targeted catch-up and confidence-building support are essential to prevent long-term disengagement.



Lack of Creative Outlets

Engagement depends on safe, relational learning environments, not access alone.

In-person settings consistently foster stronger participation than remote-only modalities.

This assessment was commissioned by NRC Ukraine and implemented by Scruples Research to inform NRC's strategic decision-making on education programming and integration of psychosocial support by examining the interlinkages between children's psychosocial wellbeing and their learning outcomes. Rather than focusing solely on learning loss as an academic outcome, the assessment highlights how emotional wellbeing, learning conditions, and support systems shape children's ability to engage meaningfully in education.

The study provides a diagnostic and contextual analysis, drawing on primary qualitative and quantitative data to examine patterns, perceptions, and relationships in children's learning experiences and wellbeing under conditions of protracted displacement, insecurity, and disrupted access to education. Conducted across the North, East, and South of Ukraine, the assessment focused on displaced and at-risk children aged 6–17 years, with specific geographic coverage in Khersonska, Mykolaivska, Sumska, Dnipropetrovska, Zaporizka, and Kharkivska oblasts. These locations reflect varying levels of conflict exposure and service availability, allowing the findings to inform differentiated programming responses. The assessment was designed to support NRC's efforts to ensure that education programming remains relevant, inclusive, and responsive in a context marked by protracted displacement, insecurity, and disrupted access to learning.

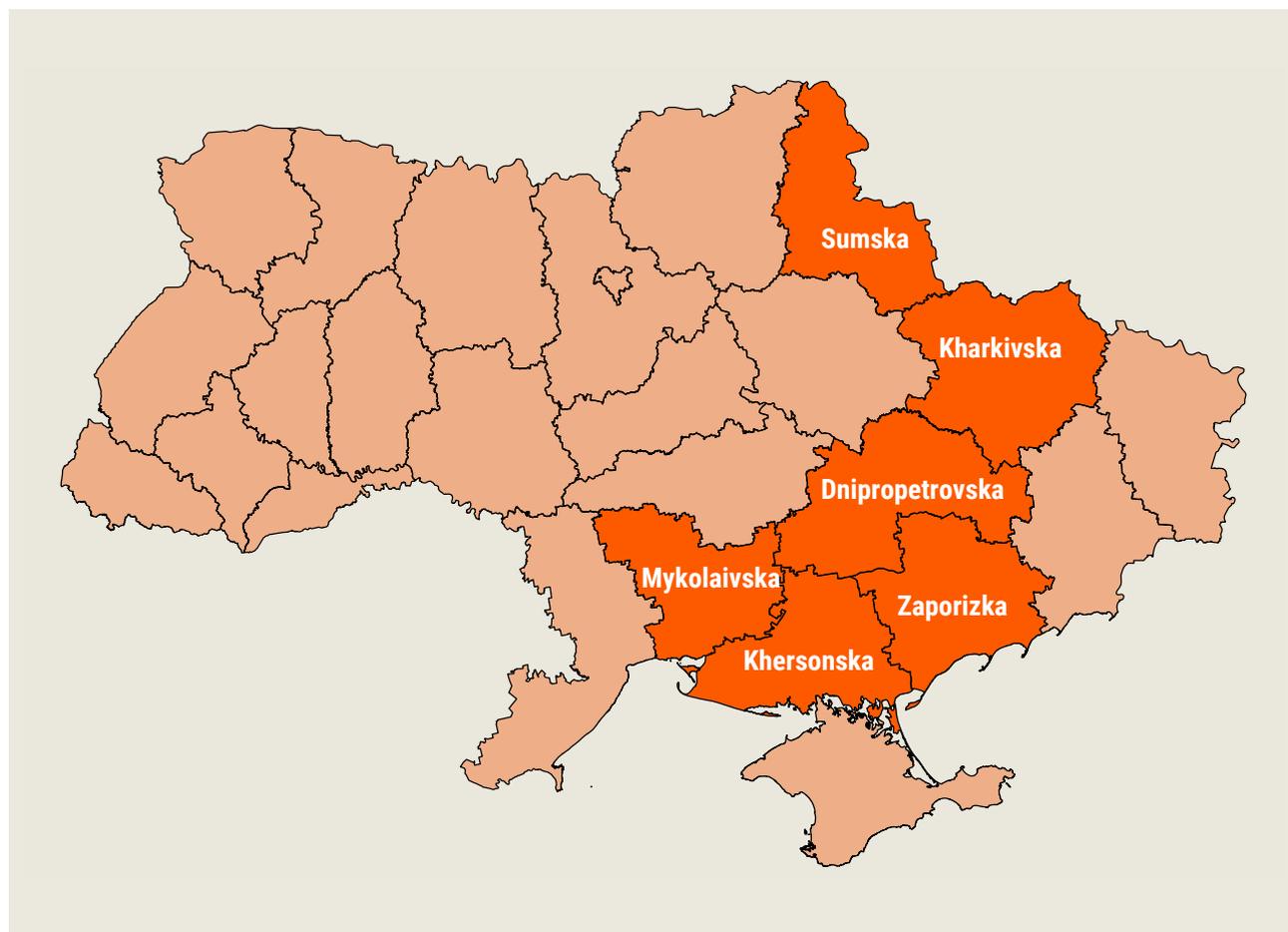
According to UNICEF's Better Learning and Skills brief drawing on PISA 2022 data, Ukrainian students have experienced learning setbacks equivalent to approximately half a year of schooling in science, around one year in mathematics, and up to two years in reading compared to pre-war benchmarks.¹ These losses are

1 UNICEF, Programme Brief 2025: Better Learning and Skills, 2025, Ukraine, https://www.unicef.org/ukraine/en/media/53936/file/2025_Better%20Learning%20and%20Skills%20brief.pdf.pdf

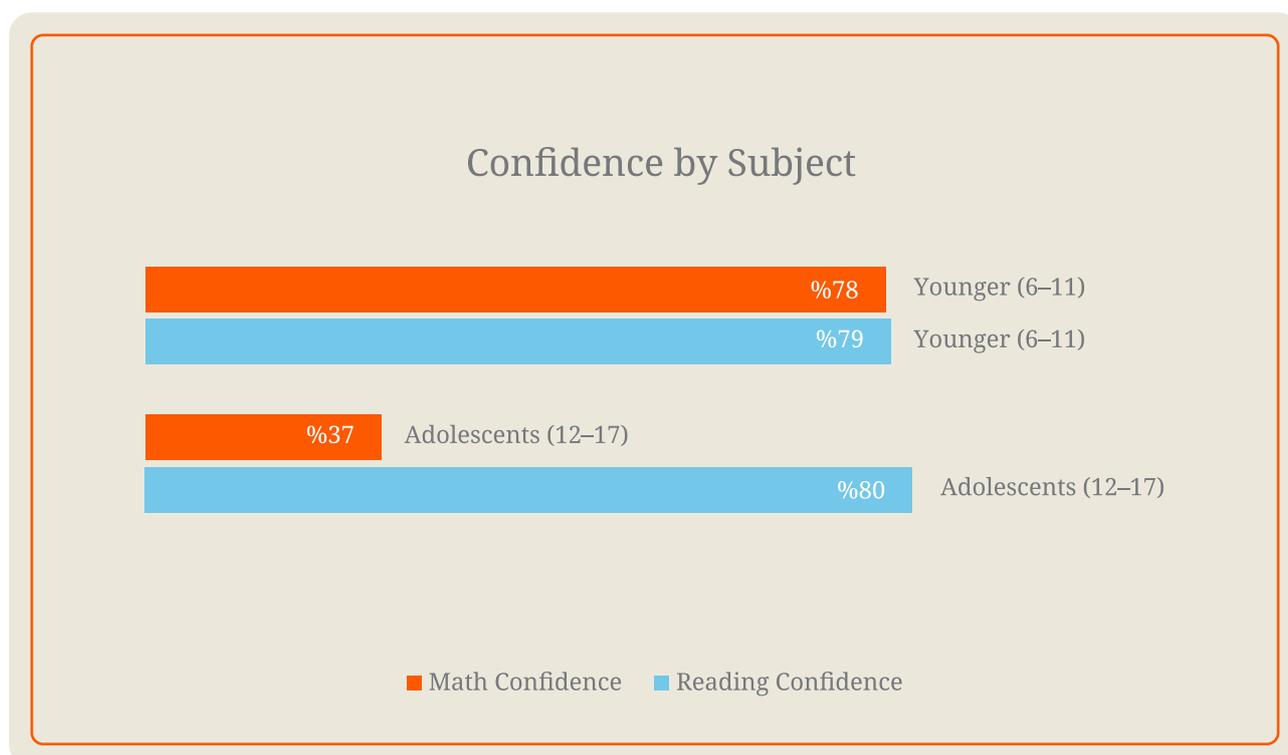
more pronounced among girls, children in rural areas, and learners from lower-income households, and are compounded by continued reliance on disrupted learning modalities and repeated interruptions to in-person schooling. This broader evidence base provides an important backdrop for understanding the learning confidence gaps and psychosocial pressures identified through this assessment.

The assessment also examined both the extent of learning loss in foundational skills, particularly literacy and numeracy, and the psychosocial needs of children affected by displacement and ongoing stressors related to the war. Findings consistently indicate that emotional distress, disrupted routines, and reduced learning confidence act as binding constraints on educational engagement, even where enrolment is maintained. Using NRC's key wellbeing indicators and domains, including emotional distress, social connectedness, and sense of safety, the study explored how children's mental and emotional wellbeing intersects with their ability to engage in learning and achieve educational outcomes. This framing supports a shift from access-focused metrics toward understanding meaningful participation in learning. Particular attention was paid to identifying trends and regional variations across the assessed oblasts, recognising the differentiated impacts of conflict intensity, displacement patterns, and service availability on children's experiences.

The findings of this assessment are intended to serve a dual purpose. Internally, they directly inform the design, adaptation, and prioritisation of NRC's education, psychosocial support (PSS), and teacher support programming, strengthening the integration of wellbeing-sensitive approaches within education interventions. Externally, the assessment contributes to broader knowledge generation within the Education sector by providing evidence to inform proposals, policy dialogue, and advocacy efforts related to children's learning and wellbeing in Ukraine. By generating context-specific, evidence-based recommendations, the assessment aims to support NRC and other stakeholders in addressing learning loss while simultaneously responding to the psychosocial needs of children in both emergency and recovery-oriented education programming.

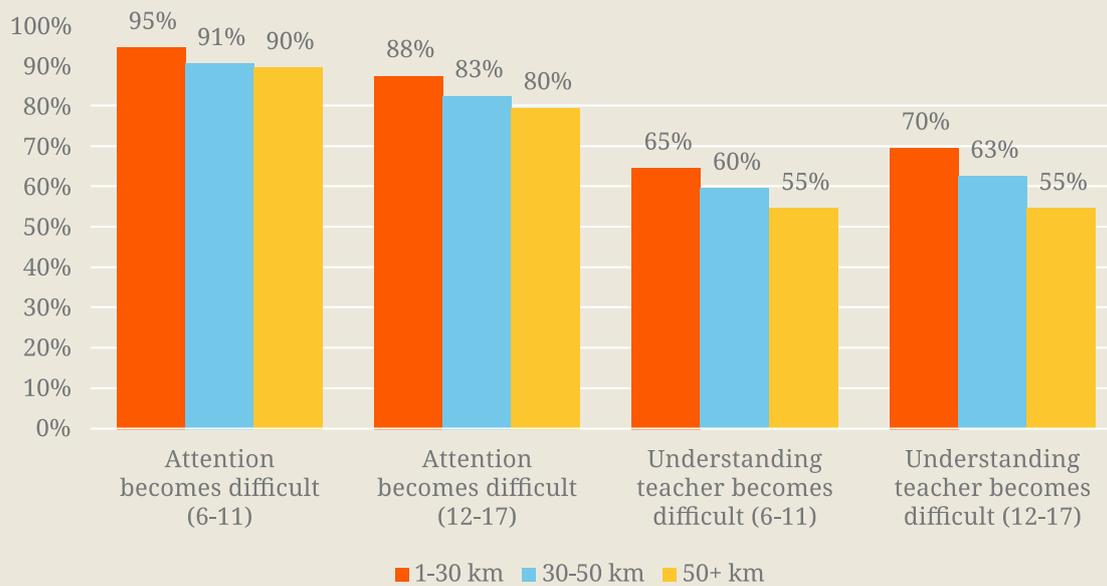


Key Findings



- **Emotional distress disrupts learning readiness more than lack of motivation:** 87% of adolescents report that learning becomes easier when they are in a good emotional state, highlighting the central role of psychosocial wellbeing in educational engagement. While most adolescents remain motivated to study, emotional distress, including anxiety, fatigue, and irritability, directly undermines their ability to concentrate, complete tasks, and retain information. Teachers and school counsellors consistently note that disengagement is situational rather than attitudinal, driven by insecurity, repeated interruptions due to air raids, and cumulative stress. This finding underscores that learning challenges in the current context are not primarily rooted in lack of interest, but in children's reduced emotional capacity to engage under prolonged crisis conditions.
- **Homework has shifted learning responsibility from schools to households, deepening inequities:** 67% of adolescents and 56% of younger children report that completing homework is difficult without external support, reflecting a significant shift of educational responsibility from schools to households. These difficulties intensify in hromadas located approximately 30 to 50 km from the frontline, where 75% of adolescents report struggling with homework, compared to lower rates in less affected areas. Teachers and caregivers report that limited time, emotional exhaustion, and subject-specific constraints, particularly in mathematics, reduce families' ability to provide consistent academic support, increasing inequities in learning outcomes despite similar levels of school enrolment.
- **Mathematics confidence is disproportionately affected by cumulative disruption:** Only 37% of adolescents report feeling confident in mathematics, compared to 80% who report confidence in reading, identifying mathematics as the subject most affected by cumulative learning loss. Nearly one-third of adolescents report low confidence in mathematics, with a further 32% expressing uncertainty. Teachers and school counsellors link this decline to repeated disruptions, missed foundational content, and increased academic pressure during the transition to lower secondary education. This pattern demonstrates how cumulative subjects are particularly vulnerable to prolonged instability, with confidence erosion becoming more pronounced as children progress through grades.
- **Play and creative activities enable emotional regulation and re-entry into learning:** 96% of children aged 6 to 11 report that fun or playful activities help them feel emotionally better, and 92% report that learning becomes easier afterward, confirming the strong enabling role of play in learning recovery. Among adolescents, 61% agreed that activities such as sports, music, arts, or clubs helped them feel and learn better, while the link to learning ease was more conditional. Adolescents' agreement that learning became easier

Proximity to Frontline Shapes Learning Experience



after activities ranged from **44%** to **60%** depending on proximity to the frontline, and strong agreement that activities improved mood ranged from **29%** to **45%**, with lower intensity closer to the frontline. Teachers, counsellors, and I/NGOs education staff consistently describe play as a regulation and re-engagement mechanism that supports readiness to learn, rather than as a non-essential or recreational add-on.

- Online attendance often masks disengagement, while physical presence supports learning:** Teachers and I/NGOs education staff across all KIIs describe online learning as associated with the lowest levels of engagement, often referred to as symbolic attendance, where children are logged in but disengaged. In contrast, in-person learning, both in schools and shelters, is consistently associated with higher participation, stronger peer interaction, and improved comprehension. Although shelter-based learning is constrained by noise, overcrowding, and limited infrastructure, teachers and humanitarian education staff still perceive it as more effective than online-only modalities, underscoring the importance of physical presence and relational connection in sustaining learning during emergencies.
- Children with disabilities face a persistent gap between enrolment and meaningful participation:** Children with disabilities consistently experience a gap between enrolment and meaningful participation, with teachers, counsellors, and I/NGOs education and protection staff reporting that frequent air raid interruptions, inconsistent adaptations, and reduced support as children age significantly undermine learning progression. Online learning often requires continuous caregiver mediation, while inclusive classroom practices and assistive resources are unevenly available across locations. These barriers become more pronounced in adolescence, when academic expectations increase but tailored support often decreases, reinforcing educational inequities under emergency conditions

Key Recommendations

Short Term Recommendations

1. Strengthen Wellbeing-Integrated and Playful Learning Recovery Approaches:

Across age groups, repeated interruptions, sleep disruption, and anxiety reduced children's ability to concentrate, retain information, and persist with learning tasks, with effects most pronounced in cumulative subjects such as mathematics. Playful, activity-based, and interactive approaches emerged as effective mechanisms for learning recovery by stabilising emotional and cognitive readiness and enabling children to re-engage with learning tasks.

Objective:

Enhance learning recovery and sustained engagement by integrating MHPSS-sensitive practices into teaching and catch-up education, while using playful, gamified, and activity-based approaches to reduce stress, rebuild confidence, and restore children's cognitive and emotional capacity for learning.

Lead: National and Local Authorities, Schools

Support: UN Agencies, I/NGOs and local civil society organisations working with children

Actions:

—> Priority actions:

- Train teachers and facilitators in wellbeing-sensitive classroom practices that combine SEL, basic PFA, and playful pedagogy, enabling them to recognise distress, regulate classroom stress, and adapt teaching approaches accordingly.
- Adapt curricula and catch-up classes, particularly for cumulative subjects such as mathematics, into more playful, gamified, and interactive formats (e.g. learning games, problem-solving challenges, collaborative tasks).
- Strengthen referral pathways between education actors and specialised MHPSS providers to ensure that children experiencing sustained distress or functional impairment receive timely, appropriate support beyond the classroom.
- Establish targeted group-based support classes for at-risk children, combining academic catch-up with structured psychosocial and play-based activities that support emotional regulation, peer interaction, and confidence-building.

—> Enabling actions:

- Establish peer homework groups or clubs to create solidarity among children and strengthen peer interaction and learning routines.
- Support I/NGOs and local partners to deliver complementary catch-up education and recreational activities through community centres, safe spaces, and online platforms, particularly in frontline, rural, and displacement-affected areas.

Indicative indicators:

- % of teachers/facilitators trained in wellbeing-sensitive and playful pedagogy
- % of participating children reporting increased learning confidence and reduced learning-related stress

2. Strengthen Inclusive Access and Meaningful Participation for Children with Disabilities:

For children with disabilities, repeated disruptions, modality shifts, and reduced individualised support undermined meaningful participation despite continued enrolment. Reliance on caregiver mediation increased as structured support diminished, particularly as academic demands rose with age. Adapted materials, predictable routines, and continuity of individualised support emerged as critical conditions for sustaining engagement and learning, rather than access alone.

Objective:

Close the gap between formal enrolment and real learning for children with disabilities, whose engagement is fragile under frequent interruptions and inconsistent support.

Lead: National and Local Authorities, Schools

Support: UN Agencies, I/NGOs and specialised disability and inclusive education organisations

Actions:**→ Priority actions:**

- Provide adapted learning materials and assistive resources (accessible formats, structured supports, predictable routines) to reduce dependence on constant caregiver mediation, especially in online learning.
- Train teachers and facilitators in inclusive, disruption-sensitive strategies (how to maintain participation during alarms, shelter transitions, and modality shifts).

→ Enabling actions:

- Establish targeted support for adolescents with disabilities, recognising the reported drop in support as academic expectations rise (e.g., individual learning plans, learning assistants, adapted assessment approaches).

Indicative indicators:

- % of children with disabilities receiving adapted learning materials
- Attendance and participation rates of children with disabilities during learning disruptions

Medium Term Recommendations

1. Strengthen Caregiver Support as a Stabilising Component of Education Response:

Periods of disrupted schooling transferred instructional and emotional regulation responsibilities from schools to households, increasing reliance on caregivers to explain content, manage distress, and maintain routines. While this support enabled some children to remain engaged, its effectiveness varied by household capacity and contributed to uneven learning experiences. Targeted caregiver guidance and system-level measures that reduced reliance on household substitution emerged as necessary to prevent widening disparities and caregiver overload.

Objective:

Reduce caregiver stress and increase household capacity to support children's routines and emotional regulation, recognising families' central role in learning continuity under crisis conditions.

Lead: UN Agencies, I/NGOs

Support: National and Local Authorities, Schools, local civil society organisations

Actions:**→ Priority actions:**

- Deliver parenting and caregiver support sessions focused on routines, reassurance, motivation, and managing school-related stress at home.
- Provide practical "what to do after an interruption" guidance (sleep disruption nights, missed lessons, anxiety spikes) for caregivers supporting younger children.

→ Enabling actions:

- Map existing caregiver support services and referral pathways within education, protection, and MHPSS systems.
 - Establish caregiver support groups / referral mechanisms for those experiencing high strain, especially in frontline and displacement-affected communities.
- Indicative indicators:**
- % of caregivers reporting improved capacity to support children’s learning routines
 - Reduction in reported caregiver stress related to schooling disruptions

2. Improve Engagement of Children through Upgrading Shelter Conditions:

Learning environments characterised by crowding, noise, and poor ventilation constrained attention, increased fatigue, and reduced sustained engagement, even when attendance was maintained. Shelter-based learning supported continuity but limited depth of participation under these conditions. Improvements to physical learning environments emerged as an enabling factor for concentration and emotional regulation, rather than a peripheral infrastructure concern.

Objective:

Increase meaningful participation (not only attendance) by adapting teaching and learning conditions to reduce fatigue, isolation, and passive engagement, especially in shelters.

Lead: National and Local Authorities, Schools

Support: UN Agencies, I/NGOs, Shelter and WASH actors

Actions:

→ Priority actions:

- Identify shelters used for learning purposes where conditions negatively affect children’s concentration and participation.
- Upgrade shelter learning conditions where feasible (lighting, ventilation, seating, noise mitigation, structured layout) to improve concentration and reduce irritability during shelter-based learning.

→ Enabling actions:

- Conduct an assessment through a participatory approach to give children, teachers and parents/caregivers to define minimum learning-friendly standards for shelter-based education spaces, along with the experts.

Indicative indicators:

- # of shelter learning spaces upgraded to meet minimum learning-friendly standards
- % of children reporting improved ability to concentrate during shelter-based learning

Long Term Recommendations

1. Advocate for Wellbeing-Sensitive and Inclusive Teaching:

Children’s learning engagement and readiness were consistently shaped by emotional regulation, perceived safety, and supportive teacher–student interaction, while teachers were increasingly required to respond to emotional needs alongside instruction. Wellbeing-sensitive pedagogy, inclusive practices, and sustained teacher support therefore emerged as system-level conditions for maintaining learning engagement over time, rather than as individual or short-term adaptations.

Objective:

Strengthen the education system’s ability to respond to protracted crisis by mainstreaming wellbeing-sensitive pedagogy, inclusive education, and teacher wellbeing support.

Lead: National and Local Authorities, Teacher Training Institutions

Support: UN Agencies, I/NGOs, academic institutions, civil society organisations

Actions:

—> **Priority actions:**

- Use evidence from this review to advocate for the integration of SEL-informed and wellbeing-sensitive teaching approaches within education policy and planning discussions.

—> **Enabling actions:**

- Review existing pre-service and in-service teacher training curricula to identify entry points for wellbeing-sensitive and inclusive education components.
- Integrate wellbeing-sensitive pedagogy and inclusive education modules into pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes.
- Establish sustained models for teacher supervision, peer learning, and staff-care to reduce burnout and maintain protective teacher roles over time.
- Strengthen inclusive education resourcing to ensure children with disabilities receive sustained support through adolescence.

Indicative indicators:

- Inclusion of wellbeing-sensitive and inclusive teaching approaches in teacher training curricula
- Teacher retention and wellbeing indicators over time

2. Sustain Adolescents’ Motivation and Future Orientation Through Structured Support Pathways:

Among adolescents, repeated disruption and academic pressure reduced confidence in planning and progression, leading many to adopt shorter and more cautious time horizons rather than disengage from education. Structured guidance, mentorship, and embedded life-skills support emerged as relevant mechanisms for sustaining motivation and engagement by restoring direction and agency under uncertainty..

Objective:

Protect adolescents’ aspirations by reducing pressure, strengthening coping, and supporting realistic future planning under uncertainty.

Lead: Schools, UN Agencies, I/NGOs

Support: National and Local Authorities, youth/children-focused organisations, counselling and guidance services

Actions:

—> **Priority actions:**

- Integrate structured life skills components (goal-setting, study organisation, managing academic stress) into education programming for adolescents.
- Establish mentorship and guidance mechanisms (teacher-led, counsellor-supported, or partner-supported) to help adolescents plan within shorter, realistic time horizons without disengaging.
- Improve peer-support and youth-led engagement structures in schools and communities to rebuild connectedness, reduce isolation, and reinforce collective coping.

—> **Enabling actions:**

- Identify and capacitate teachers, counsellors, or partner organisations to deliver mentorship and guidance support to adolescents.

Indicative indicators:

- % of adolescents reporting improved coping with academic pressure
- % of adolescents demonstrating sustained engagement in education pathways

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022, Ukraine has faced a protracted humanitarian crisis driven by insecurity, destruction of civilian infrastructure, and repeated displacement, with sustained impacts on essential services and social systems.² In 2025, the Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) estimated that **12.7 million people** in Ukraine were in need of humanitarian assistance across sectors, including children and their education and MHPSS needs, reflecting the continuing scale of the needs.³

Education continuity has also required major adaptation, including the expansion of protected learning spaces such as underground or shelter-based classrooms in high-risk cities and oblasts, illustrating how education delivery increasingly depends on security infrastructure.⁴ In frontline and high risk areas, safety requirements and shelter access have become practical determinants of learning modality, contributing to uneven opportunities for sustained in person learning and exacerbating disparities across regions and communities.⁵ The use of explosive weapons in populated urban areas and increased intensity of attacks has also driven a significant rise in child casualties and localised school closures in 2025, further limiting safe access to education in heavily affected eastern and southern oblasts.⁶

As a result, education has become among the sectors most heavily affected, as hostilities and air-raid alerts interrupt schooling, force shifts between in-person, hybrid, and remote learning, and reduce children's exposure to consistent instructional time and stable learning routines.⁷ Attacks on education have also caused extensive damage to learning infrastructure, limiting access to safe and functional school buildings and increasing reliance on temporary or alternative learning arrangements. According to Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) Save Schools Tracker reports cumulative impacts across education institutions and, as of its latest update, records 3,676 damaged and 394 destroyed education institutions nationwide (across categories such as schools, kindergartens, TVET and higher education).⁸ In frontline and high-risk areas, safety requirements and shelter access have become a practical determinant of learning modality, contributing to uneven opportunities for sustained in-person learning and exacerbating disparities across regions and communities.⁹

At the same time, children's learning challenges are closely intertwined with psychosocial wellbeing, as prolonged stress, insecurity, displacement, and disrupted routines can undermine concentration, motivation, engagement, and confidence in learning.¹⁰ The mental health burden on children has been described as reaching crisis levels: assessments and studies in 2025 found high rates of psychological distress among children, with displaced and frontline populations disproportionately affected.¹¹

2 OCHA, Ukraine Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP), 2025, Ukraine. <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/ukraine/ukraine-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2025-january-2025-enuk>

3 Ibid.

4 Le Monde, Underground classrooms in Kharkiv (illustrative adaptation reporting), 7 Sep 2025, Ukraine. https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/09/07/ukrainian-students-return-to-school-in-kharkiv-s-underground-classrooms_6745110_4.html

5 UNICEF, Ukraine Humanitarian Situation Report No. 57; Press Releases and Humanitarian Action for Children 2026, 2025, Ukraine.

6 Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Ukraine: reports on civilian casualties and attacks on infrastructure, 2025, Ukraine.

7 Ibid.

8 Ministry of Education and Science, Save Schools Tracker, Ukraine. Accessed in 12 December 2025. <https://saveschools.in.ua/en/>

9 EdTech, Resilient by Design: Ukraine's EdTech Emergency Response, September 2025, Ukraine.

10 EdTech, Resilient by Design: Ukraine's EdTech Emergency Response, September 2025, Ukraine.

11 Ukrainian Red Cross Society, Mental health needs assessment, 2025, Ukraine.

Within this evolving environment, integration of education and MHPSS programming is crucial as those both are interlinked and impactful in individual future aspects for those children but as well as the future of Ukraine through strengthening safety, connectedness, and supportive learning environments for displacement-affected and at-risk children.

1.2 NRC's Education Programming in Ukraine

The war in Ukraine has profoundly disrupted children's access to quality education and stable social environments. Displacement, prolonged insecurity, and exposure to trauma have deeply affected children's ability to learn, to socialise, and to emotionally recover. Many children are now out of school, while those who remain enrolled often face fragmented curricula, overstretched teachers, limited psychosocial support, and few opportunities for meaningful engagement. These disruptions have compounded learning losses and exacerbated distress, leaving a generation of children at risk of being left behind academically and emotionally.

In response to these challenges, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) Ukraine has placed its Education Core Competency (CC) in Ukraine at the forefront. Its programming focuses on ensuring that vulnerable, war-affected children and adolescents have access to safe, quality, and inclusive learning opportunities. In 2025–2026, NRC aims to reinforce the learning and well-being of children affected by the war through a mix of structured formal and non-formal education initiatives, teacher well-being interventions, and psychosocial support delivered through the Better Learning Programme (BLP). This includes fostering a sense of hope for the future and enabling them to become more active contributors to their communities

1.3 Purpose and Scope of the Assessment

This assessment was commissioned by NRC Ukraine and implemented by Scruples Research to elaborate the relationship between children's psychosocial wellbeing and their learning outcomes in the context of protracted displacement and ongoing conflict. The primary purpose of the assessment was to generate robust and actionable evidence to support the design, adaptation, and advocacy of NRC's Education programming, ensuring it remains relevant, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of displaced and at-risk children. For the 2025–2026 programme cycle, this assessment is intended to be used by NRC Ukraine to guide strategic programming decisions, including: (i) geographic targeting; (ii) education delivery modalities (in-person, shelter-based, and blended); (iii) the definition of NRC's minimum package for wellbeing-integrated learning recovery, including age, gender and subject-responsive activities for children; (iv) NRC's priorities for inclusive education for those disadvantaged and marginalised children; (v): necessary teacher and caregiver support that should be integrated into the programming; and (vi) potential ways to support and coordinate with national and local authorities, and schools in the targeted geographic areas.

The assessment focused on children aged 6–17 years residing in the North, East, and South of Ukraine, with specific geographic coverage in Khersonska, Mykolajivska, Sumska, Dnipropetrovska, Zaporizka, and Kharkivska oblasts. Although the study team intended to include Donetsk oblast, this was not feasible due to significant access constraints resulting from ongoing attacks and shelling, which limited the ability to conduct safe and ethical data collection, as well as participants' willingness to engage under these conditions at the time of the review. It elaborated both the extent of learning loss, particularly in foundational literacy and numeracy skills, and the psychosocial needs of children affected by displacement, insecurity, and disruption to formal education. In doing so, the assessment served a dual function: informing internal programmatic decision-making within NRC in its education programming and contributing to broader knowledge generation to support evidence-based discussions and advocacy within the Education sector. For NRC Ukraine, this external positioning supports coherent advocacy and donor engagement by clearly articulating why access-focused education responses are insufficient without attention to wellbeing, learning conditions, and meaningful participation.

To achieve its overall purpose, the assessment was guided by the following objectives:

- Assess the level of learning loss in literacy and numeracy among displaced and at-risk children close to the frontline and frontline areas;
- Analyse children’s psychosocial needs using NRC’s key wellbeing indicators and domains, including emotional distress, social connectedness, and sense of safety, drawing on NRC’s child wellbeing frameworks and psychosocial support programming, including the Right to Wellbeing initiative¹² and the Better Learning Programme¹³; Identify trends and regional variations in learning outcomes and wellbeing across the North, East, and South of Ukraine;
- Provide key findings to support external stakeholders’ understanding of children’s education and wellbeing needs, informing proposals, policy dialogue, and advocacy within the Education sector; and
- Generate evidence-based recommendations to adapt and strengthen NRC’s education, PSS), and teacher support programming.

12 <https://www.righttowellbeing.org/>

13 <https://www.nrc.no/campaign/blp/trauma>



Children’s drawings reflect a consistent association between emotional safety, relational support, and meaningful engagement in learning.

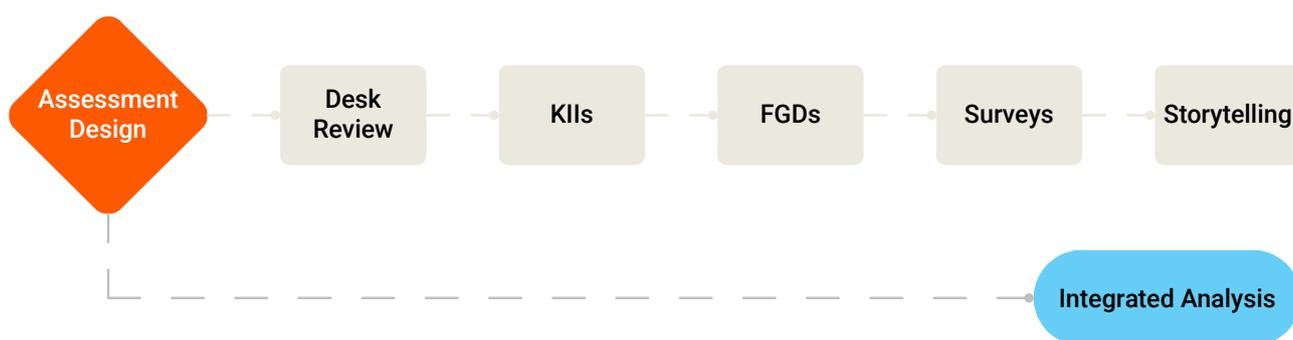


Physical presence and teacher interaction remain key enablers of meaningful learning under disruption.

2. Methodology

2.1 Assessment Design

The assessment was designed using a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques to examine the relationship between children’s psychosocial wellbeing, self-efficacy, and learning outcomes. The analytical framework was grounded in the understanding that children’s emotional states, sense of safety, and social connectedness directly influence their motivation, attention, and confidence in learning, which in turn shape educational engagement and outcomes. Therefore, findings should be considered as a reflection of children’s learning readiness, engagement, and perceived ability to progress, rather than as direct measures of academic attainment.



Rather than measuring academic performance through formal testing, the design explored how learning loss and learning confidence across subjects are influenced by wellbeing, support systems, and contextual factors. Learning loss is therefore used analytically to describe perceived setbacks or accumulated strain in learning trajectories, as reported by children, caregivers, and teachers and triangulated across data sources. The assessment distinguished between different but interrelated dimensions of children’s learning experiences under crisis conditions. Disruptions to learning, such as alarms, displacement, shortened lessons, and shifts between in-person, shelter-based, and online modalities, were understood as *learning disruption*, referring to breaks in continuity, routine, and instructional processes. *Learning confidence* was examined as a distinct construct, capturing children’s self-reported perceptions of their ability to engage with learning, understand lessons, keep up with subjects, and concentrate across different learning environments.

Primary data collection methods included KIIs with internal and external stakeholders, FGDs with children aged 12–17 and parents/caregivers, self-efficacy surveys with children aged 6–17, and storytelling activities with children aged 6–11 and children with disabilities. KIIs targeted NRC Education programme staff and external actors, including the Education Cluster, relevant national and local authorities, teachers, school counsellors, and other school staff. These methods enabled the assessment to capture both measurable trends related to learning and wellbeing and in-depth qualitative insights into children’s lived experiences, coping strategies, and support environments.

A comprehensive desk review was conducted as a foundational component of the assessment design, which included a range of documents, including the NRC’s country and Education strategies, as well as recent assessments and research conducted in Ukraine that examine the impact of the war on children’s well-being, access to education, and learning outcomes. Particular attention was given to existing evidence on the relationship between children’s psychosocial wellbeing and learning, which directly informed the analytical framework linking well-being domains, self-efficacy, and educational engagement. The review informed the assessment framework, refinement of core questions, and the design of qualitative and quantitative tools by identifying evidence gaps requiring further exploration. Please refer to “*Annex 2*” for the detailed list of desk review resources.

The assessment prioritised children's self-reported experiences of learning and wellbeing over formal academic testing. Quantitative tools captured perceptions of confidence, ease of learning, and ability to concentrate, while qualitative methods explored how these perceptions were shaped by emotional wellbeing, support systems, and learning environments. This design allowed the study to identify patterns of engagement, difficulty, and perceived progress across contexts, while recognising that children's confidence and motivation are critical intermediaries linking wellbeing and learning outcomes.

The design of this assessment supports a strong understanding of how children's emotional wellbeing, learning conditions, and support environments shape their engagement with education in Ukraine based on their proximity to the frontline. As such, the findings are well suited to informing programmatic decisions related to learning readiness, participation, modality choice, and the integration of psychosocial support within education interventions. At the same time, the assessment does not aim to quantify academic learning loss in terms of grade-level equivalency or test-based performance, as it does not include formal academic assessment. Findings should therefore be interpreted as indicative of patterns, constraints, and enabling factors influencing children's learning experiences, rather than as precise measures of academic attainment.

To ensure methodological rigour, the assessment followed a structured *six-phase process* comprising *inception, tool refinement, data collection, data cleaning and processing, analysis and quality assurance, and reporting*. During the inception phase, the assessment team worked closely with NRC to refine the scope, research questions, sampling approach, and ethical considerations. Please refer to "*Annex 3*" for the assessment matrix.

A participatory and child-centred approach was central to the assessment design. Youth facilitators previously engaged through NRC's Youth Needs Assessment were re-engaged to support FGDs with children aged 12–17, under the close supervision of senior Scruples researchers. Before fieldwork commenced, the youth facilitators participated in a three-day intensive training delivered by senior qualitative researchers. The training refreshed core participatory research principles and ethical standards while strengthening skills in facilitation, group dynamics management, conflict resolution, probing, and the use of open-ended questions. Additional emphasis was placed on research with children and adolescents, child safeguarding, children's engagement, handling sensitive information and disclosure, data protection, informed consent, and responding to ethically challenging situations. Facilitators were also oriented on the specific FGD tools developed for this assessment, enabling them to guide discussions confidently while maintaining research integrity and participant safety.

This participatory approach positioned young people not only as data collectors but as active contributors to shaping discussions, drawing on their lived experiences and contextual knowledge. The process fostered ownership over the research and contributed to the facilitators' professional development by strengthening transferable research and facilitation skills. The adaptive design allowed facilitators, with support from senior researchers, to refine their approaches based on real-time field learning, ensuring that the study remained responsive to children's perspectives and community dynamics. Activities with children aged 6–11 and with children with disabilities were conducted exclusively by senior researchers with expertise in child protection and child-friendly, play-based and storytelling methodologies, ensuring age-appropriate and safe engagement.

Ethical research protocols were strictly applied throughout. Informed consent from parents/caregivers and assent from children were obtained prior to children's participation. Data were collected through audio recordings and detailed documentation, with alternative note-taking methods used where recording was not appropriate. Following fieldwork, data cleaning and processing involved quality checks, anonymisation of sensitive information, and organisation of transcripts for analysis.

The data analysis phase applied a thematic analytical approach, combining quantitative descriptive analysis with qualitative interpretation. Findings were disaggregated by age, gender, displacement status, disability status, and geographic location. Thematic coding was used to identify recurring patterns and relationships across wellbeing, self-efficacy, and learning outcomes. For FGDs, a consensus-based coding approach was applied, whereby responses were recorded as reflective of group consensus when no dissenting views were expressed. Gendered and intersectional differences were systematically examined, and triangulation across data sources and stakeholder groups was used to validate findings and identify converging or diverging perspectives.

The assessment was implemented across the North, East, and South of Ukraine, with geographic coverage in Sumska, Dnipropetrovska, Zaporizka, Kharkivska, Mykolaivska, and Khersonska oblasts. To examine how exposure to insecurity shaped children's experiences, wellbeing, and future orientation, the analysis incorporated

proximity to the frontline as a key contextual variable, along with age groups, genders, displacement statuses, disability statuses, and learning modalities, as well as representation from urban, rural, and frontline contexts. Marginalised groups, including children with disabilities, were meaningfully included, and facilitation approaches were adapted to ensure safe and inclusive participation, including gender-segregated discussions where appropriate.

Locations were categorised into three distance-based bands—1–30 km, 30–50 km, and more than 50 km from the frontline—to reflect differing levels of exposure to hostilities, disruptions, and security-related stressors. This approach allowed for comparison across contexts experiencing varying degrees of risk, instability, and interruption, while remaining accessible for interpretation across sectors.

Distance estimates were based on open-source intelligence data from DeepStateMap¹⁴ (as of 4th December, 2025) and calculated from the administrative centre of each hromada included in the dataset. Given that hromadas cover large geographic areas, distances should be interpreted as approximate indicators of exposure rather than precise measurements for individual households or settlements. To examine how varying levels of insecurity shaped children’s experiences, the analysis incorporated proximity to the frontline as a contextual exposure variable. Locations were grouped into distance bands (1–30 km, 30–50 km, and more than 50 km from the frontline) based on open-source intelligence data from DeepStateMap, calculated from the administrative centre of each hromada. This approach enabled comparison across areas experiencing different degrees of disruption and security-related stress, while recognising that distance serves as an approximate indicator rather than a precise measure of individual risk. The categorisation was used to explore graduated patterns of impact on wellbeing, learning engagement, and future orientation, rather than to draw binary distinctions between safe and unsafe locations.

Under this classification, hromadas located within 1–30 km of the frontline represented areas of highest exposure to active hostilities, frequent air raids, shelling, or immediate displacement risk. This group included locations such as Nikopolska, Khersonska, Kostiantynivska, Dariivska, Novovorontsovska, Kushuhumska, Tavriska, Novooleksandrivska, Zaporizhska, Kunievska, and Myrivska, spanning Khersonska, Zaporizhka, Dnipropetrovska, and Kharkivska oblasts. Although the study team intended to include Donetsk oblast, this was not feasible due to significant access constraints resulting from ongoing attacks and shelling, which limited the ability to conduct safe and ethical data collection and affected participants’ willingness to engage under these conditions at the time of the review. These areas were characterised by heightened instability and repeated disruption to daily life and schooling.

Hromadas situated 30–50 km from the frontline were classified as moderately exposed contexts, where direct hostilities were less frequent but insecurity, alerts, and indirect impacts remained significant. This group included locations such as Vorozhbianska (Sumska oblast), PISOCHYNSKA (Kharkivska oblast), Apostolovska, Kryvorizka, and Matviivska (Dnipropetrovska and Zaporizhka oblasts), as well as Mykolaivska and Galitsynivska (Mykolaivska oblast). These areas often experienced fluctuating security conditions, contributing to uncertainty and intermittent disruption.

Locations categorised as more than 50 km from the frontline represented comparatively lower-exposure contexts, where security conditions were generally more stable, though still affected by the broader impacts of the conflict. This group included Okhtyrska, Konotopska, Burynska, and Novoslobodska (Sumska oblast); Chuhuivska, Slobozhanska, and Kolomatska (Kharkivska oblast); Slavhorodska and Verkhivtsevska (Dnipropetrovska oblast); and Voznesenska (Mykolaivska oblast). While not immune to disruption, these locations experienced fewer direct interruptions and greater continuity in schooling and daily routines.

By grouping locations in this way, the analysis aimed to capture graduated patterns of impact rather than binary distinctions between “safe” and “unsafe” areas. This categorisation supported a more nuanced understanding of how sustained exposure to insecurity influenced children’s wellbeing, engagement with education, and future orientation across different geographic contexts. Please refer to “*Annex 5*” for the detailed list of study locations.

Throughout this assignment, the assessment team was committed to the “Do No Harm” principle and followed these guidelines for data collection around data protection, confidentiality, and collecting data from study participants. At the same time, a gender-sensitive and inclusive approach was intentionally embedded across the

14 <https://deepstatemap.live/en>

assessment design and implementation to ensure that diverse perspectives were meaningfully represented. This commitment informed not only participant selection but also the development of research tools, data collection processes, and analytical approaches. Marginalised groups, including children with disabilities, were deliberately included to ensure their experiences were reflected in the findings. To promote gender inclusivity, the assessment ensured balanced representation across genders in FGDs, engaging girls and boys from displaced and host communities across both urban and rural settings. Facilitation approaches were designed to create safe and inclusive spaces that enabled participants to share their experiences openly, including through gender-segregated FGDs where appropriate to support discussion of sensitive topics. Youth facilitators received dedicated training on gender-sensitive research practices, including identifying and mitigating bias, applying gender-responsive questioning techniques, and ensuring that discussions captured the varied realities and intersectional experiences of children and adolescents.

The assessment adhered to NRC’s data protection policies, international ethical standards, and *General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)*¹⁵ principles where applicable. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection, with clear explanations of the study’s purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, data confidentiality measures, and the right to withdraw at any time. Personally identifiable information was not recorded, and all data were securely stored using encrypted digital systems with access limited to authorized research personnel. Special attention was given to safeguarding sensitive information, particularly when engaging youth from displaced and vulnerable communities, by implementing anonymization techniques in data processing and ensuring that identifying details were excluded from reporting. The assessment design, tools, sampling, and analysis aligned with international quality standards, including the *British Overseas NGOs for Development (BOND) Evidence Principles*¹⁶, and generated SMART, actionable recommendations to inform NRC’s education programming and advocacy efforts.

QUALITATIVE COMPONENT

- KIs
- FGDs
- Storytelling

Ensured diversity across:

- Age groups
- Gender
- Displacement status
- Disability status
- Learning modality
- Geographic location

QUANTITATIVE COMPONENT

Stratified Sampling – Self-Efficacy Surveys (6–17)

- **95%** Confidence Level
- **5%** Margin of Error

Age Distribution

- **50%** ▶ 6–11
- **50%** ▶ 12–17

Structured representation ensured across:

- Age
- Gender
- Displacement
- Disability
- Location

Target Oblasts

- Hromada Selection ▶ School Identification ▶ Security & Accessibility Check ▶ School Managers Contacted ▶ Parents & Children Informed ▶ Consent & Assent

15 General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). <https://gdpr-info.eu/>

16 General British Overseas NGOs for Development (BOND). Evidence Principles. 2018.

Sampling framework and participant selection

Sampling and implementation approaches were tailored by method. Purposive sampling was applied for KIIs, FGDs, and storytelling activities to ensure inclusion of displaced and at-risk children and to capture diverse perspectives across age groups, genders, displacement statuses, disability statuses, learning modalities, and geographic contexts. For the quantitative component, self-efficacy surveys with children aged 6–17 applied a stratified sampling approach, designed to achieve a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error at the aggregate level, while ensuring structured representation across key characteristics, including age, gender, displacement status, disability status, and geographic location, as feasible within each site. Surveys were evenly distributed across two age cohorts, with half administered to children aged 6–11 and half to adolescents aged 12–17, as well as locations, enabling age-disaggregated analysis of wellbeing, self-efficacy, and learning-related outcomes. The overall sampling frame and site selection were developed and refined through a stepwise process led by Scruples' field coordinators in close coordination with NRC Education managers. Field coordinators first identified target oblasts and hromadas, after which specific schools were selected based on accessibility, security conditions, and their relevance for potential future NRC education support. The schools included in the assessment were not NRC-supported at the time of data collection but were schools that NRC was interested in supporting should contextual conditions allow.

Following site selection, field coordinators identified contact information for school managers through local administrations or education departments. School managers were then contacted by the study team and provided with clear information on the research objectives, ethical considerations, and participant selection criteria. With the support of school management, the study team subsequently reached out to children and parents/caregivers to invite participation. Parents and caregivers were contacted through school administrations to support informed consent processes and coordination of participation.

For surveys, data collection modalities varied based on children's learning arrangements. For children attending school in person or under hybrid modalities, surveys were administered with the support of teachers in school settings. For children studying remotely, telephone-based surveys (CATI) were conducted to ensure inclusion while maintaining safety and accessibility. Surveys were administered in Ukrainian by trained enumerators under the supervision of senior researchers, with additional explanation or assisted administration provided where needed, particularly for younger children and children with disabilities.

FGDs were conducted with children aged 12–17 and parents/caregivers. To ensure inclusion of children from multiple schools within the same oblast but across different hromadas, FGDs with children were conducted online. Online FGDs were designed to be child-friendly and age-appropriate, incorporating interactive elements and light gaming-based activities to support engagement, attention, and active participation in a virtual environment. Group composition was age-appropriate and gender-sensitive, and gender-segregated discussions were used where appropriate to support safe participation and discussion of sensitive topics.

Storytelling activities were conducted with children aged 6–11 and with children with disabilities. Given the younger age group, storytelling activities were conducted primarily in person using child-friendly, play-based methodologies to support expression and comfort. Online storytelling sessions were conducted only with children with disabilities who, together with their parents/caregivers, requested remote participation due to heightened security concerns related to ongoing shelling or due to physical mobility constraints or their preference in feeling comfortable and safe. All storytelling activities were conducted exclusively by senior researchers with expertise in child protection and child-friendly methodologies to ensure age-appropriate, safe, and inclusive engagement.

Participation across all methods was voluntary. Informed consent from parents/caregivers and assent from children were obtained prior to engagement, and participants could decline to answer any question or withdraw at any time without consequence. Refusals were respected without follow-up or pressure, and no reasons for refusal were recorded. Where refusals or withdrawals occurred, replacement participants were identified using the same method-specific criteria, purposive criteria for KIIs, FGDs, and storytelling activities, and the relevant strata for surveys, to maintain balance across age, gender, displacement status, disability status, and geographic location, while upholding safeguarding, confidentiality, and "Do No Harm" principles.

2.1.1 Desk Review

As a foundational step in the assessment, the assessment conducted an extensive desk review prior to the design of data collection tools and the planning of fieldwork. This process was essential to ground the assessment in existing evidence, strengthen methodological coherence, and ensure alignment with the Terms of Reference (ToR). In total, 32 documents were reviewed, including strategic frameworks, assessment reports, research studies, Education Cluster meeting minutes, strategies and plans, and evidence briefs related to education, child wellbeing, and displacement in Ukraine.

The desk review served multiple purposes. First of all, it informed the development of the assessment matrix by refining the core research questions and ensuring consistency with NRC's strategic priorities. It also guided the design of qualitative and quantitative data collection tools by identifying key evidence gaps requiring further exploration through KIIs, FGDs, storytelling methods, and self-efficacy surveys. It also ensured contextual relevance by incorporating lessons learned and analytical insights from prior studies into the overall assessment methodology. Information extracted from reviewed documents was systematically documented to support verification and triangulation during the analysis phase, while informational gaps that were identified during the desk review were elaborated through primary data collection.

The review focused on several interrelated thematic areas. These included the extent of learning loss resulting from disrupted access to formal education, particularly gaps in foundational literacy and numeracy skills and existing efforts to support learning recovery. It also examined children's psychosocial wellbeing, with attention to emotional distress, exposure to trauma, social connectedness, peer relationships, and perceptions of safety in learning environments. Access and inclusion constituted another key focus, exploring patterns of participation in education among internally displaced children, returnees, and host community children, with particular emphasis on barriers faced by children with disabilities and other marginalised groups, including Roma children. In addition, the desk review examined protection-sensitive education approaches, including the integration of psychosocial support, child safeguarding, and conflict-sensitive practices within education settings, as well as the role of caregivers, community educators, and protection actors in supporting children's learning and wellbeing.

Documents reviewed included, but were not limited to, NRC's country strategy and education strategy, recent assessments and research conducted in Ukraine by governmental and non-governmental actors on the impact of the war on children's education and psychosocial wellbeing, and global and context-specific evidence examining the relationship between children's wellbeing and learning outcomes. This body of literature informed the conceptual framing of the assessment, particularly the analytical linkages between wellbeing domains, self-efficacy, and educational engagement.

By synthesising findings across these sources, the desk review directly informed the development of data collection tools, ensuring that primary data collection addressed priority information gaps not sufficiently covered by existing evidence. For example, limited disaggregated data on how psychosocial distress affects learning motivation across different age groups and displacement contexts shaped the inclusion of relevant questions into the tools. Similarly, gaps in evidence on caregiver support and inclusive education practices informed the design of FGDs with parents/caregivers and KIIs with teachers and school counsellors.

Triangulation was embedded throughout the assessment design. Findings from the desk review were systematically cross-checked against primary data collected from children, caregivers, educators, and institutional stakeholders to validate emerging trends and identify convergences or discrepancies between documented evidence and lived experiences.

The desk review was treated as an ongoing process rather than a one-off exercise. Additional relevant documents were reviewed throughout the assessment period to ensure that the analysis remained current and responsive to the evolving context. While the desk review provided a strong evidence base, gaps in up-to-date, disaggregated data, particularly related to learning loss and psychosocial wellbeing in frontline and recently affected areas, reinforced the importance of primary data collection to complement existing knowledge and strengthen the evidence base for NRC's education programming and advocacy.

2.1.2 Training of Youth Facilitators and Validation Workshops

Scruples Research applied a participatory and adaptive study design that places communities, and particularly children and youth, at the centre of shaping the processes that directly affect them. This approach ensured that youth are not only engaged as respondents but also as active facilitators, contributing to community-level knowledge generation and strengthening the sustainability of outcomes through civil society engagement and future programming.

As part of the previous “*Youth Needs Assessment*¹⁷” conducted for NRC Ukraine by Scruples, *eight youth facilitators in each target region were trained* to support the research process. These youth facilitators, under the guidance of a senior Scruples researcher, led *FGDs* with children aged 12–17. Their involvement ensured peer-to-peer engagement, fostering more open and relatable discussions. However, youth facilitators were not directly involved in activities with children aged 6–11, as this younger age group requires advanced technical skills and child-centred approaches (such as play-based methods and games). These activities will be conducted exclusively by Scruples’ senior researchers with expertise in child protection and child-friendly research methodologies.

Before fieldwork begins, the youth facilitators received an additional round of training covering the following topics:

Training Agenda
Introduction to the assessment and role of youth facilitators
Principles of research with children, child safeguarding
Ethical principles, and community engagement
Effective facilitation skills and managing group dynamics
Conflict resolution, probing, and use of open-ended questions
Data protection, informed consent and assent, and confidentiality
Familiarisation with FGD tools and field simulations
Field safety, communication, and reporting Protocols

Table 1 Youth Facilitator Training

Youth facilitators also engaged in the *validation and sense-making process*. Following the initial data analysis, Scruples organised validation workshops with youth participants, including the trained facilitators. These workshops used a *Thematic Clustering and Sense-Making* approach, where preliminary findings were presented, clustered into key themes, and collaboratively interpreted. By involving youth in both implementation and validation, this participatory approach led to deeper insights, actionable recommendations, and outcomes that reflect diverse perspectives. It also built the capacity of young facilitators to engage in future research and community initiatives, strengthening local ownership and sustainability.

2.1.3 Key Informant Interviews

The KIIs were guided by semi-structured interview protocols, focusing on the perspectives of key stakeholders involved in, or directly knowledgeable about, children’s education and psychosocial wellbeing in the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine. In total, approximately 20 KIIs were conducted to capture a diverse range of internal and external perspectives on learning loss, wellbeing needs, and system-level responses within the Education sector. Each KII followed a semi-structured guide consisting of 10–12 open-ended questions and

17 NRC Ukraine, Youth Needs Assessment, 19 June 2025, Ukraine. <https://www.nrc.no/resources/reports/youth-needs-assessment-in-ukraine>

lasted approximately 45 minutes. Interview guides were tailored to the roles and expertise of each respondent group to ensure relevance and depth, while maintaining consistency across core thematic areas.

A purposive sampling approach was applied to ensure balanced representation across geographic locations, gender, and professional roles, enabling the assessment to capture both strategic and operational insights. Informants were selected based on their institutional responsibilities, decision-making roles, and direct engagement with education delivery, coordination, or support services for children. This approach ensured inclusion of perspectives from policy, coordination, programme implementation, and school levels, while capturing variations across regions.

Key informants included internal NRC Education programme team members; external education actors such as Education Cluster representatives, I/NGOs, and CSOs working in education; national and local education authorities, and education practitioners, including teachers and school counsellors. This diversity of respondents enabled triangulation between institutional, coordination-level, and frontline perspectives. Please refer to “Annex 3” for the detailed list of KIIs.

While core themes, such as learning loss in literacy and numeracy, children’s psychosocial wellbeing, and the interaction between wellbeing and learning outcomes, were consistently explored across all interviews, questions were adapted according to respondents’ areas of expertise. For example, national and local authorities provided insights into education policies, governance challenges, and system-level constraints under wartime conditions; Education Cluster members and humanitarian actors reflected on coordination mechanisms, service gaps, and response priorities; and teachers and school-based professionals shared grounded observations on classroom-level learning disruptions, children’s emotional and behavioural challenges, and practical strategies used to support students’ learning and wellbeing.

The KIIs aimed to generate in-depth insights across several key areas, including:

- Observed patterns and drivers of learning loss from the perspective of those implementing, supervising, or supporting education programmes;
- Stakeholder perceptions of how the full-scale invasion has affected children’s psychosocial wellbeing, including emotional distress, social connectedness, and sense of safety;
- Barriers, enabling factors, and regional variations influencing both learning outcomes and wellbeing;
- Existing systems, policies, programmes, and resource gaps at national, regional, and school levels; and
- Evidence to inform the adaptation of NRC’s education, PSS, and teacher support programming, including coordination and policy-related implications.

Sampling and analysis were further informed by a contribution analysis approach, enabling the assessment to examine how different actors, interventions, and contextual factors contribute to observed outcomes related to children’s learning and wellbeing. This approach strengthened triangulation between internal NRC perspectives, external stakeholder insights, and primary data collected from children and caregivers.

All KIIs were conducted by senior qualitative researchers with extensive experience in humanitarian and education-focused research. Interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent and transcribed verbatim to support rigorous qualitative analysis. In cases where recording was not feasible, detailed notes were taken to ensure accuracy and completeness. KII findings were triangulated with data from FGDs, surveys, storytelling activities, and the desk review to strengthen the validity and depth of the assessment findings.

2.1.4 Focus Group Discussions

FGDs were guided by semi-structured discussion guides with open-ended questions and focused on capturing in-depth perspectives on children’s learning experiences, psychosocial wellbeing, and the interaction between the two. In total, 12 FGDs were conducted across the six targeted oblasts, Khersonska, Mykolaivska, Sumska, Dnipropetrovska, Zaporizka, and Kharkivska, to ensure geographic diversity and representation of contexts affected by displacement, insecurity, and ongoing disruption to education.

No.	Target Group	Age Group	No. of FGDs	Location
1	Children	12-17	1	Khersonska
2	Parents/Caregivers	Adults	1	
3	Children	12-17	1	Mykolaivska
4	Parents/Caregivers	Adults	1	
5	Children	12-17	1	Sumska
6	Parents/Caregivers	Adults	1	
7	Children	12-17	1	Dnipropetrovska
8	Parents/Caregivers	Adults	1	
9	Children	12-17	1	Zaporizka
10	Parents/Caregivers	Adults	1	
11	Children	12-17	1	Kharkivska
12	Parents/Caregivers	Adults	1	

Table 2 List of FGDs.

In each location, two FGDs were conducted: one mixed-gender FGD with girls and boys aged 12–17, and one FGD with parents and caregivers of children aged 6–17. This structure enabled the assessment to capture both adolescents’ direct perspectives and caregivers’ complementary insights into children’s learning challenges, psychosocial wellbeing, coping mechanisms, and support needs across different age groups. Each FGD included 6–8 participants and was guided by 10–12 semi-structured, open-ended questions, allowing for thematic consistency while remaining responsive to emerging issues during discussions.

FGDs with children aged 12–17 explored key themes including experiences of learning disruption and learning loss; confidence, motivation, and self-efficacy in learning across subjects; emotional distress and stressors related to displacement and insecurity; peer relationships and social connectedness; perceptions of safety in learning environments; and the role of teachers, parents, and schools in supporting both learning and wellbeing. FGDs with parents and caregivers focused on observations of children’s learning progress and emotional wellbeing, household-level stressors, parental support strategies for learning recovery, and perceived gaps in education and psychosocial support services. Caregiver discussions were structured to capture age-differentiated perspectives, ensuring that variations between younger (6–11) and older (12–17) children were reflected in the analysis.

The decision not to conduct FGDs directly with children aged 6–11 was deliberate and grounded in ethical, methodological, and contextual considerations. Children in this age group have limited capacity to articulate complex experiences related to wellbeing and learning outcomes within a group discussion format. In addition, safety and security risks, particularly in locations exposed to ongoing shelling and attacks, made convening FGDs with younger children inappropriate. Practical considerations, including shorter attention spans and the limited effectiveness of online FGDs for this age group, further informed this decision. Instead, younger children’s perspectives were captured through age-appropriate storytelling activities, and these findings were triangulated with FGDs conducted with parents and caregivers to provide complementary insights into children’s wellbeing and learning challenges.

2.1.5 Self-Efficacy Surveys

Self-efficacy surveys were administered to capture a broad, quantifiable picture of children’s psychosocial wellbeing and learning outcomes. This component complemented FGDs, KIIs, and storytelling activities by providing measurable insights into children’s confidence, motivation, and perceived ability to engage in learning and manage everyday challenges.

302 self-efficacy surveys were conducted with children aged 6–17 attending NRC-supported learning spaces across the North, East, and South of Ukraine, with geographic coverage in Khersonska, Mykolaivska, Sumska, Dnipropetrovska, Zaporizka, and Kharkivska oblasts. Surveys were evenly distributed across two age cohorts, with half administered to children aged 6–11 and half to adolescents aged 12–17, enabling age-disaggregated analysis.

Oblast	No. of Surveys
Khersonska	26
Kharkivska	25
Dnipropetrovska	25
Zaporizka	26
Mykolaivska	25
Sumska	26
TOTAL	153

Table 3 List of Surveys Conducted with Children Aged 6-11

Oblast	No. of Surveys
Mykolaivska	25
Khersonska	24
Dnipropetrovska	23
Kharkivska	26
Zaporizka	26
Sumska	25
TOTAL	149

Table 4 List of Surveys Conducted with Children Aged 12-17

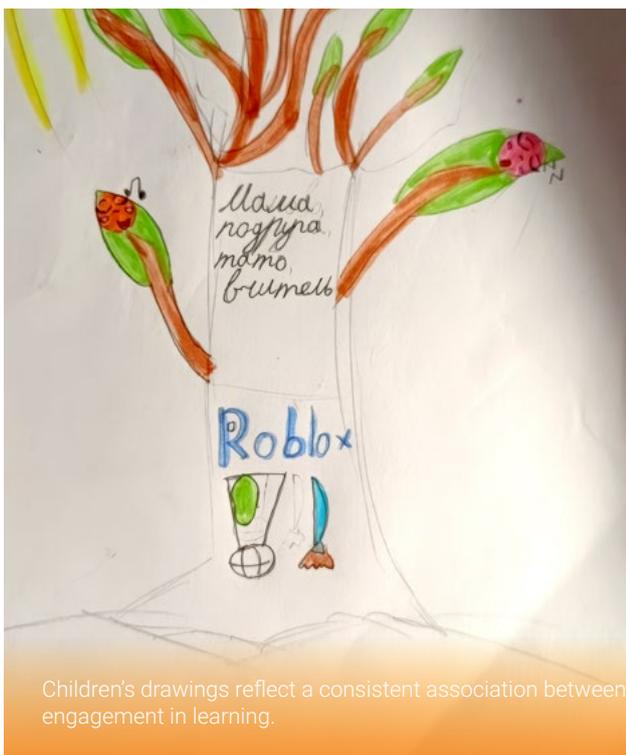
Self-efficacy surveys were selected as a child-appropriate and non-intrusive method for assessing wellbeing and learning-related confidence. Rather than exploring potentially distressing experiences, the surveys focused on children’s own perceptions of their abilities, motivation, and confidence in managing learning tasks. This strengths-based approach allowed children to reflect on their needs and capacities in a safe and supportive manner, while minimising the risk of harm or emotional distress. Survey tools were carefully adapted to age, language, and local context to ensure accessibility for younger children and relevance for adolescents.

A stratified sampling approach was employed to ensure statistical reliability and representation across key demographic variables. Children were stratified by age group (6–11 and 12–17), gender, displacement status, and geographic location. This approach supported systematic coverage of subgroups within the overall sample, enabled disaggregation of findings, and facilitated identification of regional and group-specific trends. The sample size was calculated to meet a 95% confidence level with a ±5% margin of error for the defined study population, allowing for reliable estimation of patterns within the surveyed group. These statistical thresholds were applied within a structured but context-specific sampling frame, shaped by security constraints, access considerations, and the study’s focus on locations and schools NRC considers to implement its education programming. As a result, while probability principles informed the sample design, the survey was not intended to produce nationally representative estimates. Instead, findings provide robust, indicative insights into trends, differences, and relationships among children in the study locations by its proximity to the frontline areas.

Survey data collection was conducted digitally using Kobo Toolbox, supporting secure data storage, confidentiality, and timely analysis. Enumerators administering the surveys were trained in child-sensitive and trauma-informed approaches and adhered to strict ethical and safeguarding protocols. Informed consent from parents/caregivers and assent from children were obtained prior to participation, and surveys were administered in safe, child-friendly environments that ensured privacy and comfort.

By embedding self-efficacy surveys within a trauma-informed and child-centred framework, the assessment generated robust quantitative data that strengthened understanding of how children’s wellbeing, self-perceptions, and learning outcomes intersect. Survey findings were triangulated with qualitative data from FGDs, KIIs,

and storytelling activities to inform evidence-based recommendations, supporting NRC in adapting education and psychosocial support programming to be more responsive, inclusive, and effective for displacement-affected children.



Children's drawings reflect a consistent association between emotional safety, relational support, and meaningful engagement in learning.

2.1.6 Storytelling

Storytelling activities were used to capture the perspectives of younger children and marginalised groups whose experiences are often difficult to elicit through conventional discussion-based approaches. In total, 10 storytelling activities were conducted as part of the assessment. Six sessions were implemented with children aged 6–11 across the six target oblasts, Khersonska, Mykolaivska, Sumska, Dnipropetrovska, Zaporizka, and Kharkivska, while an additional four storytelling activities were conducted with children with disabilities, including two sessions with children aged 6–11 and two with adolescents aged 12–17.

No.	Target Group	Age Group	No. of Storytelling	Location
1	Younger children	6-11	8	Khersonska Mykolaivska Sumska Dnipropetrovska Zaporizka Kharkivska
2	Younger children	6-11		
3	Younger children	6-11		
4	Younger children	6-11		
5	Younger children	6-11		
6	Younger children	6-11		
7	Children with disabilities	6-11 12-17	2	Khersonska Mykolaivska Sumska Dnipropetrovska Zaporizka Kharkivska

Table 5 List of Storytelling

Storytelling was selected as a child-centred and inclusive method that allows children to express their experiences, emotions, and perspectives through narrative, play, drawing, and other creative techniques, rather than relying solely on verbal explanation or abstract reasoning. This approach is particularly appropriate for children aged 6–11, who may have limited capacity to articulate complex links between wellbeing, learning challenges, and educational disruption in structured group discussions. It is also more accessible for children with disabilities, whose communication needs and preferences may not be adequately accommodated through standard FGDs or surveys.

The use of storytelling also reflected ethical and contextual considerations. Given the prevailing safety and security situation in the target locations, convening FGDs with younger children was found risky, and online FGDs were assessed as unsuitable due to shorter attention spans and limited engagement. In addition, parents and caregivers were found reluctant to allow younger children to participate in group discussions. Storytelling, therefore, provided a safer, more flexible, and age-appropriate alternative that prioritised children’s comfort, agency, and protection.

Storytelling sessions were designed to create a safe and supportive environment in which children could express their views on their daily lives, learning experiences, emotional well-being, feelings of safety, and sources of stress or support. Facilitators used open-ended prompts and creative tools to encourage expression without directing or influencing children’s responses. Sessions were facilitated by senior researchers with expertise in child protection, inclusive research practices, and trauma-informed approaches, ensuring that activities were conducted ethically and sensitively.

The objectives of the storytelling activities were to capture children’s own perspectives on well-being and learning in ways that respect their developmental stage; provide a meaningful channel for disadvantaged and marginalised children, including children with disabilities, to share experiences that may otherwise remain underrepresented; and generate rich qualitative data that complements and deepens insights obtained through FGDs, KIIs, and self-efficacy surveys. Findings from storytelling activities were triangulated with data from

parents and caregivers, educators, and institutional stakeholders to build a holistic understanding of children's learning and psychosocial needs.

By integrating storytelling into the assessment design, the research team ensured that the voices of younger children and marginalised groups were included in an ethical, creative, and age-appropriate manner. This approach strengthened the inclusivity and depth of the assessment and enhanced the validity of findings related to the relationship between children's well-being and learning outcomes.

2.2 Limitations

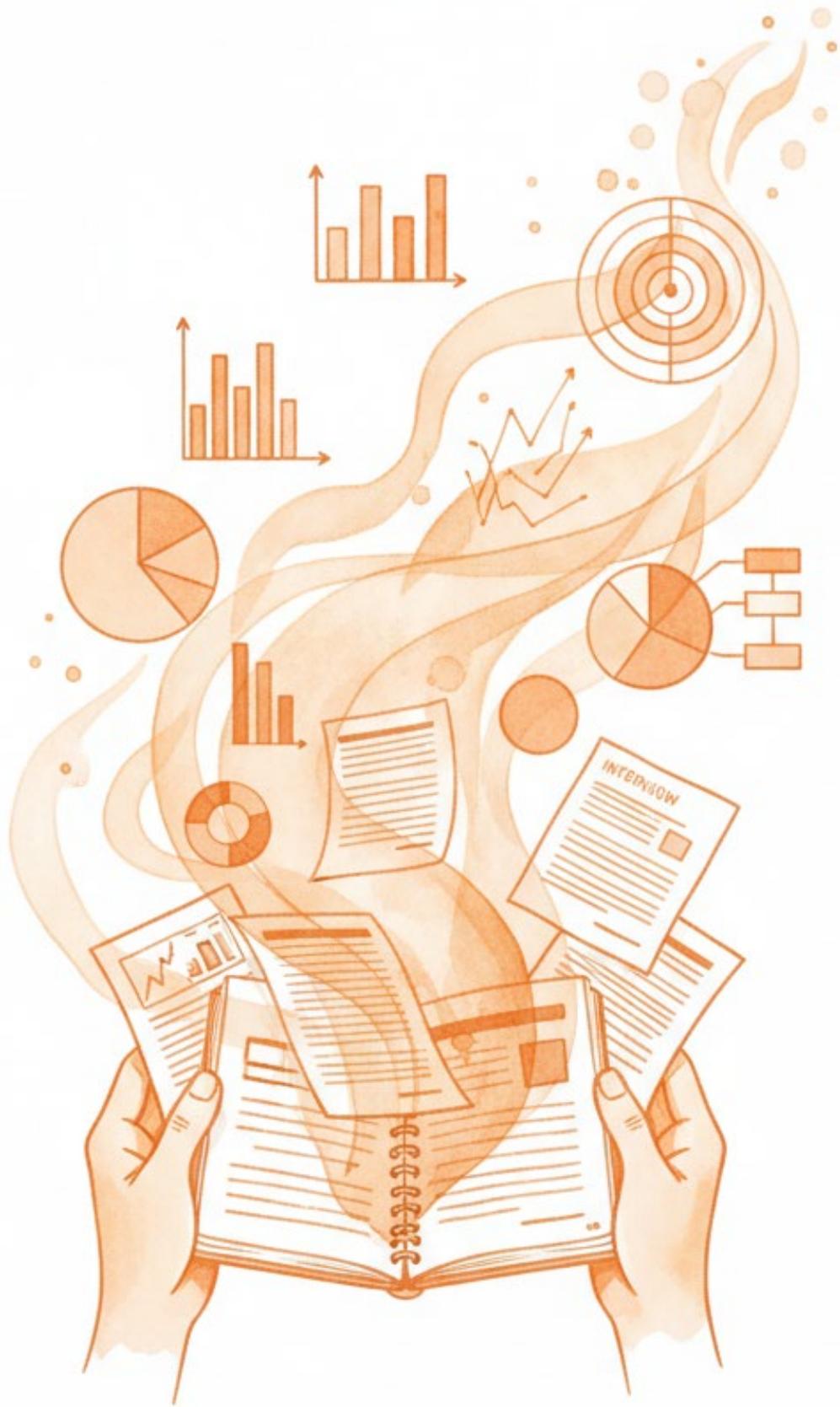
Security and Modality Constraints for FGDs with Children: Due to safety and security risks in several target locations, FGDs with children were conducted online rather than in person. While in-person engagement is generally preferable for building rapport, particularly with children, the assessment team adapted the FGD tools to be child-friendly and interactive in an online format. Sessions incorporated multiple age-appropriate engagement techniques and digital tools to sustain attention and encourage participation. Senior researchers and trained youth facilitators closely monitored group dynamics and participant wellbeing throughout the sessions. Although the online modality may have reduced opportunities to observe non-verbal interaction and spontaneous peer dynamics, the discussions generated consistent and detailed insights into children's shared experiences, perceptions, and priorities.¹⁸ The findings derived from FGDs are therefore well suited to informing programmatic design, prioritisation, and strategic planning, while offering more limited insight into micro-level interactional behaviours that would require sustained in-person observation.

Challenges in School Identification and Participant Recruitment: During the recruitment phase, the assessment team encountered difficulties accessing accurate contact information for a significant number of schools, as records within national systems were often outdated or incorrect. To address this, researchers proactively visited local education departments and schools to obtain updated contact details and to engage directly with school management. This additional step enabled effective coordination and recruitment of participants, but it extended the time required for field preparation and may have constrained the pool of schools initially considered for inclusion. While recruitment constraints may have affected the timeline and resulted in some delays, the schools in necessary locations as per their proximity to the frontline were included without any issues. Therefore, findings provide robust indicative insights for programme design across the selected locations and informative for the programme design, prioritisation, and comparative analysis across these locations.

Limited Access to Some Key Informants: Engaging certain key informants, particularly some of the representatives of international and national non-governmental organisations and governmental institutions, proved challenging due to limited responsiveness. The assessment team conducted multiple follow-ups through email and phone communication to facilitate participation. When informants remained inaccessible, the team replaced the informant in close coordination with the NRC Ukraine team. Gaps in key informant participation may have reduced representation of certain institutional perspectives; however, triangulation with school-level actors, caregivers, and children ensured that core operational and experiential insights were sufficiently captured to guide programming decisions.

Despite these limitations, the use of multiple data collection methods and triangulation across KIIs, FGDs, self-efficacy surveys, storytelling activities, and desk review findings strengthened the overall robustness of the assessment. The mitigation measures applied ensured that key patterns and trends related to children's wellbeing and learning outcomes were consistently captured across regions and stakeholder groups.

¹⁸ Please note that Scruples' digital data collection tools previously received approval by the ethics committee of the Overseas Development Institute (ODI).



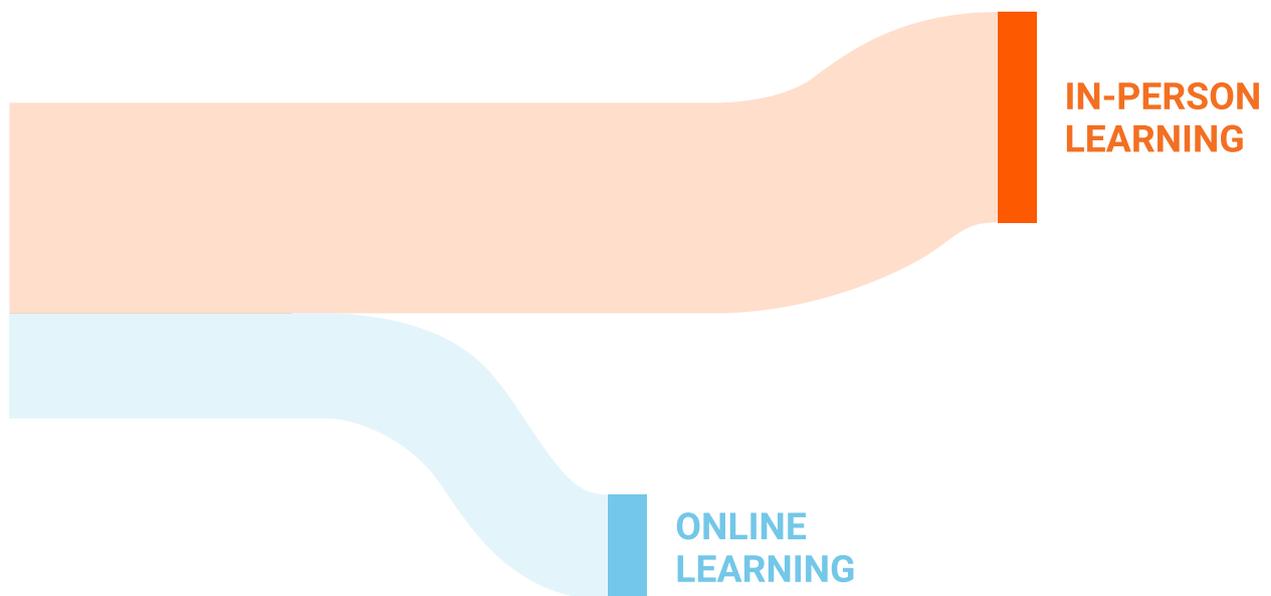
Insights gathered in the field were systematically analysed and translated into the evidence presented in the following section.



Patterns emerging from the data reveal how emotional wellbeing, learning engagement, and support structures are interconnected in shaping children's educational experiences.

3. Findings

3.1 Children’s Current Engagement with the School



Learning Engagement Spectrum

Children’s engagement with schooling during the full-scale invasion remained characterised by persistence rather than stability. Survey findings, FGDs with adolescents (12-17), and KIIs with younger children (6-11) and children with disabilities, consistently showed that most children continued to participate in learning, yet the depth, continuity, and quality of that engagement varied significantly by age, location, and learning modality. Engagement was therefore not uniform, but shaped by the interaction between children’s willingness to learn which is the result of children’s well-being and the structural conditions under which learning took place.

Taken together, these patterns have direct implications for education programming. They indicate that sustaining enrolment alone is insufficient to ensure meaningful learning, and that programme effectiveness depends on aligning modality choice, intensity of support, and teaching approaches with children’s emotional readiness and learning conditions. In practice, these points to the need to prioritise in-person or group-based modalities where feasible, adapt instructional intensity during periods of disruption, and ensure that teachers have the capacity and time to support emotional regulation alongside academic instruction. It also highlights the importance of reducing reliance on household-mediated learning, which can be supported by the UN Agencies, I/NGOs, and local CSOs through their tailored informal education activities and ensuring that learning recovery approaches explicitly address confidence, continuity, and relational support rather than content acceleration alone.

Perceived confidence

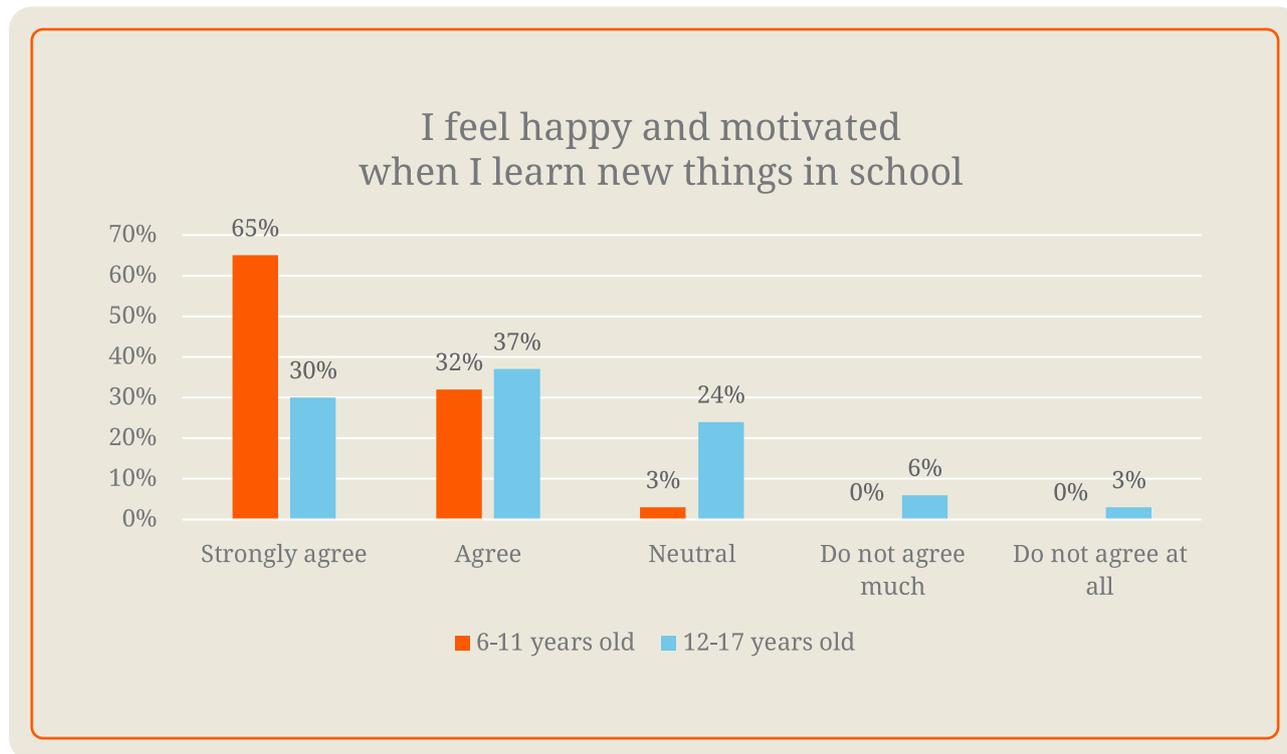


Table 6 Children feeling happy and motivated learning new things in school

Among younger children (6–11), engagement with schooling was strongly and positively anchored in emotional experience. Survey findings showed that almost all younger children associated learning with positive emotions: 65% strongly agreed and a further 32% agreed that they felt happy and motivated when learning new things at school, leaving only a small minority expressing uncertainty. These responses indicated children’s positive relationship with learning, improving their emotional well-being as well.

Meanwhile, older children’s (12–17) engagement with learning remained closely tied to emotional experience rather than academic self-assessment. Most of the adolescents continued to associate learning with positive motivation: 67% reported feeling happy and motivated when learning new things at school with 30% strongly agreed and 37% agreed, showing a positive engagement with learning activities. At the same time, 24% selected a neutral position, suggesting ambivalence rather than disengagement, while only 9% expressed low agreement. This distribution indicated that, for most adolescents, learning retained motivational value, even as emotional and contextual factors increasingly influenced how consistently this motivation translated into active participation.

A comprehensive UNICEF–UNESCO study on mental health and psychosocial support in Ukraine’s education system documented that widespread symptoms of anxiety, stress, sleep disturbance, and emotional exhaustion among school-aged children, particularly in those frontline areas.¹⁹ Prolonged exposure to insecurity directly impairs attention, memory, and emotional regulation, learning difficulties are closely linked to psychosocial strain rather than lack of motivation. As a result, UN representatives reported previous techniques not being sufficient for the improvement of children’s wellbeing as accumulated stress cannot be handles with basic relaxation and breathing exercises anymore.

Findings showed a similar pattern with adolescents overwhelmingly recognising the mood as a central condition for learning, highlighting that engagement was not only a cognitive process but also an emotional one. When asked whether learning became easier when they felt positive or in a good mood, 87% of adolescents

19 UNESCO, Mental health and psychosocial support in Ukrainian education - Comprehensive study of the service system, 22 May 2025, Ukraine. <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-ukrainian-education-comprehensive-study-service-system-enuk>

directly linked emotional well-being with learning effectiveness with 49% strongly agreed and 38% agreed. Only 5% expressed disagreement, while 8% selected the neutral midpoint. These FGDs with adolescents across multiple oblasts provided important context for this pattern. They described remaining enrolled and present in school but experiencing fluctuating levels of engagement depending on emotional state, fatigue, and stress. Many explained that when they felt anxious, exhausted, or unsettled, learning felt significantly harder, even if they wanted to engage. Conversely, when they felt calm or supported, they were more able to concentrate and participate meaningfully.

“If my head is not calm, I can’t really learn, even if I try.”
(Boy, 12-17 years, FGD, Kharkivska)

Reinforced by the KIIs with teachers and counsellors adolescents’ participation and motivation were strongly influenced by emotional readiness. Teachers observed that students often appeared attentive and compliant, but their ability to absorb new material varied significantly depending on mood and stress levels. Several teachers described spending increasing amounts of time stabilising students emotionally before learning could effectively begin, particularly after disrupted nights or stressful events.

Importantly, these findings suggested that older children’s engagement with school was not undermined by a lack of motivation or interest in learning. Instead, engagement became conditional, shaped by emotional well-being and the broader environment in which learning took place. Adolescents did not disengage from school; rather, their capacity to benefit from learning fluctuated in response to how safe, calm, and supported they felt at the time. Supported by the caregivers in Kharkivska²⁰ and Zaporizka oblasts²¹, children often asked for reassurance when completing tasks and expressed worry about “*getting things wrong*,” even when they remained willing to try. In contrast, in Mykolaivska oblast²², particularly in hromadas where in-person schooling was more consistent during the data collection period, caregivers and teachers reported more stable learning routines that supported children’s confidence, even when gaps remained.

Among older children (12–17), overall confidence levels were slightly higher, yet FGDs revealed sharper divergence by location. Adolescents in Kharkivska and Zaporizka oblast described remaining present in lessons while feeling disconnected from academic progress, particularly in cumulative subjects such as mathematics and physics. In Mykolaivska and Dnipropetrovska²³ oblasts, adolescents more frequently described being able to “*follow the programme*,” which teachers attributed to fewer modality shifts and more predictable schedules.

Stakeholders across oblasts consistently emphasised that reduced confidence reflected structural learning conditions rather than diminished effort. Repeated interruptions and shortened instructional time undermine skill consolidation, leading children to doubt their academic competence even when engagement remains high.²⁴

“They want to learn, but after so many interruptions they are no longer sure they understand.”
(KII, Counsellor, School, Zaporizka)

This showed that children’s learning confidence was not primarily undermined by lack of motivation, but by emotional strain and cumulative disruption. Confidence declined as learning gaps widened, particularly in sequential subjects such as mathematics. Adolescents remained willing to engage, but their ability to benefit from learning fluctuated with stress and instability. This highlighted the need for learning recovery approaches that rebuild confidence gradually rather than accelerate content delivery alone. It also pointed to the importance of combining academic catch-up with emotional regulation and supportive feedback.

Homework and reliance on adult support

Homework functioned as a critical filter determining whether engagement extended beyond attendance, with clear variation by age and location. Among younger children (6–11), 56% reported that homework was difficult without help. This challenge was most acute in hromadas located approximately 30–50 km from frontline, in

20 Chuhivska hromada.

21 Nooleksandrivska and Kushuhumska hromadas.

22 Mykolaivska, Galitsynivska and Voznesenska hromadas.

23 Slavhorods’ka and Verkhivtsevs’ka hromadas.

24 Finn Church Aid, Education Needs Assessment: Chernihiv, Kharkiv, Poltava Regions, November-December 2024, Ukraine.

Sumska and Kharkivska oblasts, where 60% of younger children reported difficulty completing homework independently. Caregiver FGDs in these locations highlighted that intermittent disruptions prevented children from developing consistent study routines, while not triggering the intensive adaptations observed in chronically affected frontline hromadas.

Those hromadas close to the frontline in Sumska oblast²⁵, caregivers described spending significant time re-explaining lessons, often without clear guidance from schools due to shortened or cancelled classes. In contrast, caregivers in Kharkivska oblast²⁶ reported higher expectations from schools for independent homework completion, which placed additional strain on families when lessons were disrupted.

Among older children (12–17), reliance on adult or external support was reported as 67% highlighting difficulty in completing homework without help, rising to 75% in the same 30–50 km band to the frontline. Adolescents in these locations described struggling to manage assignments independently after interrupted classes, while caregivers reported increased stress and conflict at home as academic demands intensified along with other responsibilities.

Teachers and education actors noted that online and hybrid modalities effectively transferred instructional responsibility to households, a dynamic that disproportionately affected families with limited time, digital access, or subject knowledge. According to Finn Church Aid, prolonged reliance on home-based support risks entrenching inequalities in learning outcomes, particularly for children in unstable learning environments.²⁷

*“Homework has moved into the home, but not every family can support it.”
(KII, Representative, NGO, Chernihivska)*

This demonstrated that homework increasingly determined whether learning extended beyond attendance. Disrupted instruction and modality shifts transferred learning responsibility from schools to households. This amplified inequities for families with limited time, capacity, or resources, especially in frontline-adjacent hromadas. These findings pointed to the need to reduce homework burden during disruption periods. They also highlighted the importance of clearer guidance and structured catch-up support that does not rely heavily on caregiver mediation.

Peer and teacher interaction

Peer and teacher interaction played a critical role in shaping whether children’s engagement translated into meaningful participation, particularly for older children (12–17). Survey findings showed that while a majority of younger children (6–11) reported receiving help from friends when they did not understand something (74%), this support was less consistent among older children, where only 63% reported similar peer assistance. This decline was especially evident in those locations close to the frontline, highlighting how repeated interruptions and modality shifts reduced informal peer exchange.

Children in these locations described online and hybrid learning as limiting spontaneous interaction across oblasts, with lessons becoming more individualised and task focused. Older children noted that when learning moved online or alternated frequently between formats, asking peers for help felt more difficult or less immediate, increasing isolation for those who struggled academically. Caregivers reinforced this observation, particularly for adolescents, noting that children were less likely to discuss schoolwork with classmates outside formal lesson time.

Teachers and school administrators across Kharkivska, Zaporizka, and Chernihivska oblasts explained that hybrid classrooms instructional delivery by requiring teachers to simultaneously manage in-person and remote learning, resulting in fragmented instructional attention and reduced capacity for real-time monitoring of student engagement and comprehension. This modality limited opportunities for timely clarification, peer interaction, and collective problem-solving, which are particularly critical for older students facing increased curricular complexity and cumulative learning demands. This reduced opportunities for clarification and collective problem-solving, which are especially important for older students facing cumulative learning demands.

25 Okhtyrska and Konotopaska hromadas.

26 Chuhivivska hromada.

27 Finn Church Aid, Education Needs Assessment: Chernihiv, Kharkiv, Poltava Regions, November-December 2024, Ukraine.

According to the Kyiv School of Economics (KSE), reduced interaction in mixed-modality learning environments is associated with weaker engagement and lower perceived academic support, particularly among older pupils.²⁸

*“When lessons are online, children stop helping each other the way they used to.”
(KII, Teacher, School, Kharkivska)*

This showed that peer interaction and teacher availability were central to meaningful engagement, particularly for older children. Online and hybrid modalities reduced informal peer exchange and constrained teachers’ ability to monitor understanding. As a result, learning difficulties were more likely to go unnoticed or unresolved. This underscored the value of prioritising interactive learning environments where peer support and timely feedback were possible. It also pointed to the need to support teachers in managing engagement across modalities.

Modality and subject prioritisation

Learning modality consistently shaped the depth of children’s engagement across all assessed oblasts. Offline learning was described by children, caregivers, and stakeholders as the most supportive format for sustained engagement, particularly reported in Mykolaivska and Dnipropetrovska oblasts²⁹, where schooling was more stable compared to other study locations close to the frontline. In these locations, children reported clearer explanations, easier opportunities to ask questions, and stronger relational connection with teachers, all of which supported active participation.

*“At school, you understand faster because you can ask right away.”
(Girl, 12-17 years, FGD, Mykolaivska)*

According to all interviewed teachers, school counsellors and those I/NGOs representatives, learning modality has been a decisive factor shaping the quality of and engagement with the education for children. While access to education has largely been maintained, stakeholders stress that how learning is delivered fundamentally determines whether engagement is meaningful or merely procedural. Among these stakeholders, there was a strong consensus that offline, in-person learning, even when conducted in shelters, supports higher engagement than fully online provision. According to 83% of I/NGO representative and teachers, physical presence allows for emotional atonement, immediate feedback, and relational connection, which are critical for sustaining engagement under conditions of stress.

*“When children are physically present, you can see immediately when they are lost, scared, or tired, and you can react.”
(KII, Education Project Manager, INGO, Dnipro)
(KII, Counsellor, School, Mykolaivska)*

Fully online learning was reported to be the one with the lowest engagement and learning outcomes. Teachers described that students remained logged in while disengaging cognitively, keeping cameras off, multitasking, or treating lessons as background noise. Several teachers characterised online attendance as symbolic rather than substantive. Furthermore, according to I/NGOs representatives, particularly in the frontline areas, online learning often functions as a mechanism for maintaining administrative contact rather than facilitating learning, particularly when connectivity is unstable and children are emotionally overwhelmed.

*“They are online, but they are not with you.”
(KII, Education Project Manager, INGO, Dnipro)*

These findings are supported by VoxUkraine, estimating that that air-raid alerts result in the loss of approximately 10–20 full school days per academic year in heavily affected regions, with eastern and southern oblasts experiencing the highest disruption.³⁰ Rather than complete school closure, these repeated alerts fragment lessons,

28 Kyiv School of Economics, Perceptions by Pupils of Grades 4–7 of the Educational Process, September 2025, Ukraine.

29 Lavhorods’ka and Verkhivtsevs’ka hromadas.

30 VoxUkraine, Lost Lessons Due to Air Raid Alerts: How Many — and What Can Be Done?, 17 April 2025, Ukraine.

<https://voxukraine.org/en/lost-lessons-due-to-air-raid-alerts-how-many-and-what-can-be-done>

shorten instructional periods, and undermine continuity, reinforcing patterns of learning disruption described by children and teachers across the assessed locations.³¹

Children in Kharkivska, Sumska, and Zaporizka oblasts described online learning as requiring high levels of self-regulation, which many found difficult to sustain over time. FGDs with children in Kharkiv indicated that online lessons often resulted in passive participation, with children remaining logged in but struggling to maintain attention, particularly during longer sessions or after interruptions. Caregivers confirmed that online learning increased dependence on adult mediation, especially for younger children, and amplified fatigue for older children.

Shelter-based learning emerged as an intermediate modality. Children in Khersonska³² and Zaporizka oblasts described learning together in shelters as more engaging than online formats due to physical co-presence and peer contact. At the same time, caregivers, teachers and counsellors across oblasts noted that environmental conditions, noise, crowding, limited space, and poor ventilation, reduced concentration and increased irritability, limiting sustained engagement. Despite these constraints, shelter-based learning is consistently described as preferable to fully online learning, primarily because it restores human interaction and peer presence.

“In the shelter, children are safer, but they are not really comfortable. Their attention runs out very quickly.”

This demonstrated that learning modality strongly shaped engagement depth and comprehension. In-person and shelter-based learning supported relational connection and immediate clarification, even under constrained conditions. Fully online learning, combined with repeated interruptions, fragmented instructional time and reduced effective participation. These findings reinforced that access alone was insufficient to ensure learning. They pointed to the need to prioritise safe in-person provision where possible and adapt instruction for cognitively demanding subjects during disruption.

Engagement of children with disabilities

For children with disabilities, engagement was shaped by a pronounced gap between formal access to schooling and meaningful participation. Barriers to meaningful participation for children with disabilities were consistently identified as frequent disruptions and alarms, instability of learning routines, limited availability of individualised and adapted support, reduced opportunities for one-to-one attention, heavy reliance on caregiver mediation, and the constraints of learning modalities, particularly shelter-based and online learning, that are poorly adapted to children’s needs. These barriers interacted cumulatively, making engagement sensitive to even minor disruptions and undermining learning continuity despite formal enrolment. Teachers in Kharkivska, Zaporizka, and Khersonska oblasts consistently reported that frequent alarms and continuation of the classes in shelters rapidly undermined learning readiness for these children. Caregivers and teachers explained that disruptions were particularly destabilising for children with disabilities because changes in routine, transitions to shelters, and shortened lessons often led to distress, loss of focus, or withdrawal from learning activities. Caregivers described how even short disruptions could negate an entire day’s learning, making engagement fragile.

The, heightened insecurity has exacerbated pre-existing barriers by disrupting educational routines and limiting access to specialised and inclusive support services. An INGO representative which provides children with disabilities with informal education services noted that even minor instability disproportionately affects their engagement in education. Across FGDs with caregivers and KIIs with teachers, counsellors, inclusive education specialists, and representatives of I/NGOs and UN Agencies repeatedly highlighted the loss or inconsistency of individualised support, reduced time for one-to-one attention, and the absence of adapted approaches during emergency or shelter-based learning as key barriers to sustained participation. School teachers further cautioned that reduced participation is often misattributed to children’s capacity or motivation, when in reality it reflects systemic failures to adapt learning environments under crisis conditions.

*“These children want to learn. The environment just doesn’t allow it.”
(KII, School Psychologist, Khersonska)*

31 Ibid.

32 Dariivska and Novovorontsovka

As emphasised by an inclusive education specialist working for local authorities, children with disabilities remain meaningfully engaged in schooling only insofar as education systems adapt to their needs. Where individualised support, predictable routines, and inclusive practices are in place, engagement is sustained; where these conditions are absent, participation becomes superficial and unsustainable. Informants stressed that when schools were unable to maintain predictable structures or provide tailored support due to insecurity, children with disabilities were often present in class but unable to engage meaningfully. This underscored the urgent need to strengthen inclusive education responses in crisis-affected settings.

Online learning was identified as particularly more challenging for children with disabilities. FGDs with caregivers of children with disabilities highlighted that their children's participation in online classes depended on continuous adult mediation, including helping them remain focused, repeating or clarifying teachers' instructions, supporting transitions between tasks, and assisting with emotional regulation during lessons. Caregivers explained that without this level of direct, ongoing support, their children with disabilities often disengaged, became overwhelmed, or were unable to follow lessons, making learning fragile and inconsistent. Many caregivers emphasised that sustaining this level of support was difficult over time, particularly in contexts of insecurity, displacement, or household stress. Also, in Khersonska and Zaporizka oblasts, caregivers reported limited access to specialised services and assistive resources, further constraining children's engagement. Supported by the interviewed teachers in Kharkiv, online format shifting the responsibility almost entirely onto families increased the responsibility of caregivers significantly. Particularly those with children with disabilities experienced challenges the most.

*“They are enrolled, but real learning is very fragile.”
(KII, Inclusive Education Specialist, School, Khersonska)*

According to teachers, while younger children with disabilities sometimes received more targeted support in early grades, assistance tended to decrease as children grew older, while academic expectations increased. This imbalance was reported to heighten disengagement risks for adolescents with disabilities, particularly in unstable learning environments. This reduction in support, combined with more complex curricula, was reported to heighten disengagement risks for adolescents with disabilities, particularly in unstable and frequently disrupted learning environments.

KIIs with teachers further confirmed that these challenges were particularly pronounced for children with disabilities, noting that online learning limited their ability to provide individualised attention, adapt pacing or instruction in real time, and monitor understanding or engagement. Teachers described how when students with disabilities struggled during online lessons, there were few practical options to intervene, especially when cameras were turned off or connectivity was unstable. Teachers in Kharkivska oblast additionally noted that online learning shifted responsibilities typically held by teachers or learning assistants onto caregivers, increasing caregiver burden and deepening inequalities in children's ability to participate meaningfully.

Despite these challenges, national administrative data indicated that inclusive education has continued to expand in Ukraine. According to the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, as of 1 January 2025, 47,610 children with special educational needs (SEN) were enrolled in inclusive classes within general secondary education, supported by 33,397 inclusive classes nationwide. An additional 15,297 children with SEN were enrolled in 7,658 inclusive preschool groups, alongside the operation of 700 Inclusive Resource Centres across the country.³³ While these figures demonstrate sustained progress in formal access to inclusive education, the findings above illustrate that enrolment alone does not ensure meaningful participation or learning continuity for children with disabilities.

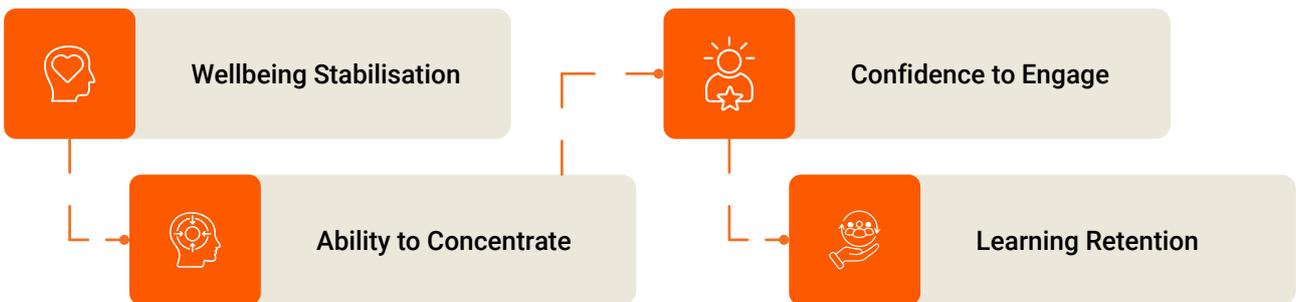
This showed that for children with disabilities, engagement remained highly fragile under crisis conditions. Formal enrolment did not ensure meaningful participation when routines were disrupted and support was inconsistent. Learning modalities that lacked adaptation placed disproportionate responsibility on caregivers. These findings highlighted the need to strengthen inclusive education responses during emergencies. They also underscored the importance of predictable routines, individualised support, and continuity of adaptations as academic demands increased with age.

33 Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, “Statistical Data on Inclusive Education,” Operational data as of 1 January 2025, Kyiv, Ukraine. <https://mon.gov.ua/osvita-2/inklyuzivne-navchannya/statistichni-dani>



Children are making exercises for stress management

3.2 Children’s Well-being as a Foundation for Learning Outcomes and School Engagement



Learning Recovery Begins with Emotional Regulation

Children’s emotional and psychosocial well-being shapes their readiness to engage with learning and benefit from education. According to the study findings, emotional regulation, perceived safety, and physical restoration consistently emerged as foundational conditions for attention, comprehension, and persistence in learning. These findings have direct implications for education programming and the integration of psychosocial support: learning recovery depends first on children’s ability to regulate emotions and attention, making emotional regulation, sense of safety, and sleep-related fatigue the most immediate wellbeing dimensions to prioritise within education responses. Programmes that focus on curriculum coverage without stabilising these foundational conditions are unlikely to achieve sustained learning gains. In practice, this underscores the need for education interventions that integrate structured psychosocial support into daily learning routines, prioritise predictable schedules and emotionally supportive classroom practices, and equip teachers to recognise and respond to emotional dysregulation as a barrier to learning readiness. However, the findings also suggest that brief or low-intensity psychosocial techniques alone are increasingly insufficient in the face of chronic stress

and prolonged anxiety, underscoring the need for organisations to strengthen and adapt psychosocial activities and approaches so that they meaningfully support children’s regulation, recovery, and sustained engagement over time.

Well-being as the foundation of education

Children’s emotional and psychosocial well-being emerged as a primary condition shaping their ability to engage with learning on any given day. Survey findings, FGDs, KIIs, and desk review evidence consistently showed that children’s capacity to listen, concentrate, understand instruction, and persist with learning tasks was directly mediated by emotional state, sleep quality, and cumulative exhaustion. Learning difficulties were therefore not primarily academic in origin but reflected children’s capacity to regulate emotions and attention under sustained stress.

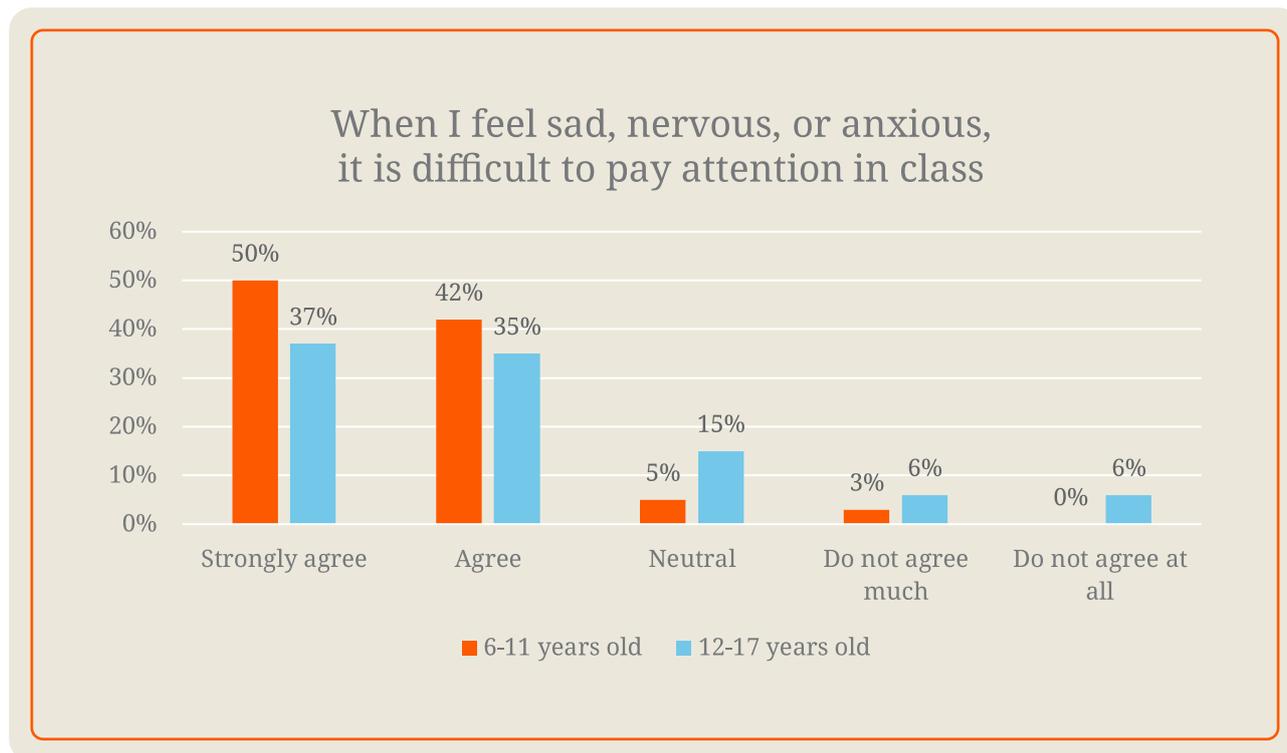


Table 7 Children’s attention span when they feel sad, nervous or anxious



Among younger children (6–11), the link between emotional state and learning readiness was almost same across locations. Survey data showed that 97% agreed that when they felt happy, learning became easier, and the same proportion reported feeling happy and excited when learning new things at school. At the same time, emotional distress created immediate learning barriers: 92% reported difficulty listening in class when feeling sad, nervous, or anxious, and 83% reported difficulty understanding the teacher when worried. These patterns were consistently reflected in KIIs with younger children across oblasts, where children described learning as becoming “hard” on days when they felt worried, scared, or emotionally unsettled, even when lessons continued as planned.

According to KIIs, younger children experienced well-being as situational and externally shaped. Emotional shifts were frequently triggered by air raid alerts, changes in routine, a teacher’s tone, tension at home, or confusion during lessons. Because emotional regulation skills were still developing, children relied heavily on adult support to calm down and re-engage. Where caregivers and teachers provided reassurance and predictability, emotional dips were often temporary. Where such support was limited, disengagement could persist across the school day. This was supported by the Save the Children’s Education Needs Assessment conducted in Mykolaiv, younger children’s learning in conflict-affected contexts is particularly sensitive to emotional safety and routine stability, as distress directly disrupts attention and memory formation.³⁴

“When I’m happy, I understand faster. When I’m worried, everything is hard.”
 (Girl, 6-12 years, KII, Kharkivska)

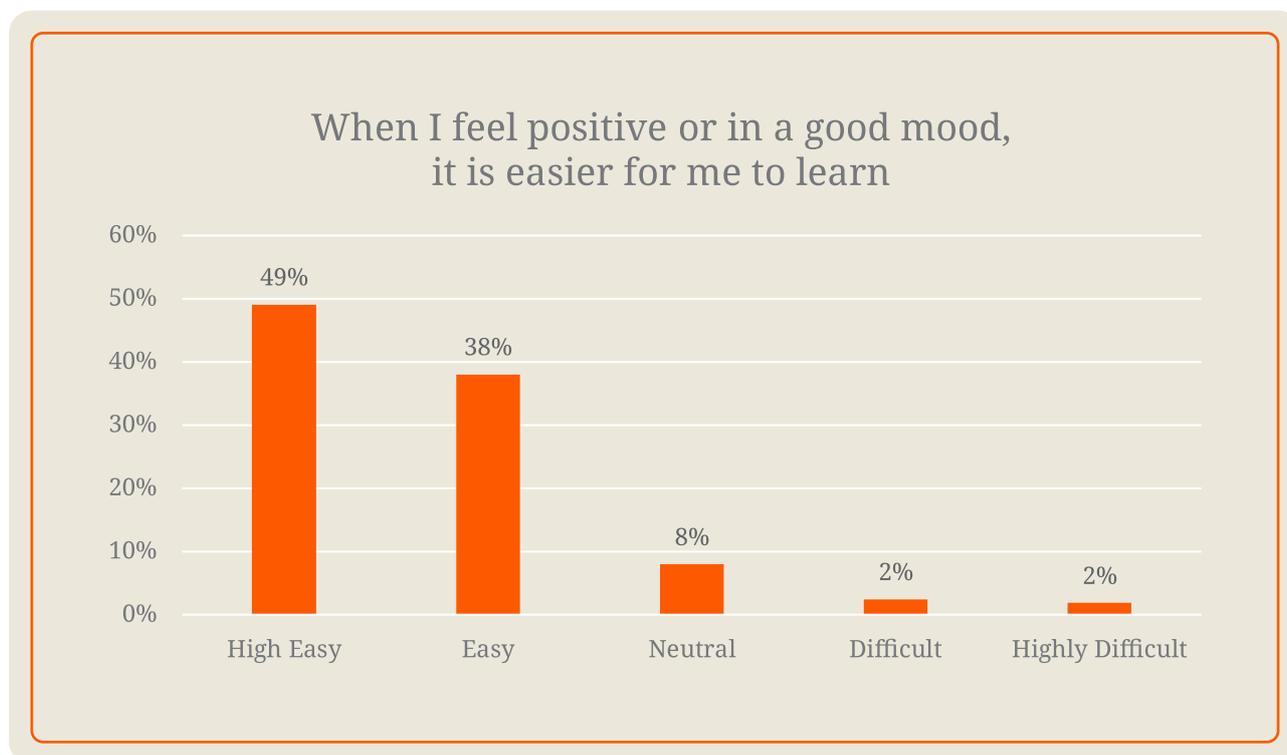


Table 8 Children’s learning when they feel positive or in a good mood

Among older children (12–17), emotional well-being influenced learning through more cumulative and less visible mechanisms. Survey findings showed that while positive emotional states supported learning for most adolescents, it was less impacting than younger children: 87% agreed that when they felt in a good mood it was easier to learn, while only 8% responded neutrally. At the same time, emotional distress disrupted learning in real time for a substantial proportion: 65% reported difficulty paying attention or understanding the teacher when feeling worried, sad, or anxious. FGDs with adolescents in Zaporizka and Kharkivska oblasts suggested that emotional strain was often experienced as chronic rather than acute, resulting in emotional fatigue and reduced cognitive bandwidth rather than overt distress.

34 Save the Children, Education Needs Assessment Report: Mykolaiv City, April 2023, Ukraine.

Survey statement	Age group	1–30 km	30–50 km	50+ km
When I feel in a good mood, learning feels easier	6–11	92%	94%	96%
	12–17	85%	86%	90%
When I feel worried, sad, or anxious, I find it difficult to pay attention in class	6–11	95%	91%	90%
	12–17	65%	60%	55%
When I feel worried, sad, or anxious, I find it difficult to understand the teacher	6–11	88%	83%	80%
	12–17	70%	63%	55%

Table 9 Matrix on the children’s wellbeing and learning by proximity to the frontline

Frontline proximity intensified these dynamics across both age groups. Among younger children living 1–30 km from the frontline, 95% reported difficulty listening in class when distressed, compared to 90–91% further from 30 kms distance. Difficulty understanding the teacher when worried reached 88% in this group. Among adolescents, the share reporting that worry made it difficult to understand the teacher reached 70% in the same distance band, compared to 55% in locations 50+ km away. These gradients indicated that emotional strain translated directly into learning disruption, even when schooling continued. Similarly, children in frontline and second-line oblasts consistently experience heightened anxiety and reduced emotional recovery, limiting their readiness to engage cognitively by the Zelenska Foundation.³⁵

This demonstrated that children’s emotional and psychosocial well-being functioned as a foundational condition for learning, directly shaping attention, comprehension, and persistence across age groups. Learning difficulties were therefore primarily driven by emotional strain, sleep disruption, and cumulative exhaustion rather than academic capacity alone, with frontline proximity intensifying these effects. Younger children’s engagement was especially sensitive to immediate emotional safety and adult reassurance, while adolescents experienced more chronic emotional fatigue that reduced cognitive bandwidth over time. These patterns indicated that learning recovery efforts that focus only on curriculum coverage risk missing the primary barriers to engagement. An education approach that prioritises emotional regulation, predictable routines, and integrated psychosocial support as prerequisites for effective learning and recovery.

Impact of a good night sleep

Sleep emerged as one of the most decisive yet least visible determinants of children’s well-being and learning capacity. Among younger children, 98% reported that when they slept well, learning and school became easier. Caregivers and teachers linked disrupted sleep to irritability, reduced concentration, and emotional volatility, particularly following nights with frequent air raid alerts. Younger children were described as especially sensitive to night-time disruptions, often waking frightened and struggling to re-regulate emotionally the following day.

*“Children sleep, but they don’t rest.”
(KII, School Psychologist, Khersonska)*

Similar findings were found for those older children (12-17) as well. More than 82% agreed that sufficient sleep made school easier, and 84% reported that sleeping properly was important for understanding and performance that day. Neutral responses were markedly lower for sleep-related items than for mood-related items, suggesting that adolescents perceived sleep as a practical precondition for learning rather than an abstract well-being concept across oblasts. FGDs with older children in Khersonska, Kharkivska and Sumska oblasts described chronic hypervigilance at night, resulting in cumulative exhaustion rather than episodic tiredness. Supported by school counsellors, children in both age groups across these frontline regions experience continuous hypervigilance, where even periods of relative calm fail to produce restorative rest. Night-time shelling, drone activity, and air raid alerts are reported to fragment sleep cycles, leaving children fatigued before the school day begins. These prolonged sleeping disruptions in frontline areas were found significantly undermining the attention, working memory, and emotional regulation during the school day as per Save the Children.³⁶

35 Olena Zelenska Foundation, Index of the Future: Professional expectations and development of adolescents in Ukraine, 2024, Ukraine.

36 Save the Children, Education Needs Assessment Report: Mykolaiv City, April 2023, Ukraine.

*“You sleep, but not really. Your head is always on.”
(Boy, 16 years old, FGD, Kharkivska)*

Teachers and counsellors working in frontline schools explained that children’s nervous systems remain oriented toward survival, constraining attention span, memory consolidation, and curiosity, core foundations of meaningful learning. As one psychologist noted, *“When a child is in survival mode, learning becomes secondary. You can teach, but the brain is protecting itself first” (KII, Counsellor, School, Zaporizka).*

Younger children were described as particularly vulnerable to the immediate effects of sleep disruption. According to school counsellors, insufficient rest manifested in emotional volatility, tearfulness, anxiety, reduced tolerance and aggression in some cases, all of which interfere with learning readiness and outcomes. Verified by the teachers, this cumulative sleep deprivation directly undermined children’s attention, memory, and emotional control. Teachers describe students struggling to stay focused, becoming irritable, or disengaging rapidly during lessons, particularly in cognitively demanding subjects.

*“After a bad night, small children cannot regulate themselves at all.”
(KII, Counselor, School, Mykolaivska)*

Among younger children, girls were more likely than boys to report difficulty listening or understanding instruction when anxious or worried. Findings suggested that girls more often internalised distress, while boys more frequently expressed emotional strain through irritability or disengagement. According to War Child, such gendered coping patterns reflect socialisation and expectation rather than inherent differences in emotional sensitivity.³⁷

Meanwhile, among adolescents, counsellors observed a different pattern. Teenagers often attempt to compensate for disrupted nights by studying late or staying connected to lessons despite exhaustion. School leaders note that this results in chronic fatigue rather than recovery, with cumulative effects on motivation and mental health. In heavily affected areas further reported that prolonged exposure to insecurity has generated delayed and cumulative patterns of disengagement, particularly among adolescents. While these older children initially demonstrated resilience and sustained participation, counsellors observe a gradual erosion of motivation, initiative, and emotional presence over time, described not as resistance but as emotional withdrawal. Frontline proximity further shaped how children prioritise their engagement, with INGO representatives noting that students in highly insecure contexts increasingly narrow their focus to what they perceive as strictly necessary, passing exams or meeting minimum requirements, while disengaging from broader learning processes. This disengagement was interpreted not as disengagement by choice, but as a rational coping strategy under sustained crisis conditions, as per some informants.

Across all age groups and locations, physical well-being and exhaustion further constrained learning readiness. 94% of younger children (6–11) overwhelmingly reported that homework became harder when they did not feel well, while 78.5% of adolescents reported the same. Stakeholders linked physical discomfort to cumulative fatigue, stress-related somatic symptoms, and prolonged screen exposure in online learning. At the same time, reduced energy levels function as a critical intermediary between chronic stress and declining educational engagement among children and adolescents.³⁸

Children’s emotional and psychosocial well-being, shaped by anxiety, worry, sleep disruption, and exhaustion, operated as a direct gatekeeper of learning. Children’s difficulties in school were therefore not primarily indicative of disengagement or lack of motivation, but reflected their capacity to regulate attention and emotions under sustained insecurity. Addressing learning outcomes in such contexts requires recognising well-being as an integral component of educational participation rather than a parallel or secondary concern.

Sleep functioned as a critical and often overlooked foundation for children’s learning readiness, directly shaping attention, emotional regulation, and cognitive capacity across age groups. Night-time insecurity and chronic

37 War Child, *Invisible at the Frontline: Disability and Childhood in Wartime Ukraine - Needs and Barriers Faced by Children with Disabilities and their Families in War-affected Communities of Ukraine*, April 2025, Ukraine. <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/invisible-frontline-disability-and-childhood-wartime-ukraine-needs-and-barriers-faced-children-disabilities-and-their-families-war-affected-communities-ukraine-april-2025-enuk>

38 Olena Zelenska Foundation, *Index of the Future: Professional expectations and development of adolescents in Ukraine*, 2024, Ukraine.

hypervigilance fragmented rest, leaving children fatigued before the school day began and limiting their ability to engage meaningfully, even when schooling continued. Younger children were particularly vulnerable to immediate emotional dysregulation following poor sleep, while adolescents experienced cumulative exhaustion that gradually eroded motivation and emotional presence. It also showed that learning difficulties are closely linked to physiological stress and survival-oriented responses rather than disengagement or lack of effort. Therefore, integration of PSS into education programs was found highly crucial.

Subject-specific engagement, confidence, and learning strain

Children’s emotional and psychosocial well-being translated into clearly differentiated patterns of confidence across subjects, with mathematics emerging as a consistent point of vulnerability from an early age and intensifying during adolescence. Survey findings showed that while many children reported some level of confidence in both reading and mathematics, the strength and stability of that confidence varied substantially by subject and age group, reflecting different cognitive demands and sensitivities to disruption.

This pattern aligns with broader evidence from Ukraine indicating that subjects requiring sequential learning and continuous scaffolding, such as mathematics, are more vulnerable to interruption, fragmented attendance, and reduced instructional clarity in crisis contexts.³⁹ During the periods of remote and hybrid schooling, learners were more likely to maintain engagement with language-based subjects than with cumulative STEM subjects, particularly where instructional continuity was compromised.⁴⁰

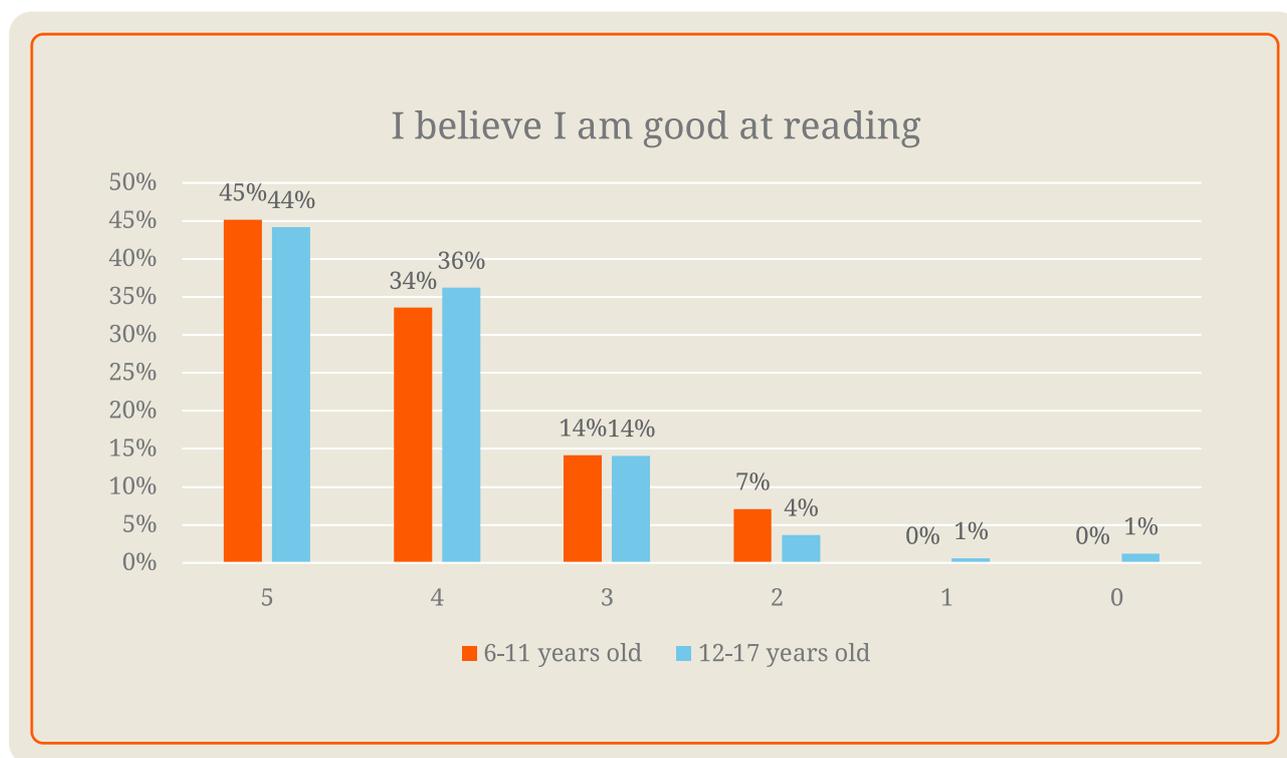


Table 10 Children feeling confident in reading

Among younger children (6–11), confidence in reading was relatively strong and consolidated. Almost half of children (45%) strongly agreed that they were good at reading, while a further 34% agreed, indicating that reading skills were generally perceived as secure. However, one in five children (22%) reported low or no confidence, signalling early pockets of vulnerability. KIIs with children in Kharkivska and Sumska oblasts suggested that reading was perceived as more forgiving of interruptions, allowing children to re-engage even after missed lessons.

39 EdTech Hub, Resilient by Design: Ukraine’s EdTech Emergency Response, 2025, Ukraine. <https://doi.org/10.53832/edtechhub.1122>

40 Ibid.

*“In math and physics, if you miss one step, everything collapses. Many children simply cannot follow anymore.”
(KII, Teacher, School, Dnipropetrovska)*

Similar patterns were reported by the older children (12-17) as well. Among those, the survey data revealed a sharply polarised confidence profile between reading and mathematics. Confidence in reading was relatively strong: 44% of adolescents strongly agreed that they were good at reading, and a further 36% agreed, meaning that 80% expressed positive confidence. Only 6% expressed low or no confidence (responses 0–2), while 14% selected a neutral position, suggesting uncertainty rather than disengagement. This distribution indicated that reading skills remained a relatively secure for most adolescents, even under prolonged disruption.

Although both children aged 6-11 and 12-17 reported having higher confidence in reading, language-related classes, including Ukrainian language and literature, were also described as challenging, particularly in online settings where reading-heavy instruction dominates as per teachers across locations. Teachers noted that reduced reading fluency, vocabulary gaps, and diminished attention span undermine engagement, especially among adolescents. Interestingly, English was often described as retaining higher engagement level by teachers as well, giving the sense of brighter future as a possibility.

*“English still gives them a sense that the future exists.”
(KII, School Leader, Mykolaivska)*

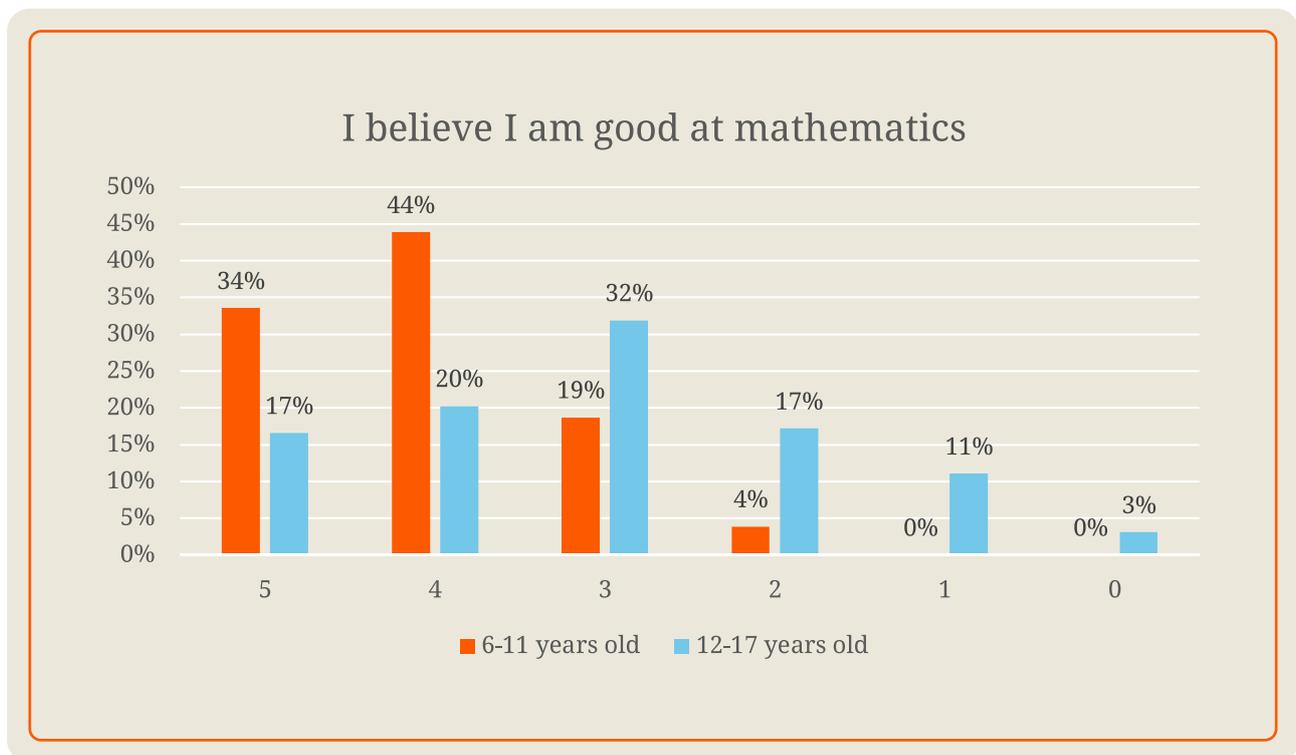


Table 11 Children feeling confident in mathematics

By contrast, confidence in mathematics among younger children was noticeably more fragile. Only 34% strongly agreed that they were good at maths, while a larger proportion (44%) expressed more tentative confidence by agreeing rather than strongly. At the same time, 23% reported low or no confidence in mathematics. This has shown that mathematics is perceived more challenging, starting from the younger ages. Over the years, this has shown an increasing trend. KIIs with younger children illustrated how missed explanations and interruptions quickly undermined confidence in maths, where children felt they needed to understand “everything in order” to continue.

*“If I miss one step, then I don’t know what to do next.”
(Boy, 12-17 years, FGD, Sumska)*

Confidence in math showed decreasing trend compared to reading for those older children as well. Only 17% of adolescents strongly agreed that they were good at mathematics, and 20% agreed, meaning that just 37% expressed positive confidence overall. At the same time, 31% expressed low confidence (responses 0–2), and 32% selected the neutral midpoint, indicating widespread uncertainty. This pattern showed that for many adolescents, mathematics had become a domain of ambiguity, hesitation, or insecurity rather than confidence. Also, children generally disengage with these subjects once they fear of catching up, which often manifests as silence, avoidance, or emotional withdrawal rather than behavioural disruption. School counsellors noted that repeated experiences of confusion and perceived failure contribute to anxiety and self-doubt, further reducing children’s willingness to engage.

“They are not lazy. They are afraid to fail again.”
(KII, Counsellor, School, Mykolaivska)

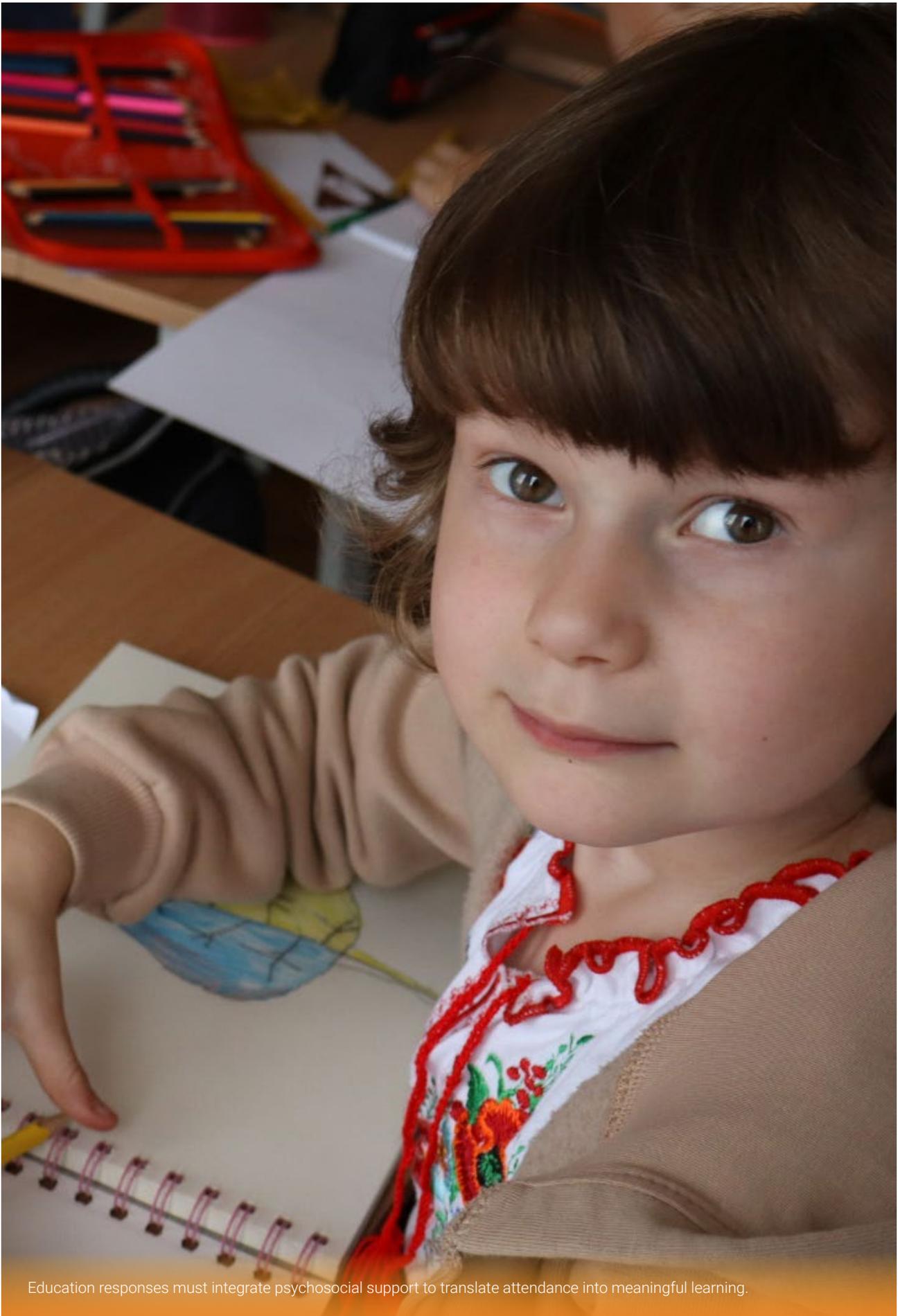
FGDs with adolescents in Kharkivska and Zaporizka oblasts provided critical context for this distribution. Adolescents consistently described mathematics as difficult to catch up independently after missed lessons, particularly because concepts build sequentially and mistakes feel highly visible. Neutral responses were often explained not as indifference, but as uncertainty, students attended classes but were unsure whether they “really understood” the material. Reading, by contrast, was described as more forgiving of interruptions, allowing adolescents to re-engage even when concentration fluctuated.

Caregivers reinforced this interpretation, noting that adolescents were more likely to avoid mathematics homework or delay starting it, while approaching reading tasks with greater confidence. Teachers and school counsellors explained that mathematics was more sensitive to emotional strain, fatigue, and fear of failure, particularly in online or hybrid settings where immediate clarification was limited. Prolonged stress and disrupted learning conditions disproportionately undermine confidence in cumulative subjects such as mathematics, while reading skills show greater resilience over time.

This demonstrated that learning strain and declining confidence were unevenly distributed across subjects, with cumulative subjects such as mathematics emerging as a consistent point of vulnerability from an early age and intensifying during adolescence. Confidence in mathematics eroded more rapidly under disruption because missed steps, limited clarification, and fear of failure accumulated over time, while reading remained more resilient to interruption. Emotional strain and fatigue further amplified these subject-specific differences, particularly in online and hybrid modalities where immediate support was limited. As a result, disengagement in mathematics often manifested as avoidance and uncertainty rather than overt resistance or lack of effort. These patterns pointed to the need for targeted, confidence-building support in cumulative subjects, paced instruction, and learning recovery approaches that explicitly address fear of failure alongside academic gaps.



Wellbeing and learning are inseparable foundations of engagement.



Education responses must integrate psychosocial support to translate attendance into meaningful learning.

3.3 Support Systems and Coping Mechanisms

Children’s capacity to cope with prolonged disruption, insecurity, and learning-related stress was shaped primarily by their coping mechanisms. Across age groups, findings showed that children relied on a combination of play and creative activities, family and peer relationships, and teachers support to regulate emotions, restore focus, and sustain engagement with schooling. These support systems functioned as critical protective factors, buffering the effects of anxiety, fatigue, and disrupted routines. At the same time, the findings showed that repeated disruptions to schooling increased children’s reliance on household-level support, particularly for emotional regulation, maintaining attention, and completing learning tasks outside formal instruction.

Although household support had improved children’s ability to “cope with school,” it could not replace structured instruction, timely feedback, and targeted support, particularly for younger children, children with disabilities, and adolescents struggling in cumulative subjects. Where schooling shifted online or became highly interrupted, the burden of maintaining attention, explaining content, and regulating distress was repeatedly transferred to caregivers, effectively making learning contingent on household capacity. Therefore, activities that reduce dependence on caregiver mediation, such as structured catch-up and small-group learning support (including homework support sessions), clearer teacher-to-home communication on expectations during disruption periods, and the provision of guided learning materials that children could use more independently should be considered under NRC’s education programming, along with the UN Agencies, other I/NGOs, and CSOs. It also highlighted the value of integrating classroom-based psychosocial support approaches that engage teachers and caregivers in predictable routines and child-regulation strategies, rather than expecting families to carry these functions alone. At the same time, several constraints fell beyond what UN Agencies, I/NGOs, and CSOs could deliver through project-level activities alone. The findings, therefore, also lent weight to advocacy with education authorities and partners on measures that reduced structural transfer of responsibility to households, including realistic workload and homework expectations during disruption, strengthened availability of school-based support services (counselling and inclusive support), and continued investment in safe learning infrastructure that enabled more consistent in-person or group-based learning.



Layers of Support for Children’s Coping and Engagement

Play, creative activities, and structured “fun” as emotional regulation and learning enablers

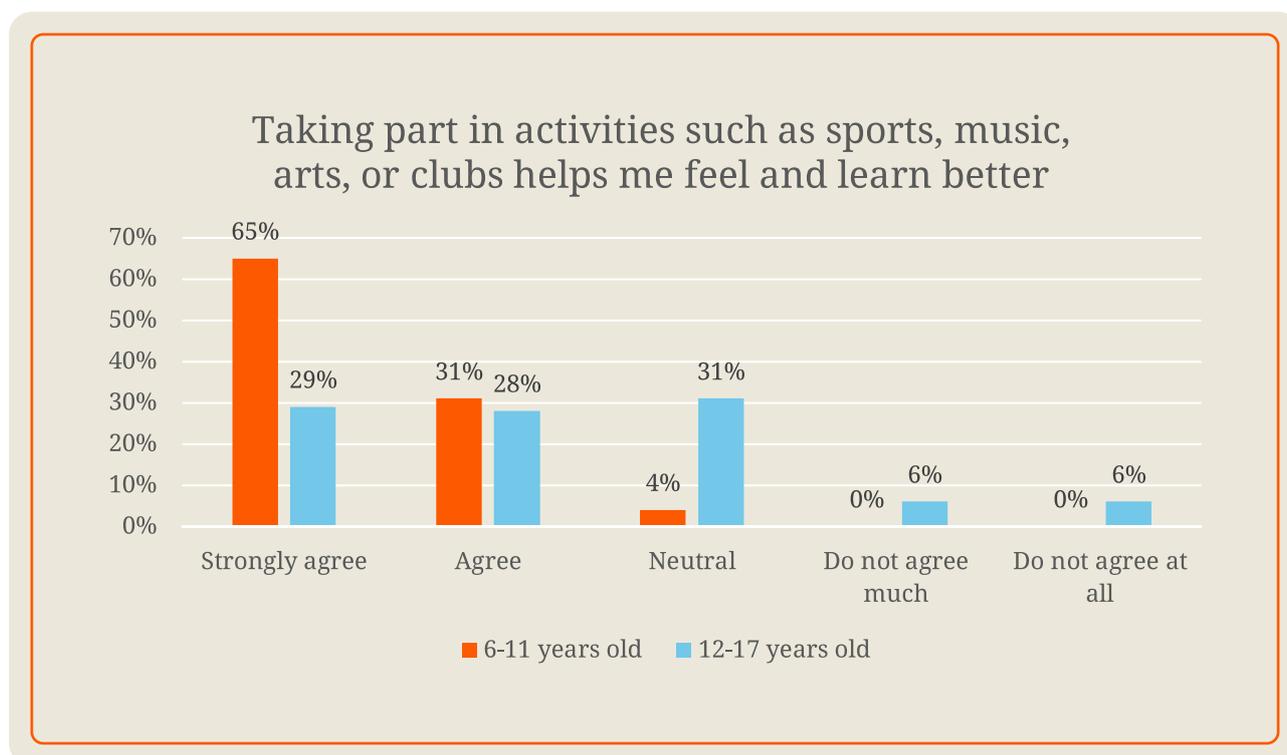


Table 12 Children feeling and learning better after activities

Play and creative activities emerged as one of the most consistently effective coping mechanisms for children across both age groups, functioning as a primary means of emotional regulation and a gateway back into learning. Survey findings among younger children (6–11) showed significantly high endorsement of play-based coping: 96% reported that playing, drawing, or engaging in fun activities helped them feel better, 95% reported an improvement in mood, and 92% agreed that learning became easier after participating in such activities. These exceptionally high levels indicate that, for younger children, play was not an auxiliary activity but a central mechanism through which emotional balance and learning readiness were restored. These exceptionally high levels indicate that, for younger children, play was not an auxiliary activity but a central mechanism through which emotional balance and learning readiness were restored.⁴¹

*“If a child starts drawing or acting again, learning can follow.”
(KII, Representative, INGO, Dnipro)*

Among adolescents (12–17), endorsement remained strong as well with some differences, reflecting developmental differences and higher emotional load. 61% agreed that activities such as sports, music, arts, or clubs helped them feel and learn better. The larger share of neutral responses among adolescents, particularly regarding whether learning became easier, suggested that while activities reliably improved emotional state, their translation into academic ease was more conditional, shaped by stress levels, activity quality, and regularity, compared to the younger children. The larger share of neutral responses among adolescents, particularly regarding whether learning became easier, suggested that while activities reliably improved emotional state, their translation into academic ease was more conditional, shaped by stress levels, activity quality, and regularity, compared to the younger children.⁴²

41 UNICEF, Child-Friendly Spaces in Emergencies, 2020, Global; War Child, Healing Classrooms, 2021, Global.

42 INEE, Psychosocial Support and Social and Emotional Learning in Emergencies, 2022, Global.

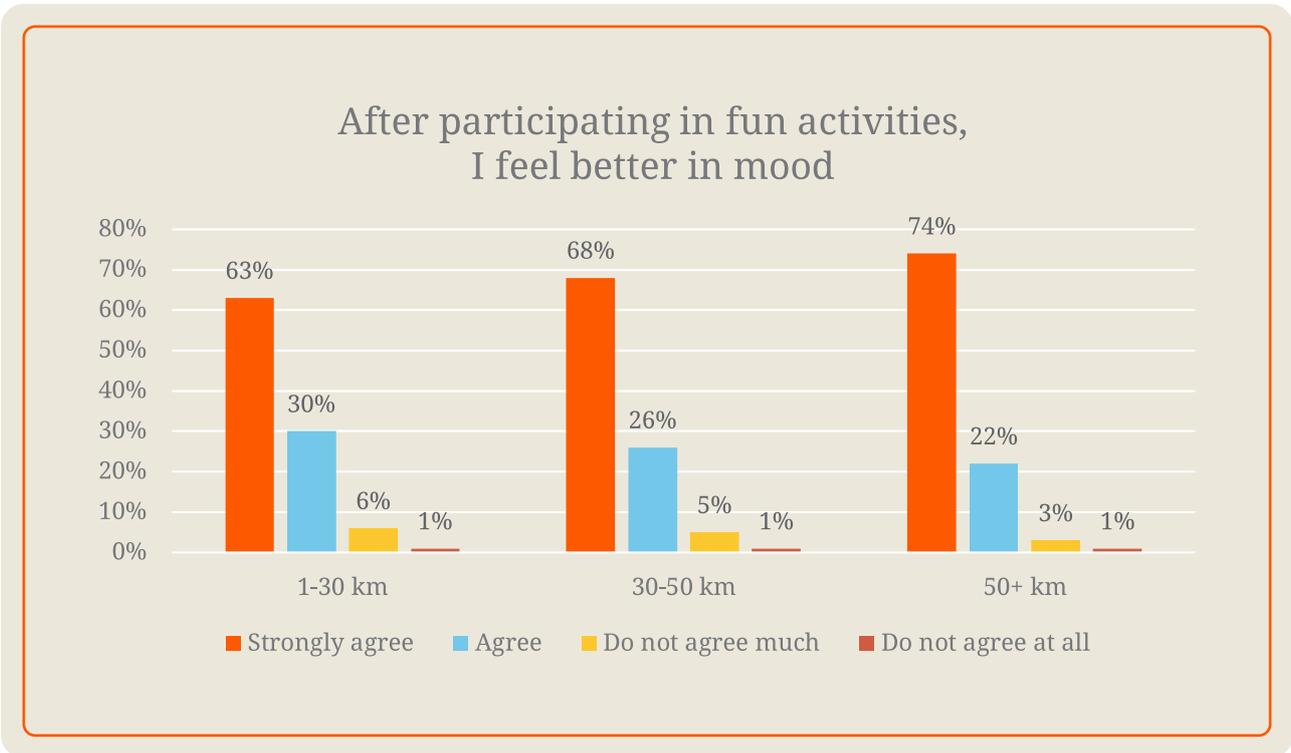


Table 13 Perceived impact of play on emotional wellbeing among children aged 6–11, by distance from the frontline -45

Frontline proximity significantly shaped the intensity of these effects rather than overall access. Among younger children, the proportion who strongly agreed that play helped them feel better was lowest in areas 1–30 km from the frontline (63%), compared to 68% in 30–50 km areas and 74% in locations 50+ km away. This pattern suggests that while playful and recreational activities remain available and valued, their capacity to improve children’s mood is more limited in contexts of constant exposure to attacks and security threats. For children living close to the frontline, repeated alarms, shelling, and uncertainty act as continuous emotional triggers, making it more difficult for them to experience sustained emotional relief, even when engaging in supportive activities. According to UN representatives, activities that previously helped children feel better are now less effective for those in high-exposure areas, as prolonged and cumulative stress has led to more entrenched emotional distress and, in some cases, more severe psychosocial difficulties. As a result, although children continue to participate in and benefit from play-based activities, improvements in mood are harder to achieve and less pronounced among those facing chronic insecurity.



Structured play and interaction strengthen learning engagement.

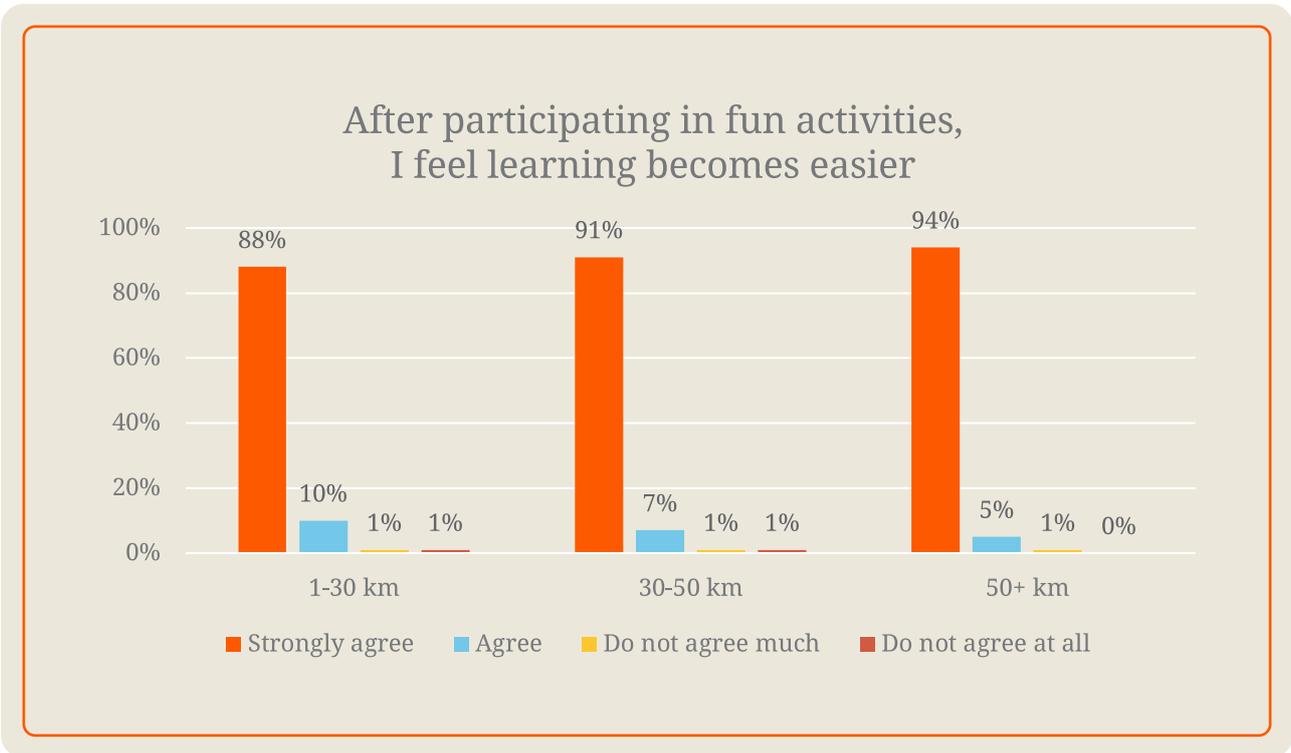


Table 14 Perceived impact of play on learning among children aged 6–11, by distance from the frontline

A similar gradient appeared in perceptions that learning became easier after play, with agreement lowest near the frontline (88%) and highest further away (94%). This pattern indicated that chronic stress did not negate the value of play, but dampened children’s ability to fully emotionally recover through it. Similar to the factors described above in relation to children’s wellbeing, persistent exposure to insecurity also appears to constrain the extent to which play-based activities translate into improved learning experiences. For children living close to the frontline, ongoing stress and repeated disruption reduce their capacity to concentrate, sustain attention, and experience learning as easier, even when engaging in supportive and recreational activities.



Peer support and creative activities strengthen emotional regulation and sustained learning engagement.

After participating in these activities, I feel my mood improves.

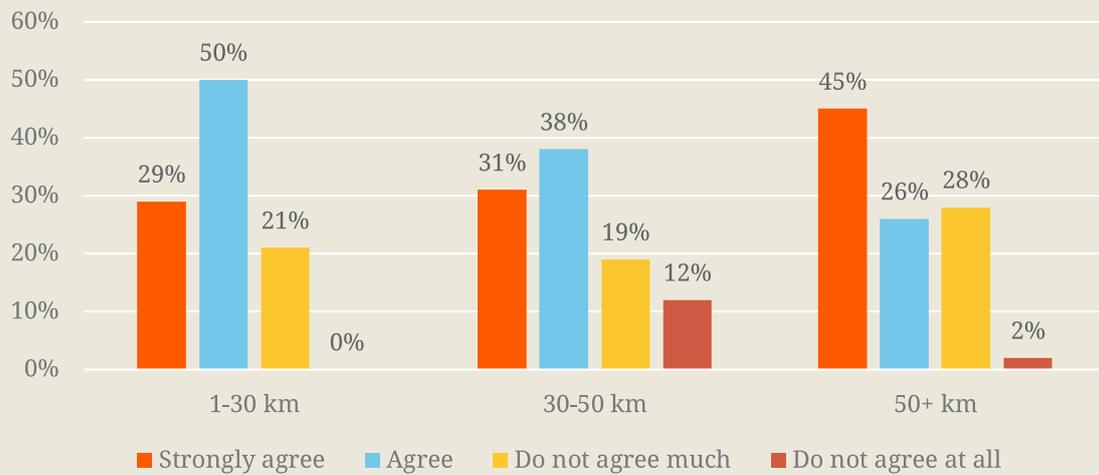


Table 15 Perceived impact of play on emotional wellbeing among children aged 12–17, by distance from the frontline

As observed among younger children, frontline proximity shaped the *intensity* of adolescents' emotional response to activities rather than their overall participation. Among adolescents, the proportion who strongly agreed that activities helped improve their mood was lowest in areas 1–30 km from the frontline (29%), increased slightly in areas 30–50 km away (31%), and was highest in locations 50+ km from the frontline (45%). This indicates that, similar to younger children, activities remain relevant and engaged with across all contexts, but their emotional impact is increasingly constrained closer to the frontline. For adolescents, this constraint appears more pronounced, reflecting greater difficulty in achieving meaningful emotional relief from activities under sustained stress, even when participation continues.



Children participate in a classroom-based creative activity

After participating in these activities, I feel learning becomes easier.



Table 16 Perceived impact of play on learning among children aged 12–17, by distance from the frontline

A similar pattern to that observed among younger children was evident in adolescents’ perceptions that learning became easier after activities, though with overall lower levels of agreement. Agreement that learning became easier was lowest in frontline areas (51%), declined further in areas 30–50 km from the frontline (44%), and increased in locations 50+ km away (60%). As with younger children, this suggests that chronic stress does not eliminate the perceived value of activities, but limits their capacity to translate into improved learning readiness. For adolescents in particular, the cumulative effects of prolonged insecurity appear to further constrain concentration and sustained engagement, making it harder for activities to function as effective bridges back to learning in high-exposure contexts.

KIIs with those aged 6-11 and FGDs with children aged 12-17 provided critical context for these patterns. Children described play and creative activities as spaces where fear, tension, and fatigue temporarily receded, allowing them to “reset” emotionally. Younger children emphasised sensory and imaginative play, while adolescents highlighted activities that provided autonomy, identity, and relief from academic pressure. Importantly, children did not describe these activities as distractions from learning, but as prerequisites for being able to concentrate and try again.

“After drawing, my head is calm. Then I can do homework.”
 (Girl, 12-17 years, FGD, Sum)

Teachers and school counsellors reinforced this interpretation, noting that play and extracurricular activities supported emotional regulation, peer connection, and motivation, particularly when integrated consistently rather than delivered as short-term events. Moreover, play based and creative activities function as essential psychosocial buffers under crisis conditions, but their effectiveness diminishes when exposure to stress is continuous and opportunities are irregular.⁴³

However, the study findings still showed that play and creative activities were among the most powerful positive coping mechanisms available to children, supporting both well-being and learning engagement. Although frontline proximity reduced the depth of their impact, and older children required more structured and meaningful activities for emotional relief to translate into learning benefits, the activities improved their overall

43 Save the Children, Education Needs Assessment Report: Mykolaiv City, April 2023, Ukraine.

well-being, motivation for engagement and resilience significantly. This underscores the importance of sustained, age-appropriate, and context-sensitive activity-based support, particularly in high-stress settings.

Overall, play and creative activities functioned as one of the most effective mechanisms for emotional regulation and re-engagement with learning across age groups. For younger children, play consistently restored emotional balance and learning readiness, while for adolescents its impact was more conditional and depended on structure, relevance, and regularity. Frontline proximity did not eliminate the value of play, but it reduced the depth and durability of its emotional and learning benefits under chronic stress. These findings showed that play supported learning not as a diversion, but as a prerequisite for concentration and motivation. Thus, sustained, age-appropriate, and context-sensitive play and creative activities, particularly in high-stress settings, should be integrated as core elements of education and psychosocial responses.

Family and friends' support

Family and close social relationships emerged as a central pillar of children's coping capacity, functioning both as emotional anchors and as practical learning scaffolds.⁴⁴ Findings across both age groups showed that most children relied on parents or caregivers for support with schoolwork, which was reported to be beyond academic assistance to include emotional regulation, reassurance, and routine-setting, particularly under conditions of repeated disruption.

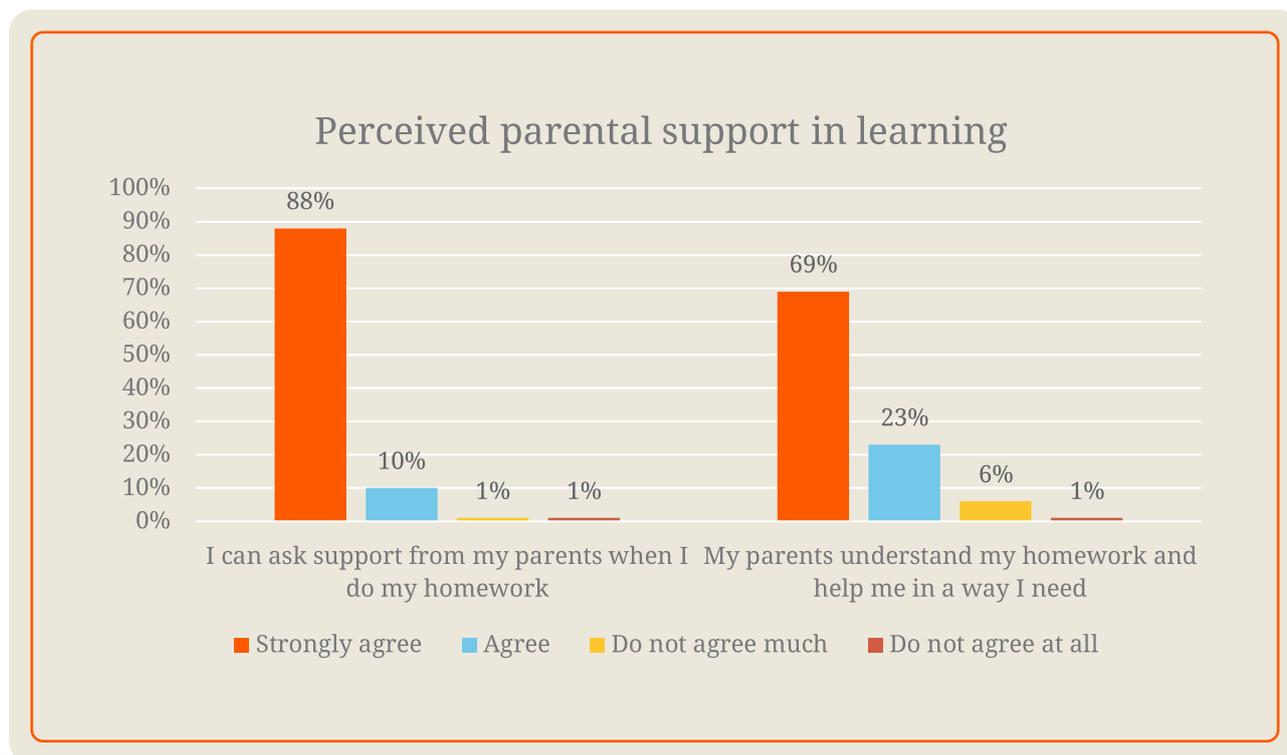


Table 17 Perceived parental support in learning among children aged 6–11, by distance from the frontline

Survey findings strongly confirmed the central role of parental support in younger children's learning processes. Among children aged 6–11, 98% reported that they could ask their parents for help when doing homework, and 92% felt that their parents understood their homework and supported them in a way they needed. This shows that caregiver support is crucial component of learning for younger children, particularly in disrupted learning environments. Furthermore, this was closely aligned with earlier findings on limited independent learning

44 UNICEF, Parenting in Crisis Contexts, Global, 2022.

capacity at this age, confirming that caregiver involvement was structurally embedded in children’s learning process rather than an occasional fallback. Younger children described parents as helping them “understand,” “remember,” and “stay calm,” indicating that emotional reassurance and task clarification were often inseparable. Teachers and counsellors across locations agreed that particularly those younger children are more dependent on their caregivers’ support in participating online classes, completing their homework, etc.

“Without an adult next to them, online lessons simply don’t work for young children. They need the support of their caregivers much more.”
 (KII, Counsellor, School, Khersonska)

FGDs with caregivers in Kharkivska, Sumska, and Zaporizka oblasts illustrated how this support operated in daily life. Caregivers described sitting with children during online lessons, re-explaining tasks after interruptions, and helping children refocus following air raid alerts or nights of poor sleep. For many younger children, the presence of a familiar adult was described as a prerequisite for being able to engage with learning at all, particularly in unstable learning modalities.

“If my mom is next to me, I’m not scared to try.”
 (Girl, 6-11 years, KII, Kharki)

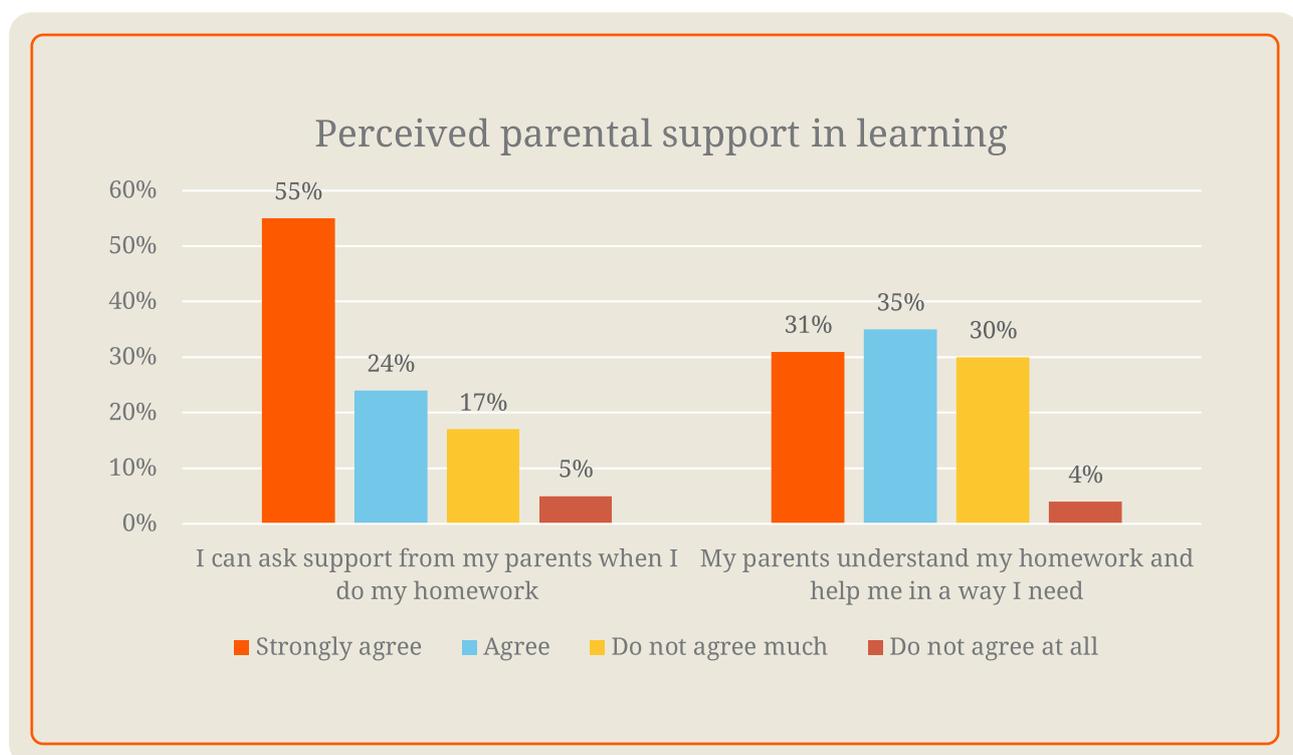


Table 18 Perceived parental support in learning among children aged 12–17, by distance from the frontline

Among adolescents (12–17), family support remained highly relevant but shifted in form. Survey findings showed that while a large majority of adolescents (79%) reported being able to ask their parents or caregivers for help with homework, this was notably lower than among younger children (98%), indicating a gradual reduction in direct reliance with age. In addition, only 66% of adolescents felt that their parents understood their homework and were able to help effectively, compared to 92% among children aged 6–11, highlighting a clear age-related decline in perceived academic support capacity. This shift reflects both adolescents’ increasing curricular complexity and growing expectations of independent learning, alongside caregivers’ more limited ability to support advanced academic content, particularly in cumulative subjects such as mathematics and science. Supported by FGDs, this support was less about direct subject assistance and more about emotional encouragement, motivation, and stress management. Adolescents described parents as helping them “not give up,” “stay organised,” or “calm down,” particularly during periods of academic pressure or emotional overload. This shift reflected both adolescents’ growing independence and caregivers’ more limited capacity to support complex academic content, especially in mathematics and science.

Frontline proximity shaped the intensity and necessity of family support rather than its presence. In frontline areas, children across both age groups described heavier reliance on caregivers to manage fear, anxiety, and concentration difficulties, often before learning could begin. Caregivers in these areas reported spending more time on emotional regulation than on academic support, particularly after nights with shelling or frequent alarms. In contrast, families in areas further from the frontline described a more balanced division between emotional and academic support, suggesting that insecurity amplified the emotional load placed on families.

As per teachers, the lower secondary grade is a difficult transitional period in which student engagement often drops sharply, particularly around Grade 5. Teachers and counsellors highlighted this stage as especially challenging because students face increased academic demands, must adapt to learning from multiple teachers, and receive less individual attention, changes that are further compounded by the broader context of disruption and insecurity.

*“Grade five is where everything becomes harder, and many children get lost.”
(KII, Counsellor, School, Zaporizhzhia)*

At the same time, lower secondary students are seen as more self-aware than younger children, yet they have not developed the coping strategies typically observed among older adolescents. Teachers and counsellors stated that this gap contributes to rising anxiety, avoidance behaviours, and reduced classroom participation during this stage, especially in cumulative subjects where learning builds over time and gaps can quickly widen.

Peer and friend support complemented family support, particularly for adolescents. FGDs showed that adolescents relied on friends for emotional validation, shared understanding, and normalisation of stress. Peer conversations helped reduce feelings of isolation and reinforced the sense that difficulties were shared rather than individual failures. However, access to peer support was uneven. Prolonged online learning, displacement, and security restrictions limited informal peer interaction, particularly in frontline-adjacent and rural areas, reducing the availability of this coping mechanism for some adolescents.

Caregiver FGDs and KIIs with teachers, and counsellors consistently highlighted the limits and strain of family-based coping systems. Parents described emotional exhaustion, uncertainty about how best to support learning, and difficulty balancing children’s needs with economic stress and their own well-being. Single caregivers and households supporting multiple children reported particularly high pressure. Many teachers, and counsellors across oblasts noted that while family support remained a powerful protective factor, prolonged reliance on households to absorb both educational and psychosocial roles risked deepening inequalities between children, depending on household capacity. Those families have become central actors in children’s learning and well-being under crisis conditions without sufficient guidance or relief mechanisms, making it much more challenging for caregivers to provide their children with the necessary support.

Findings highlighted that family and close social relationships functioned as a central coping and learning support system for children across age groups, particularly under disrupted and insecure conditions. For younger children, caregiver presence was often a prerequisite for emotional regulation and learning engagement, while for adolescents, family support shifted toward motivation, reassurance, and stress management rather than direct academic help. Frontline proximity intensified reliance on families by increasing emotional load, while simultaneously limiting caregivers’ capacity to provide sustained support. Peer relationships complemented family support for adolescents, but access to peer interaction was uneven and often constrained by displacement and online learning. As a result, the findings underscored the importance of reducing overreliance on caregivers by strengthening peer-based and school-based support structures, and by providing targeted guidance and relief mechanisms to support caregivers’ wellbeing and capacity under prolonged crisis conditions.

Teachers’ support as a stabilising and protective factor

Teachers emerged as one of the most consistent and trusted sources of support for children, functioning as both educational guides and emotional stabilisers under conditions of prolonged disruption. Survey findings across both age groups showed that a strong majority of children perceived teachers as available and supportive,

reinforcing the role of schools as key protective environments even when learning modalities and routines were repeatedly interrupted.

97% of younger children (6-11) agreed that they knew their teachers were always there to help them. For younger children, teachers functioned as a primary source of safety, reassurance, and emotional regulation within the school environment. KIIs with younger children in Kharkivska, Sumska, and Dnipropetrovska oblasts showed that teachers were frequently described using affective terms such as “kind,” “patient,” or “calming,” with children explicitly linking these qualities to their ability to feel safe, ask questions, and remain engaged during lessons, particularly following interruptions or distressing events.

“When the teacher talks calmly, I’m not scared anymore.”
(Girl, 6-12 years, KII, Dnipropetrovska)

Among adolescents (12–17), perceptions of teacher support remained positive but were less uniform. *Around four in five adolescents (approximately 79%)* agreed that their teachers were always there to help them, indicating that teacher support remained a significant coping resource even as students became more independent. However, compared to younger children, adolescents showed a lower reliance on teachers in terms of coping mechanisms although they all across oblasts valued teachers who acknowledged difficulty, allowed questions without judgement, and demonstrated flexibility in response to stress and learning gaps. Where such relational support was present, adolescents reported feeling more able to persist with learning despite anxiety or fatigue.

Frontline proximity shaped how critical teacher support became rather than whether it existed. In frontline areas, children across both age groups described teachers as playing a key role in helping them regain calm and focus after air raid alerts or disrupted nights. As per FGDs across locations, teachers’ tone, pacing, and willingness to pause or adapt lessons were repeatedly cited as factors that made continued learning possible. In areas further from the frontline, teacher support was described as more academically focused, reflecting lower baseline emotional distress.

Caregiver FGDs reinforced the protective role of teachers, particularly for families experiencing high levels of stress. Parents described teachers as providing structure, predictability, and emotional containment that children could not always receive at home, especially when caregivers themselves were exhausted or anxious. For some households, teachers were described as the only adults outside the family consistently checking in on children’s well-being.

At the same time, KIIs with teachers and counsellors highlighted the limits and fragility of this support role. Teachers reported absorbing increasing emotional labour alongside instructional responsibilities, often without sufficient training or psychosocial backing. This strain was most pronounced in frontline and rural schools with limited access to specialised support services. Teachers have increasingly functioned as first-line psychosocial responders in crisis-affected education systems, despite significant risks of burnout.⁴⁵

Teachers emerged as the core of stability within children’s learning environments, providing emotional containment and continuity alongside instructional support in highly disrupted contexts. Younger children in particular relied on teachers as sources of safety and reassurance, while adolescents benefited from relational flexibility, recognition of learning difficulty, and non-judgemental support that enabled them to persist despite anxiety and fatigue. In frontline areas, the emotional role of teachers became even more pronounced, as they helped children regain calm and focus following air raid alerts and disrupted nights. At the same time, the findings revealed the growing emotional and psychosocial burden placed on teachers, especially where access to specialised support was limited. These dynamics underlined the importance of investing in teacher wellbeing, psychosocial capacity, and supportive working conditions to sustain their protective role without exacerbating burnout.

45 Save the Children, Education Needs Assessment Report: Mykolaiv City, April 2023, Ukraine.

3.4 Children's Aspirations and Envisioning Future

Despite prolonged disruption, insecurity, and repeated interruptions to schooling, children continued to express a strong future orientation, with education remaining central to how they imagined their lives ahead. Across both age groups, findings showed that children did not disengage from aspirations or abandon hope; instead, they recalibrated their expectations and ambitions in ways that reflected their lived realities. Children's visions of the future were shaped less by abstract long-term planning and more by a desire for stability, continuity, and the possibility of learning without fear or interruption. In this context, education functioned simultaneously as a source of hope and a measure of uncertainty, particularly as children balanced optimism about the future with awareness of present challenges. Echoed by teachers, school counsellors and I/NGO representatives, children were found "careful with hope," maintaining belief in education while limiting how far ahead they allowed themselves to think in order to manage emotional vulnerability.

Education as a foundation for future hopes

98% of younger children (6–11) strongly believed that education would help them in the future was. Only 2% of children aged 6-11 reported not agreeing that much, showing less hope in education. This strong future orientation existed even among children who reported difficulties with concentration, emotional distress, or disrupted learning in the present, suggesting that younger children were able to separate their current experiences from their longer-term hopes. This pattern was strongly reflected in FGDs with older children and KIIs with younger children, who consistently framed their hopes in terms of "school like before," uninterrupted lessons, and feeling safe in class, rather than specific future achievements

For many, school symbolised normality, safety, and the promise of growing up like before rather than a concrete pathway to a specific career. As noted by caregivers and teachers, younger children rarely questioned whether education itself was worthwhile; instead, their concerns focused on how school felt emotionally, whether they could concentrate, feel calm, and enjoy learning across oblasts.

Furthermore, 82% of both younger girls and boys strongly agreed that school would help them in the future. Both girls and boys have shown strong sense of stability and hope in education without any significant changes in both genders.



Education remains central to children's hopes for the future.

I believe going to school will help me in the future.

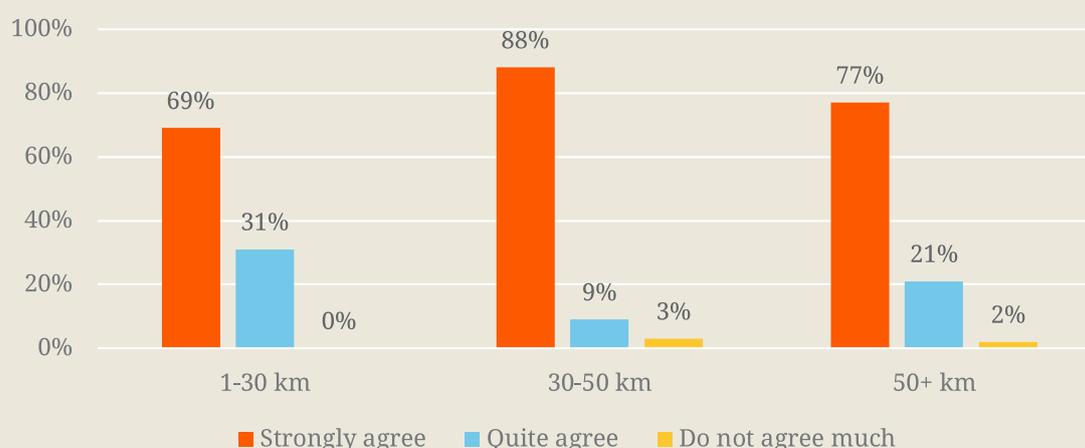


Table 19 Belief that education will help them in the future, among children aged 6–11, by distance from the frontline

Some differences were also observed based on proximity to the frontline as per survey results. Among children aged 6–11 living within 1–30 km of the frontline, 69% strongly agreed that going to school would help them in the future, while the remaining children expressed more moderate agreement (31%). Strong agreement increased further among children living 30–50 km from the frontline, reaching 88%, before decreasing slightly to 77% in locations more than 50 km away. While overall agreement remained consistently high across all distance bands, these patterns indicate that children living closer to frontline areas were less likely to express strong future-oriented confidence in education, instead clustering more heavily in moderate expressions of hope.

Proximity to frontline	Observed pattern in aspirations	Primary programming focus	Indicative response priorities
1–30 km (high exposure)	Lower levels of strong future-oriented confidence; aspirations expressed cautiously and anchored in immediate safety and continuity	Stabilisation and emotional reassurance	Prioritise predictable routines, emotional safety, and reassurance-focused engagement; reinforce schooling as a source of stability before introducing future-oriented planning
30–50 km (moderate exposure)	Most uneven and fragile optimism; aspirations present but marked by uncertainty and hesitation	Confidence rebuilding and guided orientation	Combine emotional stabilisation with structured guidance, confidence-building activities, and support linking current learning to achievable next steps
50+ km (lower exposure)	Stronger and more consistent belief in education's future value	Progression and future planning	Emphasise skills development, learning progression pathways, and longer-term planning while maintaining baseline psychosocial support

Table 20 Differentiated response priorities by proximity to the frontline

This suggested that constant exposure to insecurity and instability does not eliminate younger children’s belief in the value of education, but tempers the strength and certainty with which that belief is held. For children in frontline areas, ongoing disruptions and safety concerns appear to narrow how the future is imagined, limiting the extent to which education can function as a stable anchor of long-term hope. As a result, although school continues to represent an important source of meaning and aspiration, children living closer to the frontline may articulate future-oriented expectations in more cautious or constrained terms, reflecting the cumulative impact of prolonged insecurity on motivation and outlook.

*“I want to have a future, but I don’t know how far I can plan.”
(Girl, 12–17 years, FGD, Khersonska)*

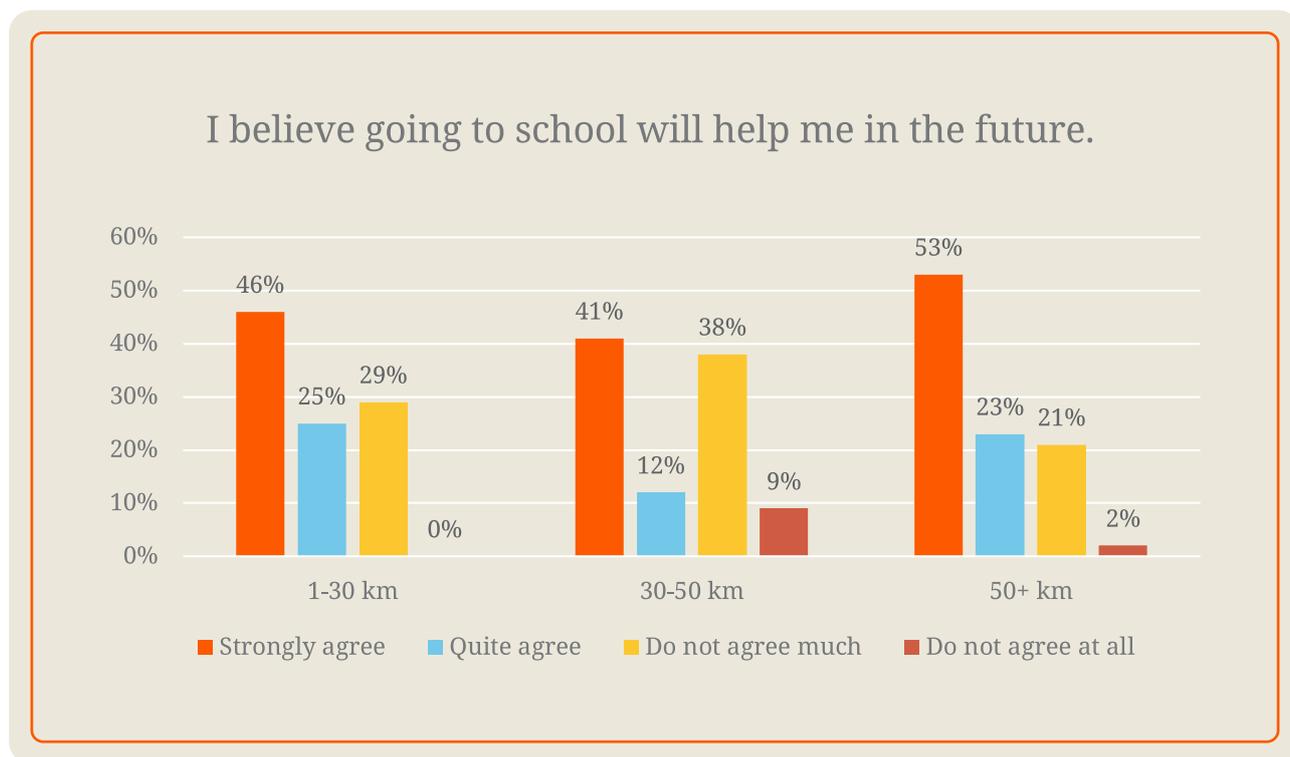


Table 21 Belief that education will help them in the future, among children aged 12–17, by distance from the frontline

Among older children (12–17), aspirations related to education remained present but were more unevenly articulated, particularly in contexts of heightened insecurity. Overall, 71% of adolescents living within 1–30 km of the frontline agreed that going to school and learning would help them achieve their future goals, including 46% who expressed strong agreement and 25% who quite agreed. Across locations, belief in the value of education was broadly maintained; adolescents living closer to the frontline were less likely to express strong agreement and more likely to report neutral or uncertain views, indicating reduced certainty rather than disengagement. In contrast, increasing distance from the frontline was associated with a higher proportion of older children expressing stronger optimism about education’s role in their future.

Interestingly, agreement that school would support future goals was lowest among adolescents residing 30–50 km from the frontline, at 53%, compared to 71% among those living within 1–30 km and 77% among those living more than 50 km away. This non-linear pattern suggests that adolescents in moderately affected areas may experience heightened uncertainty, balancing exposure to disruption with expectations of progress that remain fragile. Similar to patterns observed among younger children, adolescents residing in areas exposed to lower levels of insecurity and attacks demonstrated stronger future-oriented beliefs, while those living under more unstable and insecure conditions expressed comparatively lower levels of confidence in education as a pathway to the future.

When compared to younger children, adolescents demonstrated markedly lower optimism overall: approximately one in four adolescents (23–47%, depending on location) reported either neutral or negative views regarding the contribution of education to their future. This reflects adolescents' greater awareness of their surroundings, prolonged exposure to war-related stressors, and deeper engagement with news and information about the conflict. As noted by caregivers, teachers, and counsellors across oblasts, this heightened awareness often translated into reduced motivation and more cautious future expectations, with adolescents focusing more on short-term continuity and uncertainty rather than long-term aspiration.

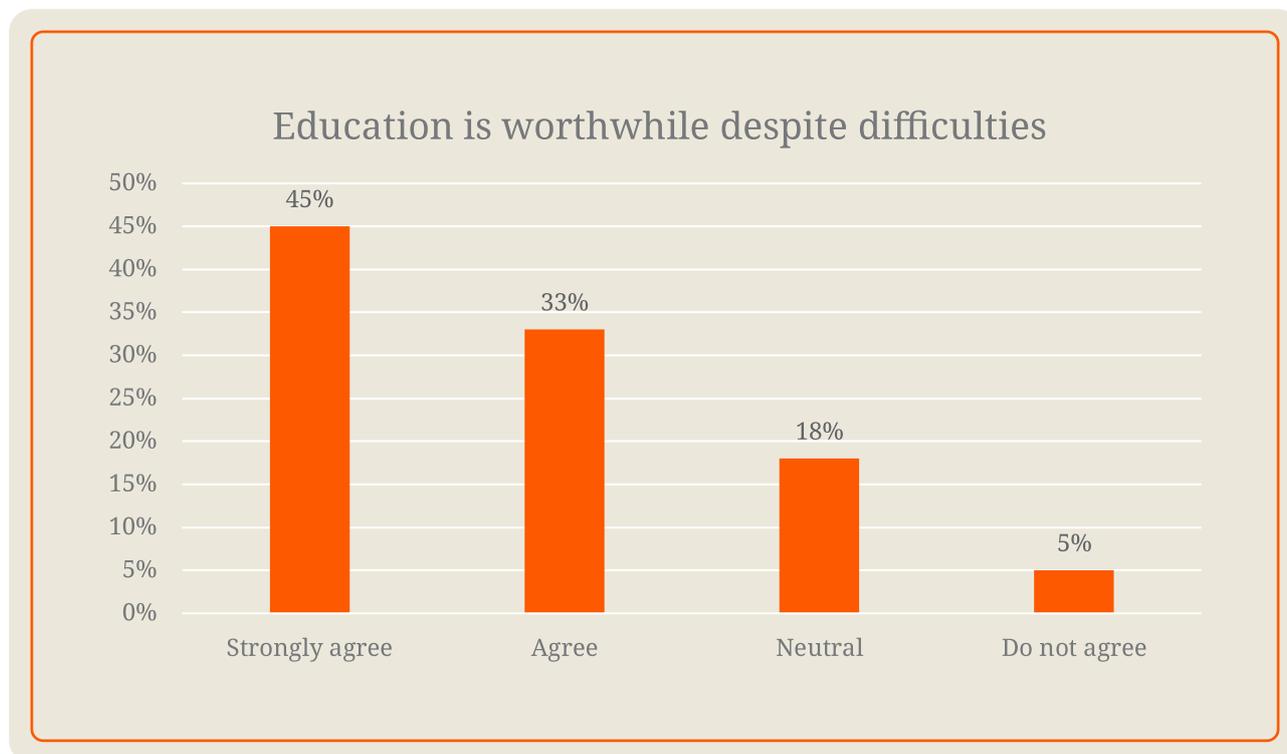


Table 22 Belief that education is worthwhile despite difficulties

When asked whether continuing education was worthwhile despite difficulties, 45% strongly agreed, and 33% agreed, resulting in 78% expressing positive agreement with this statement. Only 5% expressed low agreement, while 18% selected the neutral midpoint, again reflecting hesitation rather than rejection. Together, these findings suggest that adolescents largely maintained motivation and belief in education, even under strain, but that uncertainty remained a significant feature of their outlook. Rather than abandoning aspirations, many adolescents appeared to be holding onto education cautiously, valuing its importance while questioning their ability to fully benefit from it under current conditions. Supported by the FGD findings with adolescents, they showed a consensus around the idea of stability, having regular lessons, seeing teachers and friends, and feeling safe enough to enjoy learning. Education was understood less as an achievement goal and more as a reassuring constant in an uncertain environment. Teachers and school counsellors noted that adolescents increasingly carried a sense of responsibility for their future that exceeded their emotional capacity. Education was perceived not only as a pathway to opportunity, but also as a burden that required constant effort under difficult conditions. This tension between hope and pressure shaped how adolescents envisioned their future, leading many to adopt cautious or conditional aspirations rather than abandoning ambition altogether.

Caregivers and teachers confirmed that younger children rarely questioned the value of education itself. Instead, adults observed that children's main concerns related to how school felt emotionally, whether they could concentrate, feel calm, or enjoy being there, rather than whether learning was worthwhile. This reinforces the interpretation that, for younger children, aspirations were intact but dependent on emotional safety and routine.

According to counsellors, the more children have understanding in their surroundings, the less motivated they get about their future and education's positive impact. Furthermore, exam years reported to be intensifying stress and narrow engagement to exam-relevant subjects, while broader curiosity and participation decline. As per counsellors, older children also have higher awareness of risk, loss and perception of uncertainty that contributes to emotional distancing as a protective strategy.

*“Teenagers understand too much. That understanding makes it harder for them to stay motivated.”
(KII, Counsellor, School, Sumska)*

Across both age groups, children's aspirations reflected a careful balance between hope and realism. Younger children tended to express broad, emotionally driven hopes linked to safety and normality, while adolescents articulated more pragmatic and sometimes constrained visions of the future. In neither group was there evidence of widespread disengagement or loss of aspiration. Instead, children adjusted how far ahead they looked and how confidently they spoke about the future, depending on their age and emotional resilience.

Many interviewed teachers, school counsellors and NGO representatives highlighted that sustaining children's aspirations required more than maintaining access to education. It depended on creating learning environments that felt safe, predictable, and emotionally supportive. When children felt overwhelmed or insecure, their ability to imagine a positive future narrowed, even if their belief in education remained. The prolonged uncertainty does not erase hope, but it reshapes it into shorter, more cautious horizons.

Education continued to function as a powerful source of hope and meaning for children across age groups, even under sustained disruption and insecurity. For younger children, belief in education remained strongly intact and emotionally driven, closely tied to feelings of safety, normality, and routine rather than to long-term achievement. Among adolescents, aspirations persisted but became more cautious and conditional, shaped by heightened awareness of insecurity, learning gaps, and uncertainty about the future. Frontline proximity and prolonged stress narrowed how far ahead children felt able to plan, without eliminating their belief in education's value. These findings highlighted the importance of sustaining safe, predictable, and emotionally supportive learning environments so that education can continue to anchor hope without becoming an additional source of pressure or burden.

Future Aspirations of Children

Across both age groups, children's aspirations were anchored first and foremost in a desire for safety, predictability, and the restoration of ordinary life. Before speaking about professions or long-term achievements, children consistently framed the future through what was currently missing: uninterrupted sleep, stable schooling, and days not structured around fear or alertness. Aspirations therefore reflected not abstract ambition but an embodied response to prolonged insecurity, where “the future” was imagined as the return of calm routines that would make learning, relationships, and everyday life feel possible again. Supported by the teachers and school counsellors, across frontline oblasts, children rarely spoke about “*dream jobs*” until they felt confident that daily life itself could stabilise. As one school counsellor explained, children needed “*permission to think ahead,*” which only emerged when routines felt predictable and safe.

For younger children (6–11), this aspiration for normalcy was expressed in concrete, everyday terms. Children described wanting to go to school “*normally,*” to have lessons that were not interrupted by alarms, and to play outside without adults being afraid. In frontline areas, the future was often defined less by what children wanted to become and more by what they wanted to stop happening—noise, danger, sudden interruptions, highlighting how conflict reshaped baseline expectations and made stability itself feel like a meaningful goal. Caregivers and school teachers confirmed that younger children rarely questioned the value of education itself; instead, their aspirations were closely tied to emotional experience, whether school felt calm, friendly, and safe. Teachers noted that when these conditions were present, children's curiosity and imaginative thinking quickly resurfaced. protective strategy.

*“I want school like before, when we didn’t run anywhere.”
(Child KII, 8 years old, Khersonska oblast)*

Among adolescents (12–17), aspirations for safety and normalcy were articulated in more layered and reflective ways. Teenagers described wanting to live without constant anticipation of disruption and to plan weeks or months ahead without fear that circumstances could suddenly change. Safety was framed not only as physical protection but also as psychological relief, being able to concentrate, prepare for exams, and imagine adulthood without continuous recalibration. In this sense, older children were found operating with a shortened time horizon, particularly in frontline areas as per school counsellors and I/NGO representatives. Rather than a lack of ambition, this was interpreted as protective realism: adolescents deliberately limited long-term planning to avoid emotional disappointment in an environment where plans were frequently disrupted.

Education occupied a central yet deeply ambivalent role in both younger and older children’s aspirations. Children consistently framed schooling as the primary pathway to stability, opportunity, and independence, particularly in a context where insecurity narrowed other avenues. At the same time, education was described as carrying pressure and uncertainty, especially among adolescents who feared that disruption, learning gaps, and emotional exhaustion might limit their future options. For these adolescents, engagement with education required sustained effort under conditions of repeated interruption, fluctuating learning environments, and uncertainty about future outcomes. Many described the challenge of maintaining motivation, concentration, and commitment while adjusting expectations in response to ongoing instability. This strain was described as constant mental fatigue, reduced confidence in one’s abilities, difficulty sustaining attention over time, and a tendency to narrow aspirations to shorter time horizons as a way of managing uncertainty. This tension was most visible among older children in exam years, who often described investing effort while simultaneously questioning whether it would be “enough,” reflecting the emotional cost of carrying educational responsibility under unstable conditions.

*“I want to plan my life and not think that everything can change tomorrow.”
(Girl, 12–17 years, FGD, Kharkivska)*

Children’s aspirations reflected a careful balance between hope and realism, shaped strongly by age, insecurity, and the conditions under which learning was experienced. Younger children’s aspirations remained broad and emotionally driven, rooted in belonging, safety, and the promise of a “normal” childhood, while adolescents articulated more conditional and constrained visions of the future that depended on stability and functioning systems. Across both age groups, aspirations were sustained rather than abandoned; however, where insecurity remained high and disruption continued, children’s future thinking narrowed to shorter horizons, underscoring that sustaining aspirations required not only access to education but environments that felt safe, predictable, and emotionally supportive.

Children’s future aspirations were shaped less by long-term ambition and more by a desire for safety, predictability, and the restoration of ordinary life under prolonged insecurity. For younger children, hopes were emotionally grounded and closely tied to calm routines and positive school experiences, while adolescents articulated more cautious and conditional aspirations influenced by heightened awareness of disruption and uncertainty. Education remained central to children’s visions of the future, but for older children it increasingly carried both hope and pressure, particularly in exam years. Rather than disengagement, adolescents adopted shorter planning horizons as a protective response to repeated instability. Therefore, it is important to provide children with reduced uncertainty and increased emotional safety in their learning which can enable children to imagine the future without bearing disproportionate psychological burden.

Patterns in adolescents’ responses indicated that future-oriented thinking was shaped less by long-term ambition and more by the immediate challenge of navigating education under sustained uncertainty. Rather than articulating concrete career trajectories, many adolescents emphasised staying engaged with school, managing academic pressure, and maintaining a sense of direction despite frequent disruption. This suggested that the primary constraint for adolescents was not an absence of aspiration, but reduced confidence in their ability to plan and progress within unstable conditions.

The analysis suggested that when adolescents were unable to translate their hopes into tangible next steps, engagement with education became increasingly fragile over time. Instead of withdrawing outright, many adolescents were found to remain formally enrolled while progressively narrowing their effort, emotional investment, and willingness to persist through academic difficulty. Sustained uncertainty and pressure, particularly around examinations and transitions, appeared to contribute to avoidance of demanding subjects, reduced confidence in one's own progress, and a gradual emotional distancing from learning. Over time, this pattern was understood to weaken the durability of learning engagement and to place learning recovery at risk, especially during key transition stages where guidance, reassurance, and a sense of direction were most needed.

Within this context, education responses that provided relational continuity and structured guidance appeared particularly relevant. Approaches centred on: (1) structured guidance and counselling support that helped adolescents navigate education pathways and exam-related stress; (2) mentorship or trusted-adult models that provided continuity, encouragement, and goal-setting support; (3) peer-based modalities (youth clubs, group sessions, or facilitated peer support) that reduced isolation and normalised stress responses; and (4) life-skills and social-emotional learning activities embedded in education that strengthened self-regulation, coping, and decision-making alongside learning. These approaches aligned with established Education in Emergencies (EiE) good practice on integrating psychosocial support within education delivery and with adolescent-focused models that paired learning continuity with skills-building and guidance. Furthermore, programming options that reduced cognitive load and restored a sense of agency were likely to be more relevant than interventions framed only around long-term aspirations, particularly for those adolescents experiencing repeated disruptions during their exam years. This could include targeted academic support linked to key transition points (e.g., exam preparation, catch-up in cumulative subjects), structured extracurricular activities that supported regulation and belonging, and clear referral pathways for adolescents showing persistent distress. These elements reflected a realistic package of adolescent support that combined learning recovery with psychosocial stabilisation, rather than treating them as separate tracks.



Education remains central to children's hopes for the future.



Evidence-informed pathways guide coordinated action to restore learning and strengthen children's wellbeing.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine has profoundly disrupted children’s educational experiences, reshaping not only how learning takes place but also how children emotionally and cognitively engage with schooling. Ongoing insecurity, repeated displacement, air raid interruptions, and prolonged reliance on remote or hybrid modalities have created an education environment characterised by instability rather than disengagement. While most children remain formally connected to school, their participation is increasingly fragile and conditional, highly dependent on emotional state, learning modality, and the predictability of daily routines. This is particularly evident among adolescents, whose engagement fluctuates in response to being more aware of their surroundings and the impact of the war, further stress, anxiety, and perceived learning gaps rather than a lack of motivation or interest in education. The findings demonstrate that learning and wellbeing are inseparable in the current context. Emotional distress, manifesting as anxiety, irritability, withdrawal, or fatigue, directly affects children’s ability to concentrate, complete homework, and retain information. Transitional stages, cumulative subjects (notably mathematics), and modality shifts amplify these challenges, leading to declining confidence as children progress through grades. These patterns reflected a wider system-level risks identified in OECD analysis on recovering lost learning opportunities in Ukraine, which highlights that cumulative learning loss, particularly in sequential subjects such as mathematics, requires targeted remedial and accelerated learning, supported by teacher capacity development and curriculum prioritisation, to prevent long-term and unequal learning setbacks.⁴⁶ Complementing this, the World Bank’s LEARN framework positions learning recovery as a core component of national recovery, emphasising that remedial learning must be paired with sustained investment in teacher support, safe learning environments, and system capacity to ensure recovery efforts are equitable and durable.⁴⁷

Homework has increasingly shifted responsibility onto households, exacerbating inequities for families with limited time, capacity, or resources, particularly in hromadas closer to the frontline. Children with disabilities face compounded barriers, where enrolment does not consistently translate into meaningful participation or learning progression, especially as support structures weaken with age.

At the same time, the report identified clear protective factors that support re-engagement and learning recovery. Structured play, creative activities, and positive peer interaction function as critical regulation mechanisms, enabling children to “reset” emotionally and “re-enter” learning spaces. Supportive teacher relationships, predictable routines, and opportunities for interactive, inperson engagement significantly enhance children’s confidence and participation. Learning in shelters, while constrained, is consistently perceived as more supportive than online-only modalities, underscoring the importance of physical presence, relational connection, and immediate feedback in sustaining engagement under crisis conditions.

What children, caregivers, and teachers consistently express is not a rejection of education, but a need for learning environments that acknowledge distress, reduce pressure, and rebuild confidence, particularly through playful, supportive, and inclusive approaches. In this context, NRC is well positioned to respond strategically, drawing on its expertise in education in emergencies, child protection, and integrated programming. By strengthening the integration of education and MHPSS, addressing cumulative learning loss through wellbeing-sensitive and playful catch-up approaches, and prioritising inclusion for children with heightened vulnerabilities, NRC and other education actors can play a critical role in restoring children’s capacity to learn, participate, and sustain hope in protracted crisis settings.

46 OECD, Recovering lost learning opportunities in Ukraine: Key education policy strategies, 21 pril 2023, Ukraine. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/recovering-lost-learning-opportunities-in-ukraine-key-education-policy-strategies_c10085eb-en.html

47 Ibid.

This can be achieved by focusing on the following interconnected priority areas, aligned with NRC’s education and child wellbeing objectives:

- Strengthening wellbeing-sensitive education approaches that equip teachers and facilitators to respond to distress while maintaining learning continuity.
- Addressing cumulative learning loss, particularly in mathematics and other sequential subjects, through playful, confidence-building catch-up support delivered in schools, community centres, and online.
- Reducing inequities in learning support, including homework burden, modality access, and participation for children with disabilities and those living closer to the frontline.
- Creating safe, supportive learning spaces that integrate play, peer interaction, and referral pathways for children requiring specialised MHPSS support.

These areas collectively reflect NRC’s commitment to enhancing children’s wellbeing, sustaining engagement in education, and supporting recovery-oriented learning pathways under conditions of prolonged crisis.

4.1 Short Term Recommendations

1. Strengthen Wellbeing-Integrated and Playful Learning Recovery Approaches:

Across age groups, repeated interruptions, sleep disruption, and anxiety reduced children’s ability to concentrate, retain information, and persist with learning tasks, with effects most pronounced in cumulative subjects such as mathematics. Playful, activity-based, and interactive approaches emerged as effective mechanisms for learning recovery by stabilising emotional and cognitive readiness and enabling children to re-engage with learning tasks.

Problem	Evidence from Findings	Recommended Action	Lead Actor
Emotional distress reduces learning readiness	Emotional distress directly affects concentration, homework completion, and retention	Train teachers in wellbeing-sensitive and playful pedagogy (SEL + PFA + interactive methods)	National & Local Authorities, Schools
Cumulative subjects (math) most affected	Mathematics confidence declines due to repeated disruptions and missed foundational content	Adapt math catch-up into playful, gamified, confidence-building formats	Schools / I/NGOs
Fragile participation despite enrolment	Participation increasingly conditional on emotional state and modality	Establish group-based academic + psychosocial support classes	Schools / NGOs

2. Strengthen Inclusive Access and Meaningful Participation for Children with Disabilities:

For children with disabilities, repeated disruptions, modality shifts, and reduced individualised support undermined meaningful participation despite continued enrolment. Reliance on caregiver mediation increased as structured support diminished, particularly as academic demands rose with age. Adapted materials, predictable routines, and continuity of individualised support emerged as critical conditions for sustaining engagement and learning, rather than access alone.

Problem	Evidence from Findings	Recommended Action	Lead Actor
Enrolment ≠ meaningful participation	Support weakens with age; modality shifts undermine continuity	Provide adapted materials & structured supports	Authorities / Schools
Caregiver mediation increasing	Online learning increases reliance on caregivers	Train teachers in inclusive, disruption-sensitive strategies	Schools / Disability actors

4.2 Medium Term Recommendations

1. Strengthen Caregiver Support as a Stabilising Component of Education Response:

Periods of disrupted schooling transferred instructional and emotional regulation responsibilities from schools to households, increasing reliance on caregivers to explain content, manage distress, and maintain routines. While this support enabled some children to remain engaged, its effectiveness varied by household capacity and contributed to uneven learning experiences. Targeted caregiver guidance and system-level measures that reduced reliance on household substitution emerged as necessary to prevent widening disparities and caregiver overload.

Problem	Evidence from Findings	Recommended Action	Lead Actor
Homework burden shifted to households	Disrupted schooling transferred instructional responsibility to families	Deliver caregiver guidance sessions & routine support tools	UN Agencies / NGOs
Uneven household capacity	Learning continuity varies by family resources	Establish caregiver support groups & referral pathways	NGOs / Local Authorities

2. Improve Engagement of Children through Upgrading Shelter Conditions:

Learning environments characterised by crowding, noise, and poor ventilation constrained attention, increased fatigue, and reduced sustained engagement, even when attendance was maintained. Shelter-based learning supported continuity but limited depth of participation under these conditions. Improvements to physical learning environments emerged as an enabling factor for concentration and emotional regulation, rather than a peripheral infrastructure concern.

Problem	Evidence from Findings	Recommended Action	Lead Actor
Shelter conditions reduce sustained engagement	Crowding, noise, poor ventilation reduce concentration	Upgrade shelter learning spaces (lighting, layout, ventilation)	Authorities / Shelter actors
Attendance maintained but depth limited	Shelter learning supports continuity but not full participation	Define minimum learning-friendly shelter standards	Authorities / NGOs

4.3 Long-Term Recommendations

- **Advocate for Wellbeing-Sensitive and Inclusive Teaching:**

Children’s learning engagement and readiness were consistently shaped by emotional regulation, perceived safety, and supportive teacher–student interaction, while teachers were increasingly required to respond to emotional needs alongside instruction. Wellbeing-sensitive pedagogy, inclusive practices, and sustained teacher support therefore emerged as system-level conditions for maintaining learning engagement over time, rather than as individual or short-term adaptations.

Problem	Evidence from Findings	Recommended Action	Lead Actor
Learning & wellbeing inseparable	Emotional regulation shapes engagement & progression	Mainstream wellbeing-sensitive pedagogy in teacher training	Authorities / Teacher Institutes
Teacher strain rising	Teachers increasingly respond to emotional needs	Establish sustained supervision & staff-care models	Authorities / Education system

- **Sustain Adolescents’ Motivation and Future Orientation Through Structured Support Pathways:**

Among adolescents, repeated disruption and academic pressure reduced confidence in planning and progression, leading many to adopt shorter and more cautious time horizons rather than disengage from education. Structured guidance, mentorship, and embedded life-skills support emerged as relevant mechanisms for sustaining motivation and engagement by restoring direction and agency under uncertainty.

Problem	Evidence from Findings	Recommended Action	Lead Actor
Adolescents adopt shorter time horizons	Repeated disruption reduces confidence in planning	Integrate life skills & structured mentorship	Schools / NGOs
Confidence erosion in transition phases	Academic pressure amplifies disengagement	Establish guidance & peer-support structures	Schools / Youth actors

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- UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan, 2026, Ukraine.
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5.3 Annex 3: Assessment Matrix

Assessment Questions	Assessment Sub-questions	Indicators/Criteria to Explore	Data Collection Methods	Sources of Information
Demographics	Age, Gender, Location.	Reported demographics	Surveys with children aged 6-11 Surveys with children aged 12-17 Storytelling with children with disabilities and aged 6-11. FGDs with children aged 12-17 FGDs with parents/caregivers Storytelling with children 6-11 KIs with the NRC education programme team, external stakeholders, including the Education Cluster, relevant national and local authorities, teachers, school psychologists/counsellors, and other relevant school staff.	Children aged 6-11 Children aged 12-17 Children with disabilities Parents/Caregivers NRC Education Team Education Cluster Relevant National and Local Authorities, Teachers, school psychologists/counsellors, and other relevant school staff
Demographics	Displacement Status, Disability Status and Education Level	Reported demographics	Surveys with children aged 6-11 Surveys with children aged 12-17 FGDs with children aged 12-17 FGDs with parents/caregivers Storytelling with children with disabilities and aged 6-11.	Children aged 6-11 Children aged 12-17 Children with disabilities Parents/Caregivers
1. 1. What is the extent of learning loss among children aged 6–17 in the target oblasts?	1.1. What are children’s literacy and numeracy levels by oblast? 1.2. How do learning outcomes differ between 6–11 and 12–17 age groups? 1.3. Are there subject differences beyond Ukrainian and mathematics (e.g., science, foreign language)? 1.4. How do frequent school interruptions (air alarms, displacement) quantitatively affect learning time and progress? 1.5. Do children demonstrate confidence in problem-solving, creativity, or other skills beyond core subjects? 1.6. Are there oblast-level/urban vs. rural differences and those in the frontline? If yes, what are those?	Literacy/numeracy scores. Subject-specific difficulties. Differences by oblast, age, and gender. Hours of classes lost due to security events and their correlation with academic results. Self-reported confidence in creativity and problem-solving tasks.	Surveys with children aged 6–11. Surveys with children aged 12–17. Storytelling with children with disabilities and aged 6-11. FGDs with children aged 12–17. FGDs with parents/caregivers. KIs with the NRC education programme team, external stakeholders, including the Education Cluster, relevant national and local authorities, Teachers, school psychologists/counsellors, and other relevant school staff.	Children aged 6–11. Children aged 12–17. Children with disabilities Parents/caregivers. NRC Education Team. Education Cluster. Relevant national and local authorities. Teachers, school psychologists/counsellors, and other relevant school staff.

Assessment Questions	Assessment Sub-questions	Indicators/Criteria to Explore	Data Collection Methods	Sources of Information
2. How do children experience psychosocial well-being domains (emotional distress, social connectedness, sense of safety)?	<p>2.1. What types of distress, anxiety, or depression symptoms are reported? What are the factors causing that?</p> <p>2.2. How connected do children feel to peers, teachers, and families?</p> <p>2.3. Do children show symptoms like sleep disturbances, nightmares, or psychosomatic issues (e.g., stomach pain, headaches)?</p> <p>2.4. Do children report positive peer relationships (having friends, feeling accepted)?</p> <p>2.5. Are there oblast-level/urban vs. rural differences and those in the frontline? If yes, what are those?</p>	<p>Frequency of stress, sadness, sleep problems, aggression, withdrawal. Peer connectedness and loneliness.</p> <p>Prevalence of trauma-related symptoms.</p> <p>Levels of hope, confidence, and motivation.</p> <p>% reporting positive peer relationships.</p>	<p>Surveys with children aged 6–11. Surveys with children aged 12–17. Storytelling with children with disabilities and aged 6-11. FGDs with children aged 12–17. FGDs with parents/caregivers. KIIs with the NRC education programme team, external stakeholders, including the Education Cluster, relevant national and local authorities, Teachers, school psychologists/counsellors, and other relevant school staff.</p>	<p>Children aged 6–11. Children aged 12–17. Children with disabilities. Parents/caregivers. NRC Education Team. Education Cluster. Relevant national and local authorities. Teachers, school psychologists/counsellors, and other relevant school staff.</p>
3. What is the relationship between learning loss and psychosocial well-being?	<p>3.1. How does emotional distress affect literacy/numeracy outcomes?</p> <p>3.2. How does a sense of safety influence attendance and engagement?</p> <p>3.3. Do children with higher well-being scores perform better academically?</p> <p>3.4. How is motivation to study linked to stress, fear, or depression?</p> <p>3.5. Are children with stronger coping/resilience skills performing better in learning tasks?</p> <p>3.6. Do supportive teacher–student or peer relationships improve academic motivation?</p> <p>3.7. Are there oblast-level/urban vs. rural differences and those in the frontline? If yes, what are those?</p>	<p>Reported correlation between test performance and well-being.</p> <p>Reported engagement vs distress levels.</p> <p>Reported relationship quality indicators linked to academic engagement.</p>	<p>Surveys with children aged 6–11. Surveys with children aged 12–17. FGDs with children aged 12–17. KIIs with the NRC education programme team, external stakeholders, including the Education Cluster, relevant national and local authorities, Teachers, school psychologists/counsellors, and other relevant school staff.</p>	<p>Children aged 6–11. Children aged 12–17. NRC Education Team. Education Cluster. Relevant national and local authorities. Teachers, school psychologists/counsellors, and other relevant school staff.</p>

Assessment Questions	Assessment Sub-questions	Indicators/Criteria to Explore	Data Collection Methods	Sources of Information
4. How do learning and well-being differ by gender?	<p>4.1. Do boys and girls show different patterns in academic performance?</p> <p>4.2. Do boys and girls report different psychosocial needs or coping strategies?</p> <p>4.3. Do gender roles/expectations (e.g., household chores, parental pressure) influence study time or stress?</p> <p>4.4. Are there oblast-level/urban vs. rural differences and those in the frontline? If yes, what are those?</p>	<p>Gender-disaggregated learning results.</p> <p>Gender-specific well-being experiences.</p> <p>Gendered division of time and responsibilities.</p>	<p>Surveys with children aged 6–11.</p> <p>Surveys with children aged 12–17.</p> <p>FGDs with children aged 12–17.</p> <p>FGDs with parents/caregivers.</p>	<p>Children aged 6–11.</p> <p>Children aged 12–17.</p> <p>Parents/caregivers.</p>
5. How do displacement and vulnerability status affect learning and well-being?	<p>5.1. Do displaced children perform differently from host community peers? What barriers do IDPs face compared to non-displaced?</p> <p>5.2. How does instability of living arrangements (collective sites, frequent moves) affect continuity of learning and peer connections?</p> <p>5.3. Are there oblast-level/urban vs. rural differences and those in the frontline? If yes, what are those?</p>	<p>Reported differences between IDP and host community children.</p> <p>Impact of access to services, safe spaces, and devices.</p>	<p>Surveys with children aged 6–11.</p> <p>Surveys with children aged 12–17.</p> <p>Storytelling with children with disabilities and aged 6-11.</p> <p>FGDs with children aged 12–17.</p> <p>FGDs with parents/caregivers.</p> <p>KIIs with the NRC education programme team, external stakeholders, including the Education Cluster, relevant national and local authorities, Teachers, school psychologists/counsellors, and other relevant school staff.</p>	<p>Children aged 6–11.</p> <p>Children aged 12–17.</p> <p>Parents/caregivers.</p> <p>NRC Education Team.</p> <p>Education Cluster.</p> <p>Relevant national and local authorities.</p> <p>Teachers, school psychologists/counsellors, and other relevant school staff.</p>
6. How are children with disabilities experiencing learning and well-being?	<p>6.1. What barriers do children with disabilities face in remote and offline learning?</p> <p>6.2. How are psychosocial needs different?</p> <p>6.3. What specific adaptive aids (textbooks, devices, tactile materials) are missing, and how does this hinder learning?</p> <p>6.4. How do children with disabilities experience peer inclusion/exclusion and its impact on their confidence?</p> <p>6.5. Are there oblast-level/urban vs. rural differences and those in the frontline? If yes, what are those?</p>	<p>Self-reported and caregiver-reported challenges.</p> <p>Peer integration levels.</p> <p>Reported learning performance is linked to accessibility.</p>	<p>FGDs with parents/caregivers.</p> <p>Storytelling with children with disabilities.</p> <p>KIIs with the NRC education programme team, external stakeholders, including the Education Cluster, relevant national and local authorities, Teachers, school psychologists/counsellors, and other relevant school staff.</p>	<p>Children with disabilities</p> <p>Parents/caregivers.</p> <p>NRC Education Team.</p> <p>Education Cluster.</p> <p>Relevant national and local authorities.</p> <p>Teachers, school psychologists/counsellors, and other relevant school staff.</p>

Assessment Questions	Assessment Sub-questions	Indicators/Criteria to Explore	Data Collection Methods	Sources of Information
7. What is the relationship between the teachers' capacity and teaching modality with children's learning and well-being?	<p>7.1. How does teacher well-being and burnout affect student outcomes?</p> <p>7.2. What strategies do teachers use to support children's learning and well-being? How confident are teachers in supporting children's learning and psychosocial needs?</p> <p>7.3. Which teaching methods (games, projects, group work vs. textbooks) improve both motivation and psychosocial well-being?</p>	<p>Correlation between teaching style and child motivation/engagement. Differences in engagement and stress. Teacher stress and workload are reported. Availability of training and confidence in psychosocial support.</p>	<p>KIIs with NRC education programme team, external stakeholders, including Education Cluster, relevant national and local authorities, Teachers, school psychologists/counsellors, and other relevant school staff.</p>	<p>NRC Education Team. Education Cluster. Relevant national and local authorities. Teachers, school psychologists/counsellors, and other relevant school staff.</p>
8. What role do parents/caregivers play in supporting their children's learning and well-being?	<p>8.1. How do parents support their children with homework, online classes, or catch-up learning?</p> <p>8.2. What coping strategies do parents use to reduce children's stress or anxiety?</p> <p>8.3. How does parental stress, displacement, or lack of resources affect their ability to help children learn? What kind of support do parents say they need to better help their children?</p> <p>8.4. What expectations or pressures do parents place on children (e.g., academic performance, household chores), and how does this influence well-being?</p>	<p>Frequency and type of parental support for learning (help with homework, finding devices, creating study routines). Types of emotional support provided (encouragement, calming, routines, play). Levels of parental stress and its perceived effect on children. Parent-reported barriers (lack of skills, devices, time, stress). Parent-reported needs for support (training, psychosocial help, material aid).</p>	<p>Surveys with children aged 6–11 and 12–17 (asking about parental help at home). Storytelling with children with disabilities. FGDs with parents/caregivers. FGDs with children aged 12–17. KIIs with the NRC education programme team, external stakeholders, including the Education Cluster, relevant national and local authorities, Teachers, school psychologists/counsellors, and other relevant school staff.</p>	<p>Parents/caregivers. Children aged 6–11. Children aged 12–17. NRC Education Team. Teachers, school psychologists/counsellors, and other relevant school staff.</p>

Assessment Questions	Assessment Sub-questions	Indicators/Criteria to Explore	Data Collection Methods	Sources of Information
9. What protective factors help children cope and learn despite disruptions?	<p>9.1. Do extracurriculars and creative activities improve psychosocial well-being and engagement in learning? If yes, how and why?</p> <p>9.2. Which activities (arts, sports, group work) improve both mood and readiness to learn? What coping mechanisms do children themselves describe?</p> <p>• Do children express hope and future aspirations, and how does this affect their learning motivation?</p>	<p>Participation in extracurriculars, safe spaces, and the reported impact in engagement and learning.</p> <p>Self-reported coping and resilience strategies.</p> <p>Role of positive peer/teacher relationships in resilience</p>	<p>Surveys with children aged 6–11.</p> <p>Surveys with children aged 12–17.</p> <p>Storytelling with children with disabilities and aged 6-11.</p> <p>FGDs with children aged 12–17.</p> <p>FGDs with parents/caregivers.</p> <p>KIIs with the NRC education programme team, external stakeholders, including the Education Cluster, relevant national and local authorities, Teachers, school psychologists/counsellors, and other relevant school staff.</p>	<p>Children aged 6–11.</p> <p>Children aged 12–17.</p> <p>Children with disabilities</p> <p>Parents/caregivers.</p> <p>NRC Education Team.</p> <p>Education Cluster.</p> <p>Relevant national and local authorities.</p> <p>Teachers, school psychologists/ counsellors, and other relevant school staff.</p>

5.4 Annex 4: List of Key Informants

No.	Stakeholder Category	Organization/Institution	Position	Name and Surname	Contact Information	Location	Language Spoken
1	Internal Stakeholder	NRC Ukraine	Education Project Manager	Tamara Ishchenko	tamara.ishchenko@nrc.no	Dnipro	English/Ukrainian
2	Internal Stakeholder	NRC Ukraine	Education Project Manager	Iryna Kuzmenko	iryna.kuzmenko@nrc.no	Kyiv	English/Ukrainian
3	Internal Stakeholder	Implementing partner (NGO)	Coordinator of Educational Programs	Olga Voytyuk	voytyuk@potribnitut.org	Kherson	Ukrainian
4	External Stakeholder	Education Cluster	Coordinator of South Cluster	Tetiana Rodionova	trodionova@unicef.org	Kyiv	English/Ukrainian
5	External Stakeholder	MHPSS Technical Working Group	Co-Chair	Viktor Vus	vvus@InternationalMedicalCorps.org	Kyiv	English
6	External Stakeholder	Teachers/School Psychologists/Counsellors/ Other Relevant School Staff	Teacher	Nadia	N/A	Khersonska oblast, Khersonskyy rayon, Khersonska hromada	Ukrainian/Russian

No.	Stakeholder Category	Organization/Institution	Position	Name and Surname	Contact Information	Location	Language Spoken
7	External Stakeholder	Teachers/School Psychologists/Counsellors/ Other Relevant School Staff	Psychologist	Yulia	N/A	Kherson- ska oblast, Beryslavskyy rayon, Novo- vorontsovsk hromada	Ukrainian/Russian
8	External Stakeholder	Teachers/School Psychologists/Counsellors/ Other Relevant School Staff	Teacher	Svitlana	N/A	Mykolaivska oblast, Mykolaivskyy rayon, Halytsynivska hromada	Ukrainian/Russian
9	External Stakeholder	Teachers/School Psychologists/Counsellors/ Other Relevant School Staff	Deputy Director for Educational Work	Margaryta	N/A	Mykolaivska oblast, Mykolaivskyy rayon, Mykolaivska hromada	Ukrainian/Russian
10	External Stakeholder	Teachers/School Psychologists/Counsellors/ Other Relevant School Staff	School Social Worker	Nina	N/A	Sumska oblast, Sum- skyy rayon, Vorozhbian- ska hromada	Ukrainian/Russian
11	External Stakeholder	Teachers/School Psychologists/Counsellors/ Other Relevant School Staff	Deputy Director for Educational Work	Nadia	N/A	Sumska oblast, Kono- topskyy rayon, Burynska hromada	Ukrainian/Russian
12	External Stakeholder	Teachers/School Psychologists/Counsellors/ Other Relevant School Staff	Teacher	Svitlana	N/A	Dnipropetro- vska oblast, Kamyanskyy rayon, Ver- khytsevska hromada	Ukrainian/Russian

No.	Stakeholder Category	Organization/Institution	Position	Name and Surname	Contact Information	Location	Language Spoken
13	External Stakeholder	Teachers/School Psychologists/Counsellors/ Other Relevant School Staff	Teacher	Viktoria	N/A	Dnipropetro- vska oblast, Synelnikivskyy rayon, Slavhorodska hromada	Ukrainian/Russian
14	External Stakeholder	Teachers/School Psychologists/Counsellors/ Other Relevant School Staff	Psychologist	Svitlana	N/A	Zaporizka oblast, Zapor- izkyy rayon	Ukrainian/Russian
15	External Stakeholder	Teachers/School Psychologists/Counsellors/ Other Relevant School Staff	Teacher	Natalia	N/A	Zaporizka oblast, Zapor- izkyy rayon, Tavriyska hromada	Ukrainian/Russian
16	External Stakeholder	Teachers/School Psychologists/Counsellors/ Other Relevant School Staff	Deputy Director for Educational Work	Tetiana	N/A	Kharkivska oblast, Chuhu- ivskyy rayon, Chuhivska hromada	Ukrainian/Russian
17	External Stakeholder	Teachers/School Psychologists/Counsellors/ Other Relevant School Staff	Psychologist, Inclusive Resource Center	Natalia	N/A	Kharkivska, Izyumskyy rayon, Izum- ska hromada	Ukrainian/Russian
18	External Stakeholder	Teachers/School Psychologists/Counsellors/ Other Relevant School Staff	Psychologist, Inclusive Resource Center	Olena	N/A	Zaporizka oblast, Zaporizkyy Rayon, Kus- huhumska hromada	Ukrainian/Russian
19	External Stakeholder	Local Education Authorities	Head of Education Department	Olena	e.v.kazannikova@gmail.com	Zaporizka oblast	Ukrainian/Russian
20	External Stakeholder	NGO	Child Fund	Tetiana Tsuman	info@childfund.org.ua	Kyiv	Ukrainian/Russian

5.5 Annex 5: List of Study Locations and Categorisation

Location	1-30 km	30-50 km	50+ km
SUMSKA OBLAST			
Burynska			X (~59)
Novoslobodska			X (~59)
Okhtyrska			X (~87)
Vorozhbianska		X (~33)	
Konotopska			X (~98)
KHARKIVSKA OBLAST			
Kolomatska			X (~86)
Chuhuivska			X (~62)
Slobozhanska			X (~71)
Kunievska	X (~26)		
Pisochynskaya		X (~38)	
DNIPROPETROVSKA OBLAST			
Slavhorodska			X (~62)
Myrivska	X (~22)		
Nikopolska	X (~2)		
Verkhivtsevska			X (~100)
Kryvorizka		X (~48)	
Apostolovska		X (~32)	
ZAPORIZKA OBLAST			
Kushuhumska	X (~9)		
Tavriiska	X (~11)		
Novooleksandrivska	X (~16)	X (~32)	
Matviivska		X (~42)	X (~100)

Location	1-30 km	30-50 km	50+ km
Shyrokyvska		X (~37)	
Vilnianska			
Zaporizhska	X (~17)		
MYKOLAIVSKA OBLAST			
Mykolaivska		X (~46)	
Galitsynivska		X (~49)	
Voznesenska			X (~128)
KHERSONSKA OBLAST			
Khersonka	X (~1)		
Dariivska	X (~6)		
Novovorontsovska	X (~9)		
Kostiantynivska	X (~1)		

5.6 Annex 6: Location-Based Key Findings

1. Eastern Ukraine – Location-Based Findings

LOCATIONS	KHARKIVSKA					DNIPROPETROVSKA					ZAPORIZKA						
	Kolomatska	Chuhuivska	Slobozhanska	Kunievka	Pisochynskaya	Slavhorodska	Myrivska	Nikopol'ska	Verkhivtsevska	Kryvorizka	Apostolovska	Kushuhumska	Tavriiska	Novooleksandriivska	Matviivska	Shyrokyvska	Vilnianska
While children largely remain enrolled in school, engagement is fragile rather than stable, as emotional strain and repeated disruptions undermine learning confidence, whereas more stable routines and fewer modality shifts support stronger confidence and continuity of engagement.				✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Repeated air-raid alerts and shelter transitions fragment lessons into shorter, incomplete learning episodes, undermining continuity even when schooling remains operational.				✓			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓				✓
Learning modality strongly shapes engagement and support dynamics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online and hybrid learning shift instructional responsibility from schools to households, increasing reliance on caregiver support for homework and emotional regulation, • Reduces peer interaction and informal academic support, and Fragments teachers' attention and ability to monitor understanding in real time.				✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Engagement and aspirations are most uneven and fragile due to partial disruption combined with higher expectations of continuity					✓					✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	
In-person learning enables deeper engagement through immediate feedback and relational connection, decreasing learning loss and fragmentation.	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓									
For children with disabilities, engagement is particularly fragile under online and hybrid learning, as disrupted routines and limited adapted support reduce teachers' capacity to provide one-to-one attention, contributing to increased learning loss.				✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
While children largely remain enrolled in school, engagement is fragile rather than stable, as emotional strain and repeated disruptions undermine learning confidence, whereas more stable routines and fewer modality shifts support stronger confidence and continuity of engagement.				✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Emotional distress (anxiety, distress, worry, fatigue) directly undermines attention and comprehension, manifesting as heightened emotional sensitivity among younger children and chronic cognitive fatigue among adolescents.				✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

LOCATIONS	KHARKIVSKA				DNIPROPETROVSKA				ZAPORIZKA					
Night-time insecurity and chronic hypervigilance disrupt sleep, leading to cumulative exhaustion that undermines emotional regulation and learning readiness, especially among adolescents.			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cumulative learning disruption disproportionately affects mathematics, where repeated interruptions erode confidence and lead to avoidance rather than disengagement, with effects most pronounced closer to the frontline.			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Reading and language subjects are more resilient to disruption than cumulative STEM subjects across locations, with resilience most consistently sustained in 50+ km contexts due to greater instructional stability.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Play and creative activities function as one of the most effective coping mechanisms supporting emotional regulation and learning readiness across age groups, along with its impact in reducing learning loss and improving psychosocial wellbeing. While for younger children, play consistently restores emotional balance and enables re-engagement with learning, it also supports well-being of adolescents, but translate into learning gains only when structured and regular.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Play and psychosocial activities remain valued but are less effective in producing sustained emotional relief due to continuous exposure to stressors.			✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓			✓
As schooling becomes disrupted, reliance on caregivers for emotional regulation and learning support increases, with frontline proximity intensifying the emotional burden on families and shifting caregiver roles from academic assistance toward emotional containment, particularly for adolescents.			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Peer support remains an important coping mechanism for adolescents, providing emotional validation and shared understanding; however, its availability and effectiveness are constrained by online learning, displacement, and reduced informal interaction, particularly in frontline and second-line areas.			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Teachers increasingly function as first-line emotional stabilisers rather than primarily instructional actors, reducing time and capacity for teaching.			✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓			✓
Teachers increasingly absorb psychosocial responsibilities alongside instruction, heightening risks of strain and burnout.			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
While children across age groups continue to believe in the value of education, the strength and certainty of future-oriented confidence are reduced under sustained disruption, with hope expressed more cautiously and unevenly.			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Children living in more stable learning environments express stronger and more consistent confidence in education's future value, with education perceived as a reliable pathway for continuity, opportunity, and longer-term planning.	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓							
Younger children's hopes are emotionally driven and anchored in safety and normality across locations, but where disruption is higher these aspirations narrow to immediate calm and routine.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

LOCATIONS	KHARKIVSKA				DNIPROPETROVSKA				ZAPORIZKA					
Adolescents articulate more cautious and conditional aspirations, with planning horizons becoming progressively shorter.			✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
In less predictable learning environments, educational pressure increases, leading many adolescents, especially in exam years, to narrow their aspirations as a protective coping response.			✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

2. Southern and Northern Ukraine – Location-Based Findings

LOCATIONS	MYKOLAIVSKA			KHERSONSKA				SUMSKA				
	Mykolaivska 30-50	Galitsynivska 30-50	Voznesenska 50	Khersonka 1-30	Dariivska 1-30	Novovorontsovka 1-30	Kostiantynivska 1-30	Burynska 50	Novoslobodska 50	Okhtyrka 50	Vorozhbianska 30-50	Konotopska 50
While children largely remain enrolled in school, engagement is fragile rather than stable, as emotional strain and repeated disruptions undermine learning confidence, whereas more stable routines and fewer modality shifts support stronger confidence and continuity of engagement.	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	
Repeated air-raid alerts and shelter transitions fragment lessons into shorter, incomplete learning episodes, undermining continuity even when schooling remains operational.				✓	✓	✓	✓					
Learning modality strongly shapes engagement and support dynamics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online and hybrid learning shift instructional responsibility from schools to households, increasing reliance on caregiver support for homework and emotional regulation, • Reduces peer interaction and informal academic support, and Fragments teachers' attention and ability to monitor understanding in real time.	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	
Engagement and aspirations are most uneven and fragile due to partial disruption combined with higher expectations of continuity	✓	✓									✓	
In-person learning enables deeper engagement through immediate feedback and relational connection, decreasing learning loss and fragmentation.			✓					✓	✓	✓		✓
For children with disabilities, engagement is particularly fragile under online and hybrid learning, as disrupted routines and limited adapted support reduce teachers' capacity to provide one-to-one attention, contributing to increased learning loss.	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	

LOCATIONS	MYKOLAIVSKA		KHERSONSKA				SUMSKA					
While children largely remain enrolled in school, engagement is fragile rather than stable, as emotional strain and repeated disruptions undermine learning confidence, whereas more stable routines and fewer modality shifts support stronger confidence and continuity of engagement.	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	
Emotional distress (anxiety, distress, worry, fatigue) directly undermines attention and comprehension, manifesting as heightened emotional sensitivity among younger children and chronic cognitive fatigue among adolescents.	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	
Night-time insecurity and chronic hypervigilance disrupt sleep, leading to cumulative exhaustion that undermines emotional regulation and learning readiness, especially among adolescents.	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	
Cumulative learning disruption disproportionately affects mathematics, where repeated interruptions erode confidence and lead to avoidance rather than disengagement, with effects most pronounced closer to the frontline.	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	
Reading and language subjects are more resilient to disruption than cumulative STEM subjects across locations, with resilience most consistently sustained in 50+ km contexts due to greater instructional stability.			✓					✓	✓	✓		✓
Play and creative activities function as one of the most effective coping mechanisms supporting emotional regulation and learning readiness across age groups, along with its impact in reducing learning loss and improving psychosocial wellbeing. While for younger children, play consistently restores emotional balance and enables re-engagement with learning, it also supports well-being of adolescents, but translate into learning gains only when structured and regular.			✓					✓	✓	✓		✓
Play and psychosocial activities remain valued but are less effective in producing sustained emotional relief due to continuous exposure to stressors.				✓	✓	✓	✓					
As schooling becomes disrupted, reliance on caregivers for emotional regulation and learning support increases, with frontline proximity intensifying the emotional burden on families and shifting caregiver roles from academic assistance toward emotional containment, particularly for adolescents.	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	
Peer support remains an important coping mechanism for adolescents, providing emotional validation and shared understanding; however, its availability and effectiveness are constrained by online learning, displacement, and reduced informal interaction, particularly in frontline and second-line areas.				✓	✓	✓	✓					
Teachers increasingly function as first-line emotional stabilisers rather than primarily instructional actors, reducing time and capacity for teaching.	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	
While children across age groups continue to believe in the value of education, the strength and certainty of future-oriented confidence are reduced under sustained disruption, with hope expressed more cautiously and unevenly.	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	
Children living in more stable learning environments express stronger and more consistent confidence in education's future value, with education perceived as a reliable pathway for continuity, opportunity, and longer-term planning.			✓					✓	✓	✓		✓
Younger children's hopes are emotionally driven and anchored in safety and normality across locations, but where disruption is higher these aspirations narrow to immediate calm and routine.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

LOCATIONS	MYKOLAIVSKA		KHERSONSKA				SUMSKA			
Adolescents articulate more cautious and conditional aspirations, with planning horizons becoming progressively shorter.	√	√	√	√	√	√	√			
In less predictable learning environments, educational pressure increases, leading many adolescents, especially in exam years, to narrow their aspirations as a protective coping response.	√	√	√	√	√	√	√			