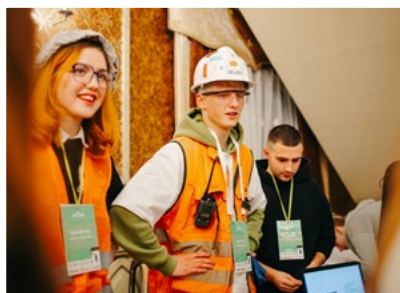


# YOUTH NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Chernihivska, Sumska, Dnipropetrovska,  
Zaporizka, Kharkivska, Donetska, Mykolaivska,  
Odeska, and Khersonska in Ukraine

*Final Report, 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2025*







Scruples Research  
*For the Norwegian Refugee Council*

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Ukraine**

This report, produced by Scruples Research, was contracted by NRC as part of the Youth Needs Assessment in Ukraine. Publishing of this report was supported by Norway.



31st of March 2025



# Acronyms and Abbreviations

BOND	British Overseas NGOs for Development
CAWI	Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standards
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
DLC	Digital Learning Centre
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
FSL	Food Security and Livelihoods
GAD	Gender, Age and Diversity
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IDY	Internally Displaced Youth
I/NGO	International/Non-Governmental Organisation
ICLA	Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance
KII	Key Informant Interview
LFS	Livelihoods and Food Security
MERL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NMFA	Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
PSHEA	Prevention of Sexual Harassment, Exploitation and Abuse
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound
SoP	Standard Operating Procedures
ToR	Terms of Reference
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UXOs	Unexploded Ordnances
WFP	World Food Programme

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	6
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b> .....	7
Key Findings .....	7
Key Recommendations .....	10
Short Term Recommendations .....	10
Medium Term Recommendations .....	11
Long Term Recommendations .....	11
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	12
1.1 Background .....	12
1.2 NRC Youth Programming in Ukraine .....	13
1.3 Purpose and Scope of Assessment .....	14
<b>2. METHODOLOGY</b> .....	15
2.1 Assessment Design .....	15
2.1.1 Desk Review .....	18
2.1.2 Key Informant Interviews .....	18
2.1.3 Focus Group Discussions .....	20
2.2 Limitations .....	22
<b>3. FINDINGS</b> .....	23
3.1 Current Situation of Youth in Ukraine .....	23
3.2 Barriers To Transitioning From TVET/High School to Employment and Coping Strategies .....	27
3.3 Capacity and Qualifications of Youth .....	35
3.4 TVET Mechanism and Further Support by Actors .....	39
3.5 Mental Health and Well-Being of the Youth .....	45
3.5.1 Psychological Impact of War .....	45
3.5.2 Barriers to Mental Health Support .....	46
3.5.3 Coping Mechanisms and Resilience .....	46
3.6 Participation and Engagement .....	48
3.6.1 Formal Participation Mechanisms .....	48
3.6.2 Informal Engagement Mechanisms .....	49
3.6.3 Barriers to Meaningful Participation .....	50
<b>4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	54
4.1 Short Term Recommendations .....	56
4.2 Medium Term Recommendations .....	57
4.3 Long-Term Recommendations .....	59

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Focus group discussions per location, target group and modality .....	21
Table 2: Barriers to Transitioning from TVET/High School Education to Employment .....	28
Table 3: Skills Gap for Youth .....	35
Table 4: Challenges faced by Government of Ukraine, Private Sector and Non-Governmental Actors .....	39

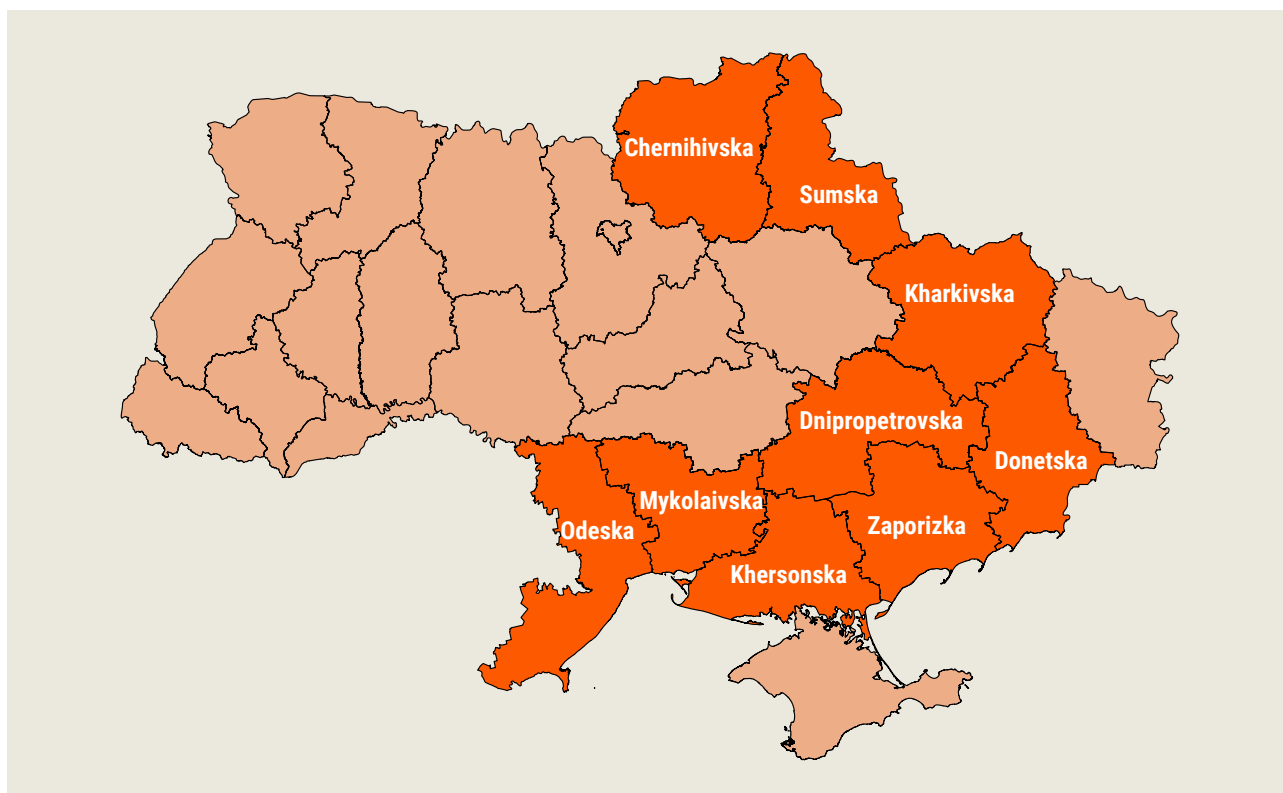
# Acknowledgements

This youth-led assessment was commissioned by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) to Scruples Research to amplify the voices and experiences of young people and ensure youth-centred programming.

Our deepest gratitude goes to the eight youth facilitators who spearheaded this work across Ukraine. Their time, dedication, and passion were invaluable in making this initiative a reality. We also extend our heartfelt thanks to the external stakeholders, including representatives of national and local governmental authorities, youth councils and centres, I/NGOs and community/volunteer networks and young people, who participated and generously shared their personal experiences. Prior to fieldwork, youth facilitators participated in a three-day intensive training led by senior qualitative researchers from Scruples Research. The training equipped them with key skills in participatory research, including ethical research practices, community engagement, effective facilitation, probing techniques, and managing group dynamics. Emphasis was placed on data protection, informed consent, and handling sensitive information. Facilitators were also introduced to the specific FGD tools for this study, enabling them to guide discussions confidently and ethically. This participatory approach placed young people at the heart of the research process, fostering ownership, enhancing data authenticity, and contributing to the facilitators' professional development. Their lived experiences and local knowledge enriched the findings, while the study's adaptive design allowed for ongoing refinement based on field insights, promoting youth leadership in community and civil society initiatives.

This assessment would not be possible without the tireless efforts of the NRC and Scruples Research team members. From leading trainings and managing logistics to rigorously piloting and refining data collection tools, their unwavering support for the youth facilitators was the backbone of this work. We are highly grateful for their commitment and expertise. The assessment was led by Serap Merve Dogan, the lead consultant from Scruples Research, with the invaluable experience, guidance and support of Marco Fuduli Education Specialist from NRC Ukraine.

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



# Executive summary

This youth-led assessment was commissioned by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) Ukraine Country Office for Scruples Research to identify youth's voices and experiences to ensure that NRC's programming is both youth-responsive and youth-centric. Conducted over four months, from September to December 2024, the assessment covered Northern Ukraine (Chernihiv and Sumy oblasts, specifically Shostka raion), Eastern Ukraine (Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia, Kharkiv, and Donetsk), and Southern Ukraine (Mykolayiv, Odesa, and Kherson).

This study focused on exploring the barriers war-affected youth experience in transitioning from Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) or high school into employment, unemployed youth, including gaps in skills and limited access to market-relevant opportunities. It also aimed to provide a deeper understanding of the preparedness of youth for livelihoods by evaluating their access to life skills and market demands needed for their active involvement in the local labour force, which is not only crucial for Ukraine under war conditions but also for the reconstruction and recovery phases of the country. Additionally, the assessment highlighted challenges youth face in their meaningful participation in decision-making at local, regional and national levels, including traditional socio-cultural norms, gender roles and responsibilities, regulations, policies and structural barriers that limit their ability to participate in decision-making as well as taking on leadership roles. This assessment aims to guide NRC and other humanitarian interventions that empower war-affected youth to overcome these challenges and realise their full potential by providing a deeper understanding and perspective.

## Key Findings



### Top 3 Insights

- TVET continues to carry a stigma, which deters young people from selecting vocational careers.
- Mental health issues hinder motivation, restricting young people's willingness to seek employment or enter training programs.
- The number of youth councils, centres and led-organisations should be increased along with long-term funding opportunities.



### Opportunities

- Enhance outreach in rural areas
- Improve availability of services
- Engage youth as stakeholders



### Top 3 Challenges

- Centrally located TVET facilities
- Power outages and unstable internet connectivity
- Prejudice against TVET education and professions

**Youth access to TVET education and employment opportunities highly depends on their proximity to central locations and the frontline.** The impact varies significantly depending on whether youth live in urban or rural areas, with proximity to the frontline and access to available infrastructure also shaping their opportunities. According to the youth who participated in FGDs, inadequate transportation infrastructure (10%), absence of nearby TVET institutions (13%), along with financial constraints (14%) that made transportation unaffordable, particularly for those displaced and from marginalised groups residing in rural and remote hromadas of Zaporizhzhia, Mykolaiv, Sumy further increased difficulties in accessing TVET for youth, as TVET centers are primarily located in urban areas. These challenges underscore the need to expand TVET through mobile units and hybrid delivery models tailored to underserved areas.

**The demand for TVET programmes is growing as per the representatives of the Government of Ukraine, societal stigma for both female and male youth surrounding TVET professions remains a barrier.** Despite the increasing need for TVET programmes to equip youth with skills for non-traditional roles, such as welders, carpenters, and electricians, negative attitudes toward these roles continue to present a significant challenge. TVET careers are widely perceived by youth as less prestigious and financially rewarding compared to white-collar professions. However, recent changes to the higher education admission system—combined with increasing competition and a growing preference for university education—have made access to higher education more difficult. As a result, more young people are enrolling in TVET programs, though often motivated by conscription exemptions rather than genuine interest in vocational pathways. Although TVET registrations increased up to 80,000 across Ukraine in 2024 (Approximately 50,000 in 2023) as per the representatives of the Government of Ukraine, this was mainly male youth enrolling to avoid conscription.

**Youth across Ukraine face a wide range of barriers that limit their participation in TVET programmes and access to employment.** The most commonly reported obstacles include limited local job opportunities in rural and frontline areas (15% of youth), financial constraints that hinder participation in TVET and employment (14% of youth), and poor internet connectivity (12% of youth), which restricts access to online learning platforms. A further 13% of youth reported societal stigma surrounding TVET as a significant deterrent, with many perceiving vocational careers as less prestigious than university education. Youth also reported dissatisfaction with outdated curricula and low-quality instruction (10%) and the lack of hands-on training opportunities (11%), which undermine job readiness. Following, legal and documentation barriers were highlighted by 9%, with IDYs and Roma youth especially affected by missing IDs, diplomas, or registration papers. Shortages of qualified facilitators trained in youth and adult education were flagged by 7%, particularly in digital and remote learning settings.

**Economic instability and the undervaluation of vocational professions in Ukraine have created a significant disincentive for youth to pursue TVET pathways or commit to long-term careers in technical fields.** Low wages in the formal sector were identified as a major concern by 12% of youth who participated in FGDs, with many highlighting that entry-level positions often offer minimal pay despite requiring significant training and effort. For example, formal internships or jobs in TVET-related fields such as mechanics, construction, or agriculture frequently offer wages as low as 10,000 UAH per month, while informal roles—such as those in fast food or retail—can pay up to 25,000 UAH, making them more attractive despite their instability and lack of legal protections. This wage disparity contributes to a perception that TVET is not worth the investment, particularly when paired with exploitative labour practices. 9% of youth reported being offered unpaid “probation” periods or positions without formal contracts, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and without access to basic labour rights like health insurance or pension contributions. Internally displaced youth (IDY) were particularly affected, as they often face urgent financial needs and are more likely to accept low-paid or informal work in the absence of stable options.

**The war in Ukraine has had a profound impact on the mental, emotional, and psychosocial well-being of youth, with widespread consequences for their engagement in education and employment.** According to FGDs, 17% of youth reported experiencing persistent feelings of emptiness, anxiety, and hopelessness, particularly those living in frontline areas or who had been displaced. Constant exposure to air raids, drone attacks, insecurity, and trauma has created an environment of fear and uncertainty, making it difficult for youth to concentrate, plan for the future, or sustain motivation for learning and professional development. Particularly among IDYs, mental health challenges are further intensified by the emotional toll of relocation, social isolation, and the pressure to adapt to unfamiliar communities. These youth reported heightened levels of stress, guilt, and disorientation, particularly when disconnected from peer networks or lacking access to stable housing,



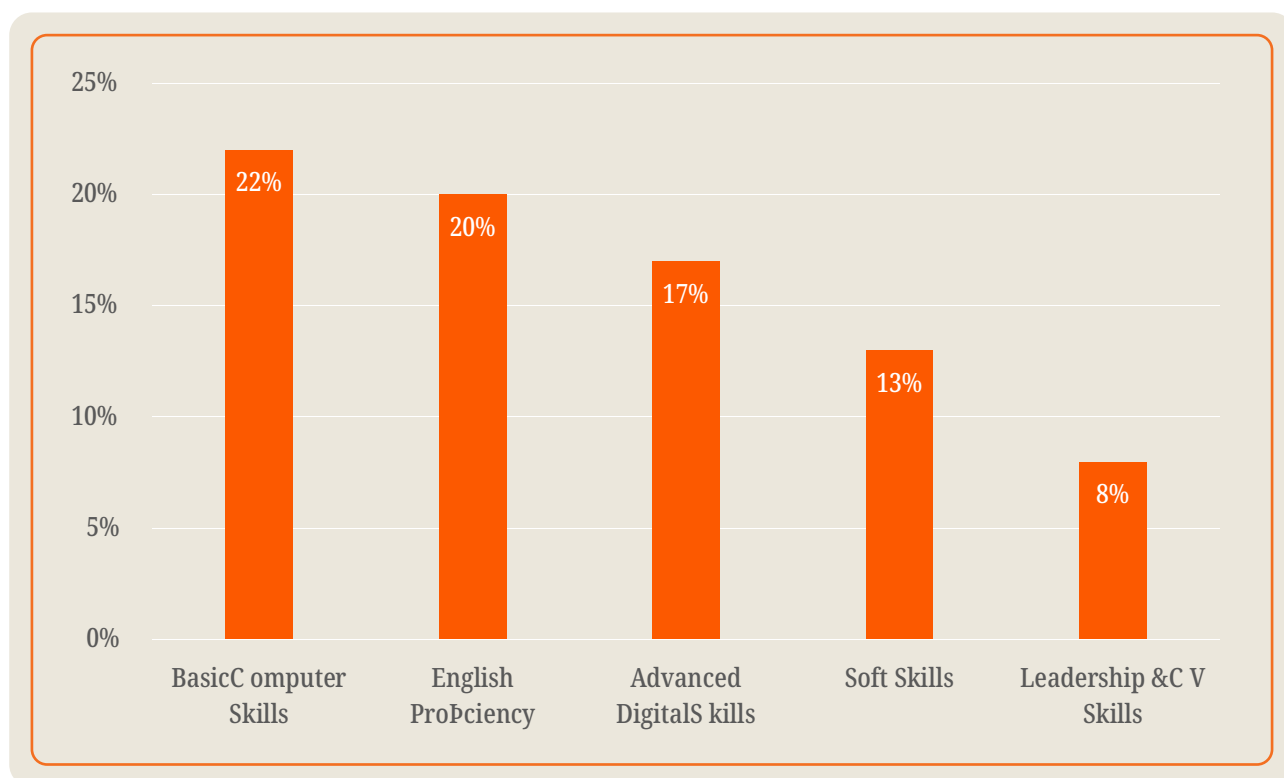
employment pathways, or support services. Social isolation was reported by **10%** of youth, with many noting that the absence of supportive relationships significantly worsened their emotional health and reduced engagement with TVET or job opportunities.

**Youth in Ukraine engage through both formal mechanisms, such as youth councils and youth centres, and informal structures, including youth-led organisations, volunteer initiatives, and digital networks.** Youth councils, established at municipal, rayon and hromada levels and have shown success in promoting youth engagement in some regions. For example, in Zaporizhzhia and Lviv, informants reported that youth councils have contributed to local development initiatives and advocated for inclusive programming. However, **43%** of youth in FGDs noted that many youth councils still prioritise recreational or cultural events over skills development, employment support, or TVET-related initiatives. This perception is often linked to councils' limited autonomy, with multiple informants indicating that local administrations influence the agenda, which can restrict opportunities for youth-led decision-making.

**The current misalignment between TVET curricula and labour market needs is a critical barrier to youth employability in Ukraine.** **10%** of youth reported that the content of their training was outdated or irrelevant to actual job requirements, with informants noting that some institutions still rely on obsolete software and equipment—such as teaching programming on outdated systems like Windows 98. This gap is particularly problematic in fast-evolving sectors like IT.

**Youth across Ukraine have expressed a strong demand for capacity-building in both technical and soft skills to better align with labour market expectations.** According to FGD data:

- **22%** of youth identified basic computer literacy—including proficiency in Microsoft Office, Excel, and online tools—as the most essential technical skill for employment.
- **20%** prioritised English language proficiency, particularly for accessing remote work and international job markets in sectors such as IT and digital services.
- **17%** reported a need for advanced IT and digital skills, including social media management, app development, and coding.
- **13%** emphasised the importance of soft skills such as adaptability, teamwork, and problem-solving, which are often lacking in formal TVET programmes.
- **8%** requested leadership training, CV-writing workshops, and entrepreneurship education to improve job readiness and career navigation.



# Key Recommendations

By strategically directing resources toward high-impact, scalable initiatives, meaningful progress can be achieved in expanding TVET education, enhancing youth mental health, and fostering civic engagement among war-affected youth in Ukraine. Three key actions stand out as particularly transformative:

## Short Term Recommendations

### 1. Expand Mobile and Digital TVET Access

**Objective:** —————>  
Increase access to TVET for displaced youth and those residing in rural, remote and frontline areas.

**Recommended Action:**

- a. Deploy mobile training units to underserved communities, ensuring flexible, location-adaptive learning.
- b. Develop e-learning platforms with hybrid (online and in-person) modules that provide certifications aligned with market demands.
- c. Partner with telecommunications providers to subsidise data costs, ensuring affordability and digital inclusion.

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### 2. Provide Financial Support to TVET Students

**Objective:** —————>  
Remove financial barriers to participation in and completion of TVET.

**Action:**

- a. Introduce cash-based support (CBI) and vouchers covering tuition, transportation, and learning materials.
- b. Target subsidies towards low-income and displaced youth, prioritising those at high risk of dropping out.
- c. Develop a scholarship fund in collaboration with donors and private-sector stakeholders to enhance long-term sustainability.

---

### 3. Improve Mental, Psychosocial and Emotional Well-being of Youth

**Objective:** —————>  
Improve access to MHPSS services for youth, particularly those who are displaced or residing in frontline and rural/remote areas.

**Action:**

- a. Deploy mobile MHPSS teams in rural/remote, frontline, and hard-to-reach areas, integrating psychologists, social workers, and youth facilitators.
- b. Establish and scale digital MHPSS platforms, including confidential tele-counseling services, SMS-based support lines, and mobile apps offering self-help tools tailored for youth.
- c. Partner with telecom providers and youth organisations to disseminate information on available services and increase digital literacy for MHPSS access.

## Medium Term Recommendations

### 1. Strengthen Youth Councils and Informal Networks

**Objective:** —————>

Build the capacity of both formal and informal youth-led structures to increase the meaningful participation and engagement of youth at local, regional and national levels.

**Action:**

- a. Provide technical and financial support to youth councils and youth-led grassroots networks, particularly for displaced youth and those residing in rural, remote, and frontline areas.
- b. Advocate for more independent youth council structures and mechanisms in close collaboration with national, regional, and local authorities, to ensure that youth councils can operate with greater autonomy, free from undue political or administrative influence, while maintaining constructive partnerships that support youth-led priorities and local authorities.

---

### 2. Integrate MHPSS Services Into Education and Livelihoods Programmes

**Objective:** —————>

Ensure that MHPSS services are integrated into TVET and livelihoods programmes by both governmental, non-governmental and private sector actors.

**Action:**

- a. Equip teachers/facilitators with skills to recognise and address psychosocial distress among students. This includes training in Psychological First Aid (PFA) and classroom strategies that promote social and emotional learning (SEL) in the TVET system.
- b. Advocate to the Government of Ukraine for including structured MHPSS components, such as stress management, emotional regulation, and social-emotional learning, within TVET programme curricula.
- c. Advocate for and collaborate with employers to implement workplace wellness and staff-care initiatives, including regular mental health check-ins and referral pathways to professional support.

---

## Long-Term Recommendations

### 1. Align TVET Curricula with Market Demands

**Objective:** —————>

Ensure that TVET programmes, align with employer demands and emerging job sectors by advocating for stronger cooperation between public-private partnerships, along with civil society.

**Action:**

- a. Conduct regular labor market assessments to identify high-demand skills, ensuring curricula remain relevant.
- b. Facilitate stronger public-private partnerships between the Government of Ukraine and the private sector, including co-designing training modules to maximise employability outcomes.



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022, severely impacted the lives of millions, leading to a severe humanitarian crisis. Based on the most recent data from the Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan, 12.7 million Ukrainians are found to be in need, out of those 2.8 million internally displaced people within the country.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, this ongoing war has also disrupted education, particularly in Eastern and Southern Ukraine, where institutions have been destroyed, and in the North and West, where air raids frequently interrupt education activities.<sup>2</sup> Since the onset of the full-scale invasion, the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) has reported that a total of 3,428 educational institutions have been subjected to bombing and shelling. Among them, a staggering 365 institutions have been completely destroyed, hindering access to education services.<sup>3</sup> This disruption makes it challenging for students to complete their education or training, including Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes.<sup>4</sup>

Access to resources and infrastructure is limited, especially in war-torn regions, where a lack of educational materials, technology for online learning, and TVET programmes prevents displaced youth from gaining necessary skills for employment.<sup>5</sup> Youth face further barriers to active participation in the local labour force, exacerbated by the ongoing war and resulting socio-economic challenges. Key issues include high unemployment rates, displacement, declining opportunities in some sectors, particularly in agriculture, gender-specific barriers, and discrimination against marginalised groups and minorities like Roma, LGBTQAI+ individuals, and youth with disabilities.<sup>6</sup> The limited availability of jobs, combined with high competition, particularly in the less affected Northern and Western regions, further exacerbates these challenges. Economic instability, including high unemployment rates and low wages, often forces youth into informal or low-paid jobs that do not match their qualifications.<sup>7</sup>

Youth also face practical challenges like navigating bureaucratic systems for credential transfer and accessing government services.<sup>8</sup> Safety and security concerns, such as the risk of travel in conflict areas, and infrastructure issues like power outages, further hinder both their education and job search efforts.<sup>9</sup> Many youth, especially those interested in entrepreneurship, struggle with access to financial resources, limiting their ability to start or expand businesses.<sup>10</sup> Career counseling and job placement services exist but are often ineffective due to limited reach and low awareness among the displaced population. The availability of structured career guidance is scarce, especially in rural and conflict-affected areas, where destroyed infrastructure and widespread displacement create additional challenges. Many displaced youth and their families remain unaware of the

- 
- 1 UNOCHA, Ukraine Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2024, December 2023, Ukraine. <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2024-december-2023-enuk>
  - 2 Plan International, Adolescent Girls in Crisis: Voices from Ukraine, Poland and Romania, 2024.
  - 3 Ministry of Education and Science (MoES). Save the Schools Tracker. <http://saveschools.in.ua/en/>
  - 4 Plan International, Adolescent Girls in Crisis: Voices from Ukraine, Poland and Romania, 2024.
  - 5 UNOCHA, Ukraine Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2024, December 2023, Ukraine. <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2024-december-2023-enuk>
  - 6 UNDP, Impact of War on Youth in Ukraine, Ukraine, 2023.
  - 7 Taras Vasylytsiv, Ruslan Lupak, Olha Mulska, Olha Levytska and Ihor Baranyak (2024). Youth migration during war: Triggers of positive aspirations and preservation of human resources in Ukraine. Problems and Perspectives in Management, 22(2), 627-641. doi:10.21511/ppm.22(2).2024.49
  - 8 UNDP, Impact of War on Youth in Ukraine, Ukraine, 2023
  - 9 Food Security and Livelihoods (FSL) Cluster, Overview of Priority Crosscutting Issues for Food Security and Livelihoods, Ukraine, 2024.
  - 10 Council of Europe, Ukraine: Chapter III- Employment and Entrepreneurship, Ukraine, 2023.

services that could support their transition from education to employment, making this a significant barrier to their integration into the job market.<sup>11</sup>

Additionally, many displaced youth are struggling with mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and trauma, which negatively impact their ability to focus, stay motivated, and successfully transition to the workforce.<sup>12</sup> Considering that many youth participate in online learning since the COVID-19 outbreak, their peer-to-peer communication skills are highly decreased<sup>13</sup>, which could be considered impacting their skills in being a team member in their professional lives also.

## 1.2 NRC Youth Programming in Ukraine

The overarching goal of NRC Ukraine's youth programming is to ensure that vulnerable and war-affected youth in Ukraine have access to meaningful social engagement, livelihoods opportunities, and quality education. This includes fostering hope for the future and enabling youth to become active contributors to their communities. In line with the Ukrainian system, the NRC defines youth as individuals aged 14 to 35 years<sup>14</sup>; however, for this research, the 18–35 age group was prioritized to align with the target group already covered by NRC's Education in Emergencies youth programme.

The NRC youth education programme's primary outcomes include:

- 
- 11 Plan International, Adolescent Girls in Crisis: Voices from Ukraine, Poland and Romania, 2024.
  - 12 Plan International, Adolescent Girls in Crisis: Voices from Ukraine, Poland and Romania, 2024.
  - 13 Plan International, Adolescent Girls in Crisis: Voices from Ukraine, Poland and Romania, 2024.
  - 14 Borenko, Yarnya and Ostrikova, Anna, Contribution of Non Programme Countries to EU Youth Wiki Chapter I: Ukraine Youth Policy Governance, Ukraine, December 2017.  
[https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262379/Ukraine\\_Youth-Wiki-Chapter-1.pdf/ae882d8a-d251-ee1c-d881-d79a1eaf9128#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Law%20of,aged%2014%20to%2035%20years.](https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262379/Ukraine_Youth-Wiki-Chapter-1.pdf/ae882d8a-d251-ee1c-d881-d79a1eaf9128#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Law%20of,aged%2014%20to%2035%20years.)



- Equipping youth with the necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes to remain or become active and engaged community members.
- Empowering unemployed youth from all genders who have not completed basic education, to acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to pursue safe and sustainable livelihood opportunities.

NRC's Youth programming in Ukraine is carried out through local partners in collaboration with Youth Councils, Youth Centres, local authorities, TVET schools, with additional support for youth-led projects. The objectives of these initiatives are to:

- Enhance youth well-being and engagement.
- Empower youth to become proactive contributors to their communities, working closely with NRC's Protection from Violence and ICLA teams to mitigate protection risks.
- Provide access to TVET in coordination with NRC's Livelihoods and Food Security (LFS) programme.
- Offer learning support in both soft and technical skills through Digital Learning Centres (DLCs), Youth Centres and Youth Councils.
- Partner with local organisations to deliver career coaching and soft skills development support for youth.

NRC prioritises internally displaced youth within this age group, working closely with the Livelihoods and Food Security (LFS), Protection from Violence, Information, Counselling, and Legal Assistance (ICLA) programmes to ensure that youth-specific needs and learning pathways are effectively addressed.

## 1.3 Purpose And Scope of Assessment

This Youth Needs Assessment was commissioned to Scruples Research by the NRC Ukraine team to identify and prioritise key areas of intervention that the organisation should focus on based on the identified needs of internally displaced youth (IDY) residing in the North, East, and South oblasts of Ukraine. This prioritisation is aligned with NRC's strategies in Education, ICLA and LFS as well as the broader country strategy. The findings will directly inform NRC's programming decisions, funding priorities, and advocacy efforts, ensuring that interventions are evidence-based and aligned with youth needs in TVET education, livelihoods, participation and well-being. Insights from this assessment will support programmatic adjustments, the design of new proposals and programmes, and as well as contribute to policy advocacy efforts aimed at improving youth access to TVET education, employment, participation, and leadership opportunities.

To achieve the primary objective and in alignment with NRC's three global youth education pathways, the research focused on identifying the needs, challenges, and opportunities for youth in the following areas:

- **Educational Transition** - Supporting the transition from Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)/high school to employment.
- **Preparedness for Livelihood Opportunities** - Equipping youth with market-driven and life skills to effectively access the Ukrainian labor market.
- **Social Engagement** - Enhancing meaningful engagement and leadership within their communities

In addition to the primary objective, the assessment aimed to achieve the following:

- Identify barriers to youth employment and income generation.
- Identify barriers (including policy, structural, and religious/socio-cultural) as well as opportunities for social engagement, such as networking, volunteering, and increased participation in family and community decision-making.
- Identify relevant youth-led associations that promote youth engagement within their communities, including initiatives like community projects, youth clubs, and organising sports events.



## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Assessment Design

The assessment adopted a qualitative methodology, combining key informant interviews (KIIs) to gather data from stakeholders, including key NRC staff members, education cluster, government authorities, youth platforms, youth-led organisations, and focus group discussions (FGDs) with youth aged 18-35, including IDYs and host community members. The assessment covered regions including Northern Ukraine (Chernihiv oblast, Sumy oblasts – Shostka raion), Eastern Ukraine (Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia, Kharkiv and Donetsk) and Southern Ukraine (Mykolayiv, Odesa, Kherson) and bring in-depth, context-specific relevant information to inform the economic activities and identify key local collaborators. The assessment followed a six-phase structured process to uphold methodological rigor and ensure quality control at each stage. It commenced with the Inception Phase, during which the assessment team collaborated with NRC team members to refine the study's objectives, scope, and key thematic areas. This phase also involved clarifying the methodology and sampling strategies to ensure a robust research design.

To design the methodology, tools and approach of the study, this assessment utilised the Framing Paper: Youth Education and Training Programmes, Youth Tracer Study toolkit and Youth Wellbeing Outcome Monitoring Guidance Note, which NRC developed to inform NRC's programming activities throughout the humanitarian programme cycle. These resources were critical in shaping the research matrix, defining thematic areas, and aligning the study with NRC's strategic priorities for youth programming. They helped establish the core dimensions of the research matrix and tools, ensuring the assessment focused on key aspects of technical and vocational education and training and the transition of the youth into employment. While focusing on these dimensions, the study also adopted the outcome-based approach outlined in the Youth Wellbeing Outcome Monitoring Guidance Note, using its indicators to assess youth resilience, well-being, social inclusion, and economic stability. These tools shaped data collection and guided the analytical framework, enabling a structured interpretation of findings consistent with NRC's established methodologies. By integrating these resources at every stage—from research design to analysis—the assessment ensured methodological rigor, programmatic relevance, and alignment with NRC's broader objectives, ultimately strengthening the evidence base for future youth programming and policy development.

Furthermore, a comprehensive desk review encompassed an in-depth analysis of NRC's youth-focused guidance documents and other relevant literature, including recent assessments and research studies conducted in Ukraine and focused on youth's challenges and barriers to access to employment and community engagement. Drawing on insights from the desk review and NRC's existing frameworks, the team developed a research matrix, which served as the foundational structure for the study. This matrix ensured coherence between research objectives, thematic areas, participant groups, and anticipated outcomes, providing a systematic framework for data collection and analysis.

Designed as a guiding tool, the matrix systematically mapped key themes—such as the transition from Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)/high school to employment, barriers to economic participation, skill-building opportunities, gender-specific TVET and employment dynamics, and the impact of wellbeing and meaningful participation on decision-making processes. This structured framework informed the development of standardized interview and FGD guides, ensuring consistency across data collection while allowing flexibility to capture emerging insights. Each guide contained 10-15 open-ended questions tailored to either the expertise of key informants or the lived experiences of youth participants, facilitating in-depth discussions while maintaining thematic alignment. Please refer to **Annex 1** for the assessment matrix and **Annex 2** for the data collection tools used in this study. The **Instrument Refinement** phase followed, where research tools, including KII and FGD guides, were developed and validated through NRC team reviews and pilot testing, ensuring that they captured the nuances of youth experiences with gender-sensitive adaptations.

A participatory approach was adopted during this assessment by actively involving youth facilitators in the research process, ensuring that IDYs and youth at risk of displacement were not just subjects of the study but active contributors to its implementation. This approach was designed to empower young people to play a central role in shaping the research while also enhancing their skills in participatory research and field data collection. The Scruples Research team identified and selected eight youth facilitators (one female and one male per region) from three key geographical areas: Northern Ukraine (Chernihiv Oblast, Sumy Oblast – Shostka Raion), Eastern Ukraine (Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia, Kharkiv, and Donetsk), and Southern Ukraine (Mykolaiv, Odesa, and Kherson). Gender-balanced youth aged 18-35 were chosen based on their interest in community engagement and research, ensuring diverse representation across the regions studied through the open call Scruples team has circulated to its local partners, including NGOs, CSOs, volunteer and community networks, and social media groups.

Before fieldwork commenced, the youth facilitators underwent a three-day intensive training conducted by senior qualitative field researchers at Scruples Research. The training covered core aspects of participatory research, equipping them with the necessary skills to conduct FGDs effectively and learn in-depth research for their future endeavors. Therefore, the training included an introduction to participatory research principles, ethical considerations in research, community engagement strategies, and the specific role of youth facilitators. Additionally, facilitators received hands-on instruction in effective facilitation techniques, managing group dynamics, conflict resolution, probing and asking open-ended questions and handling sensitive information. Data protection, informed consent, privacy safeguards, and strategies for handling ethically challenging situations were also key components of the training. The facilitators were further oriented on the specific FGD tools developed for this study, ensuring they could confidently guide discussions while maintaining research integrity and participant safety.

## Youth Facilitator Training Modules



**Participatory  
Research  
Principles**



**Ethical  
Considerations  
in Research**



**Community  
Engagement  
Strategies**



**The Role of  
Facilitators**



**Managing  
Group  
Dynamics**



**Conflict  
Resolution**



**The Role of  
Data Protection**



**Handling  
Sensitive  
Information**



**Familiarising  
with the FGD  
Tools**

This participatory approach ensured that young people were at the forefront of the research process, fostering a sense of ownership over the study and its findings. The facilitators did not merely assist in data collection but actively shaped the discussions, bringing their lived experiences and local knowledge into the study. The collaborative process also contributed to the facilitators' professional growth, as they developed research and facilitation skills that could be applied to future community initiatives, research projects, or career opportunities. By directly involving youth in conducting research on issues affecting them, this approach not only enriched the depth and authenticity of the data but also created a pathway for more youth-led initiatives at the community and civil society levels. The participatory nature of the study is further demonstrated by its iterative

and adaptive design, allowing youth facilitators to refine their approaches based on real-time field experiences, ensuring that the study remained responsive to the perspectives of the communities involved.

During the **Data Collection** phase, trained youth facilitators, supervised by Scruples Research senior researchers, conducted FGDs across target regions. Ethical research protocols were strictly followed. Data collection was conducted through audio recordings and detailed documentation, with informed consent obtained prior to any recordings. In cases where recording was not possible, field researchers and youth facilitators took detailed notes to ensure data accuracy. Once data collection was completed, the **Data Cleaning and Processing** phase involved rigorous quality control measures, including verifying completeness, anonymizing sensitive information, and organizing transcripts for systematic analysis. In the **Data Analysis** phase, a thematic approach was applied to identify key trends and patterns, with findings disaggregated by gender, displacement status, and geographic location. Thematic coding was performed to categorize recurring trends, allowing for a structured interpretation of responses. In the case of FGDs, a consensus-based coding approach was employed: if a participant provided a response and no objections were raised by other group members, the response was considered reflective of group consensus and recorded as a full count. This methodology ensured that collective perspectives were accurately represented and that prevailing sentiments were captured with clarity. Gendered differences in experiences, barriers, and opportunities were specifically examined to ensure an intersectional perspective. Validation and triangulation techniques were employed to cross-reference findings with secondary data sources, comparing responses across different stakeholder groups to identify consistent patterns and potential discrepancies.

Throughout the assignment, a gender-sensitive, and inclusive approach was systematically integrated into the research methodology and implementation to ensure that diverse perspectives were represented meaningfully. Marginalised youth groups, including youth with disabilities, were included in the study. This approach extended beyond participant selection to encompass research design, data collection processes, and analysis. To promote gender inclusivity, the assessment ensured balanced representation across all genders in FGDs, actively engaging young men and women from internally displaced and host communities across rural and urban settings. The facilitation process was structured to create a safe and inclusive space where participants could freely express their experiences, including through gender-segregated FGDs where necessary, to encourage open discussions on sensitive topics. Additionally, youth facilitators were trained on gender-sensitive research practices, including recognizing and mitigating potential biases, applying gender-responsive questioning techniques, and ensuring that discussions reflected the diverse realities of young people's experiences. 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. To uphold data protection and ethical research standards, the assessment strictly adhered to NRC's data protection policies and international best practices, ensuring compliance with GDPR 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.

Furthermore, the design of this assessment ensured that the overall tool design, sampling approach and data analysis meet the international standard, considering the **British Overseas NGOs for Development (BOND) Evidence Principles**<sup>15</sup>. Through this assessment, **SMART and actionable** recommendations were generated to inform NRC's future youth interventions.

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



## 2.1.1 Desk Review

As a foundational step in the assessment, the Scruples Research team conducted an extensive desk review to analyze existing knowledge, identify data gaps, and refine the research methodology. The review encompassed **46 documents**, including assessments, evaluations, policy reports, academic studies, and governmental statistics. Key sources included reports from UNOCHA, the Council of Europe, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (MoES), OECD, USAID, IREX, NRC, UNDP, Plan International, FAO, British Council, IOM, NGO Youth Platform, and etc. which provided critical insights into TVET education, youth skills development, barriers in transitioning from TVET/high school education to employment opportunities, participation and well-being, and the broader humanitarian and economic landscape affecting war-affected youth in Ukraine. The desk review was instrumental in designing the assessment matrix, which structured the study by aligning research objectives with key thematic areas, stakeholder groups, and expected outcomes. Thematic areas were categorized as:

- **Skills Building** – Identifying existing TVET programmes, and other skills building opportunities for youth, geographic -rural and urban- and gender disparities in access, and opportunities for enhancing employment and social engagement.
- **Employment** – Assessing labor market trends, formal and informal employment pathways, opportunities for youth-led businesses, and employment sectors more accommodating to women with vocational skills.
- **Social Engagement** – Mapping community engagement structures, particularly for women and IDYs, and analyzing opportunities for youth participation in decision-making and civil society initiatives.

By synthesizing findings from diverse sources, the desk review informed the development of interview and FGD guides, ensuring that primary data collection addressed key informational gaps. For example, gaps in the access to the TVET programs, including comparisons in rural and urban settings, and youth perceptions around youth councils, their structure, activities and relation with the local administrations, and its influence in youth participation. Similarly, limited data on youth-led initiatives influenced the design of KII questions to capture stakeholder perspectives on the role of youth in post-war economic recovery.

A triangulation approach was applied throughout the study to enhance data credibility. Findings from secondary sources were cross-validated with primary data collected from FGDs and KIIs, ensuring that emerging trends, such as barriers to employment for displaced youth or challenges in skill-building access, were corroborated across multiple data points. Discrepancies between secondary and primary data—such as differences in reported job availability versus lived youth experiences—were critically analyzed to distinguish between perception gaps and structural barriers.

Despite the breadth of the desk review, some limitations were identified. The absence of recent labor market statistics, particularly regarding job accessibility for displaced youth, along with statistics on the barriers impacting youth access in TVET, posed challenges in establishing a comprehensive understanding. Recognizing these limitations, the assessment methodology was designed to generate qualitative insights that complemented the existing evidence base, ensuring that NRC's programming is informed by both documented trends and real-time youth experiences.

## 2.1.2 Key Informant Interviews

The KIIs were guided by semi-structured interview protocols, focusing on the perspectives of key stakeholders. KIIs were conducted with **35 stakeholders** to gain diverse perspectives on TVET/high school education, including access and barriers, and transition into employment, skills development, social engagement, systemic challenges, well-being, and the impact of war of the war.

A **purposive sampling** approach was employed to ensure balanced representation across sectors, expertise levels, and geographic regions. Informants were prioritized based on their institutional roles, decision-making authority, direct engagement with youth, and relevance to the study's thematic focus areas. The selection criteria ensured a mix of policy-level representatives, service providers, and grassroots actors, covering urban and rural perspectives, as well as institutional and community-based insights. These included Youth Council and Youth

Center members; regional and local officials from the Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Youth and Sports, and Ministry of Social Policy; representatives from TVET institutions, high schools, universities, youth-run businesses, chambers of commerce, industry associations, social inclusion and gender experts; and local and international organisations involved in youth education, livelihoods, policy advocacy, and social inclusion.

Moreover, NRC management, including Area Managers, LFS, ICLA, advocacy, and education team members, were interviewed and contributed valuable insights that informed the assessment not only about NRC's internal programming but also a broader analysis of regional and systemic challenges affecting TVET/high school education, youth transitioning to employment, participation and well-being. Area Managers, in particular, provided region-specific knowledge on displacement patterns, regional disparities in access, and barriers to TVET education and employment, offering a localized perspective that strengthened the geographic depth of the assessment. Their contributions helped contextualize findings across different oblasts, ensuring that the study captured variations in youth access to opportunities and region-specific barriers. Furthermore, interviews with the LFS and ICLA and advocacy provided a holistic and comprehensive approach to the assessment, enabling the analysis of findings from different sectoral perspectives and their relation to each other.

While core themes—such as TVET/high school-to-employment transitions, skill-building gaps, employment barriers, and gendered labor market dynamics—were covered consistently, questions were adapted depending on the respondent's sectoral expertise and role. This approach allowed for both comparability across interviews and flexibility in exploring emerging themes. For example:

- **Government representatives** provided insights into policy frameworks and systemic barriers, current perspective and situation of TVET and how the system is impacted by the war.
- **Youth Council and Centre members** shared firsthand experiences regarding youth engagement and employment challenges, the role of youth councils and centres in youth's access to TVET and employment, and projects and activities implemented in these councils and centres.
- **TVET and educational institution representatives** contributed perspectives on skill-building programmes and gaps in curricula, perspective against TVET by the both youth and other community members, and the needs and challenges in these programmes and curricula.
- **Local and international NGOs** shared their experience in supporting youth's access to TVET, challenges and difficulties youth encountered and offered successful models and practices in youth programming and advocacy.

Although FGDs were the primary method for capturing direct youth perspectives, some youth representatives were also included in KIIs, particularly those affiliated with youth councils, youth-led businesses, and TVET student organizations. This ensured that youth voices were integrated into both structured discussions and broader policy-level insights, which was benefited to mitigate the potential bias as well. By integrating their expertises, institutional perspectives, and lived experiences of youth, the KIIs provided a comprehensive evidence base that was triangulated with FGD findings and secondary data, ensuring that the assessment accurately reflects the realities of TVET/high school education, youth experiences in transitioning to employment, participation, and well-being

The KIIs aimed to bring knowledge on:

- Systemic, social, and economic barriers to transitioning from education to stable employment.
- Youth-friendly skill-building programmes and opportunities for male and female youth employment and social engagement.
- The role of education systems in job market preparation and identify gaps in educational offerings that impact employment outcomes.
- Technical and soft skills, as well as knowledge and competencies, in demand in the Ukrainian labor market.
- How NRC's programming can be adjusted or enhanced to better equip youth with necessary skills.
- Employment sectors that are more accessible to women and men with vocational skills.
- Successful models and good practices for youth engagement.
- The impact of community and family structures on youth engagement and decision-making processes, including networking, volunteering, and youth-led organizations.
- Effective youth-led practices, potential gaps, and opportunities for collaboration and capacity-building.

- NRC's potential role in supporting these efforts.

However, the challenges of securing participation from employers, particularly in locations such as Donetsk, Kherson, Kharkiv, Sumy, and Zaporizhzhia, as a result of the displacement of key industry actors and security issues, limited the information brought to the study regarding private-sector employment opportunities, skill demands, and labor market trends in these regions. This gap in direct employer insights was mitigated by reviewing secondary data sources, incorporating perspectives from the representatives of humanitarian actors, mainly working on TVET, livelihoods and employment, and youth FGD participants.

Interviews were conducted by Scruples Research's senior qualitative field researchers, a 50-50 gender-balanced team with backgrounds in sociology, philosophy, and social sciences. These researchers are highly trained in humanitarian research methodologies, including ethics, safeguarding, Do No Harm principles, Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (PSHEA), and participatory research approaches. KIIs were conducted in person or remotely, depending on accessibility and security conditions. All interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent, or in cases where recording was not possible, detailed notes were taken to ensure data integrity. Please see **Annex 3** for the detailed breakdown of the key informants.

## 2.1.3 Focus Group Discussions

The assessment conducted 15 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with 115 youth participants across Northern, Eastern, and Southern Ukraine to explore youth perspectives on TVET/high school education-to-employment transitions, skill development, labour market access, informal and formal participation mechanisms, their well-being and impact of the well-being on their education and employment. FGDs were conducted separately for female and male IDYs and youth at risk of displacement, ensuring that both groups' unique gendered challenges and experiences were captured.

The discussions focused on the following areas:

- Transition from TVET or high school education to employment.
- Technical and soft skills needed to succeed in the Ukrainian labour market.
- Gaps in the education system in providing these skills.
- Effectiveness of existing skills-building programmes and their alignment with market demands.
- Gender-specific barriers to secure employment.
- Channels used to seek job opportunities.
- Opportunities for volunteerism and leadership roles.
- Participation in community decision-making and youth-led associations (e.g., community projects, youth clubs, events).
- Suggestions for improving youth-led initiatives, including training and mentorship programmes.
- Barriers to community engagement, such as gender norms, community structures, and local dynamics.

Discussions revealed challenges, opportunities, and gaps in terms of the TVET/high school education, labor market, and other skill-building programmes. Moreover, youth FGDs identified key factors influencing their engagement in decision-making, including formal and informal mechanisms, along with the systemic challenges and issues around youth councils. Additionally, the assessment examined not only the impact of the war on youth well-being but also how it has shaped their job-seeking behaviors, willingness to pursue employment opportunities, and resilience in navigating professional and economic uncertainties.

No.	Location	Gender	No.of Participants
1	Zaporizhzhia	Female (1 group)	7
2	Zaporizhzhia	Male (1 group)	10
3	Dnipro	Female (1 group)	8
4	Dnipro	Male (1 group)	8
5	Kharkiv	Female (1 group)	10
6	Kharkiv	Male (1 group)	6
7	Odesa	Female (1 group)	7
8	Odesa	Male (1 group)	8
9	Mykolaiv	Female (1 group)	6
10	Mykolaiv	Male (1 group)	6
11	Sumy	Female (1 group)	10
12	Sumy	Male (1 group)	7
13	Chernihiv	Female (1 group)	10
14	Chernihiv	Male (1 group)	6
15	Kherson	Female (1 group)	6
16	Kherson	Male (FGD was replaced with a KII)	N/A

Table 1 Focus group discussions per location, target group and modality.

The team conducted **15 FGDs**, **4** in Northern Ukraine (Chernihiv oblast, Sumy oblasts – Shostka raion, **6** in Eastern Ukraine (Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia, Kharkiv) and **5** in Southern Ukraine (Mykolayiv, Odesa, Kherson). These regions were chosen to ensure geographic and socio-economic diversity, allowing the study to capture regional differences in accessing TVET/high school education, labor market, informal and formal participation mechanisms, including the prevalence of youth councils and youth-led initiatives, and their well-being. Although there was an initial plan at conducting one FGD with men in Kherson and two FGDs (one female and one male) in Donetsk, attempts were unsuccessful as a result of recent intensify attacks which has impacted mental well-being of participants, many rejected to be part after. In response, a KII was conducted with a male youth in Kherson to partially compensate for the missing perspectives. Moreover, several interviews with representatives from governmental bodies, such as employment agencies and youth-led organizations, were included to provide more in-depth insights into the challenges faced in Donetska and Kherson and further compensate for the limited information about the situation in these locations. Further details on these limitations are discussed in the “**Limitations**” section.

**A quota sampling** strategy was employed to ensure representation across gender, age groups, displacement status, and geographic locations, including both rural and urban areas. Participants were selected from diverse backgrounds, including those residing in rural and urban areas, displaced or at risk of displacement, employed and unemployed youth, students, and those engaged in volunteerism or community initiatives, to capture a broad spectrum of experiences and aspirations.

The data collection was managed by the Youth Facilitators in pairs with the Scruples Field Researchers. Female Youth Facilitators and Field Researchers led FGDs with female groups, while male Youth Facilitators and Field Researchers conducted FGDs with male groups, ensuring a comfortable and inclusive environment for participants to share their experiences. To maintain consistency, methodological rigor, and minimize bias in data collection, all youth facilitators underwent a comprehensive three-day training prior to fieldwork. This training covered ethical research principles, informed consent, data protection, and safeguarding measures, including Do No Harm and Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (PSHEA). Additionally, facilitators received practical instruction on facilitation techniques, active listening, probing strategies, managing group dynamics, and handling sensitive discussions. Special emphasis was placed on gender-sensitive research practices, ensuring facilitators were equipped to mitigate bias and foster inclusive discussions that accurately captured diverse youth perspectives. To further enhance data reliability and quality, facilitators followed



standardized discussion guides while maintaining the flexibility to explore emerging themes. Scruples field researchers were also present throughout the sessions to provide real-time support whenever needed, assisting facilitators in managing complex discussions, clarifying participant responses, and ensuring adherence to ethical and methodological standards. Their collaboration with field researchers, further ensured data consistency and ethical integrity across all FGDs while minimizing the potential bias.

## 2.2 Limitations

**Accessing Some Key Informants:** Some local organization representatives were not prompt in responding to interview requests, which led to delays in scheduling. The assessment team made multiple follow-up attempts -**3 times per key informant in 10 working days**- via email and phone calls to ensure coordination. When informants remained inaccessible, replacement informants with similar expertise were identified in close collaboration with NRC. While this approach helped mitigate gaps, the delayed or missing interviews may have slightly reduced the depth of insights from specific local organizations, particularly regarding their role in youth programming, TVET, skills development and employment. However, findings from other KIIs and secondary data sources helped compensate for these missing perspectives, ensuring that key themes remained well-supported.

**Security Risks and Geographic Limitations in FGDs:** The recent intensification of attacks in Kherson and Donetska significantly affected FGD participation, particularly among male youth. Many pre-recruited participants declined to take part due to security concerns and mental well-being impacts, limiting youth representation from these areas. In response, the assessment team coordinated with NRC and the Youth Council to recruit additional participants in Kherson, successfully conducting an FGD with 6 female participants. However, the planned male FGD in Kherson was replaced with a Key Informant Interview with a male youth, ensuring that some male perspectives were still captured, even its limited.

**Absence of FGDs in Donetska:** Unlike Kherson, Donetska remained entirely inaccessible in terms of FGDs, preventing any direct data collection from youth in the region. This limitation reduced geographic diversity, particularly in understanding their challenges in such frontline zone. To mitigate this gap, several interviews were conducted with the representatives of government institutions, including the employment agency, youth councils and led-initiatives, along with secondary data sources, allowing the study to partially account for missing primary data from Donetska. While these alternative sources provided valuable context, the absence of direct youth voices from Donetska remains a notable gap in representation.

The replacement of FGDs with informants and reliance on alternative data sources helped mitigate the impact on the overall findings, ensuring that youth perspectives were still comprehensively explored. However, the lower male participation in Kherson and the lack of direct data from Donetsk may have influenced gendered and region-specific insights, particularly regarding male youth experiences in TVET/high school education, their transition into employment, the labor market, participation, and well-being.

# 3. Findings

## 3.1 Current Situation of Youth in Ukraine

The ongoing war in Ukraine has drastically reshaped the socio-economic landscape. This study's findings suggest that key issues affecting youth employment include mass displacement, acute job shortages, a mismatch between available skills and market demands, and negative perceptions surrounding TVET. Youth displacement has not only reduced workforce availability in heavily affected regions but has also significantly shifted labour dynamics, prompting employers to become more open to training young and female workers to fill gaps, especially in traditionally male-dominated sectors. Despite these shifts, entrenched stereotypes continue to position TVET as a less prestigious alternative to higher education, thereby reducing its appeal to young people. Furthermore, emerging sectors such as IT offer promising opportunities, yet limited technical training, language barriers, and regional infrastructural disparities restrict widespread youth participation.

### General Overview

According to the OECD, 90% of IDPs lost their employment since the beginning of the war.<sup>16</sup> Factors such as displacement, inflation, business interruptions and demographic shifts created a new reality for internally displaced youth. Among those unemployed, 40% are reported to be internally displaced youth, with 45% of women and 35% of men youth.<sup>17</sup> While the South faces a significant shortage of workers due to high displacement, businesses in eastern Ukraine, such as Zaporizhzhia, Dnipro, Kharkiv and Donetsk, are the most impacted, with the fewest job openings across the country.<sup>18</sup> In the north, regions like Sumy are reported to be grappling with intensified security threats, further exacerbating displacement and reducing the available workforce, similar to the east, as per informants.

Ongoing instability and attacks in frontline regions such as Zaporizhzhia, Kharkiv, Kherson, and Sumy have forced many youth to relocate to safer areas as per youth FGDs. However, this displacement has also influenced employer attitudes toward hiring young workers. According to key informants, while employers previously prioritised experienced candidates, they are now increasingly open to training and employing youth to address labour shortages. Additionally, the conscription, injury, and loss of many men due to the conflict have left significant gaps in traditionally male-dominated sectors. As a result, employers are turning to women to fill these roles, shifting the labour market dynamics, reported by the informants. For instance, non-traditional roles for women, such as tractor operators and agro-drone pilots, are becoming more popular due to technological advancements and workforce demands. However, women entering these fields continue to face substantial barriers, including workplace discrimination and societal biases questioning their capabilities in traditionally male roles. Addressing these challenges requires targeted interventions such as gender-sensitive workplace policies, tailored TVET opportunities, and awareness campaigns to dismantle stereotypes. Additionally, sustaining these shifts beyond temporary labour shortages involves creating supportive environments for women through mentorship programmes, accessible childcare services, and employer incentives for gender-inclusive hiring practices.

Moreover, many IDPs previously worked in industrial or blue-collar jobs—roles that are not widely available in the western regions where they have been displaced. Given these changes, there is a growing need for reskilling

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16 OECD, Strengthening the human capital of forcibly displaced persons in and from Ukraine: Background note for the Ukraine Recovery Conference 2024, 11 June 2024, Ukraine.

[https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/06/strengthening-the-human-capital-of-forcibly-displaced-persons-in-and-from-ukraine\\_710d8b05/9afedf7c-en.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/06/strengthening-the-human-capital-of-forcibly-displaced-persons-in-and-from-ukraine_710d8b05/9afedf7c-en.pdf)

17 NGO Youth Platform, Youth Needs Assessment, Ukraine, 2023.

18 Beinsure, Ukrainian Labor Market Faces Challenges Amid War: Recovery and Persistent Struggles, 18 November 2024, Ukraine. [https://beinsure.com/news/ukrainian-labor-market-challenge/#utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://beinsure.com/news/ukrainian-labor-market-challenge/#utm_source=chatgpt.com)

and capacity-building programmes, particularly for women and displaced youth, as per FGD participants and informants. Therefore, TVET programmes present an opportunity to strengthen youth employment and equip young people with the necessary skills to adapt to evolving labour market needs.

According to the representatives of the Government of Ukraine, these TVET programmes focusing on reskilling are essential for youth and adults, along with the increasing number of veterans who should be integrated into the workforce. Although the number of individuals enrolled TVET increased from 50.000 to 80.000 between 2023 and 2024, officials note that the rise is not solely driven by a growing interest in vocational education, as per the representative of the Government of Ukraine. Recent changes in Ukraine's higher education entry system have made university admission more challenging, leading many youth to opt for TVET as an alternative. Additionally, some young men enrol in TVET programmes to avoid conscription, as these programmes provide exemptions from military service. However, entrenched stereotypes and outdated perceptions of TVET education remain major challenges in attracting youth into these roles, supported by 13% of youth, and government and I/NGO representatives of Ukraine. 60% of youth reported perceiving TVET jobs as inferior to white-collar jobs either themselves or their friends, associating it with lower salaries and less prestige. This is also supported by the findings from the IREX Youth Survey, which reinforces this perception. According to the survey, 70% of youth aged 16-35 prefer higher education over TVET in both 2023 and 2024, while only 19% considered TVET as a viable option.<sup>19</sup> This shows the significant interest in higher education compared to TVET, making TVET professionals less likely to be available in the workforce. To effectively address these negative perceptions, stakeholders suggest leveraging career success stories, particularly those highlighting women and youth thriving in non-traditional TVET roles, such as tractor operators or agro-drone pilots. Additionally, strengthening employer engagement through collaborative training programmes, internships, and direct employment pathways could significantly enhance the perceived value and attractiveness of TVET programmes. Outreach initiatives targeting parents should also be prioritized, educating families about the tangible career opportunities and potential economic stability offered by TVET, thereby shifting cultural attitudes and overcoming deeply rooted biases against vocational pathways.

Among those who do choose TVET, the decision is primarily driven by personal interest (36%) or confidence in their skills in the field (31%). Another 26% of youth select TVET based on the high market demand for specific professions, while 18% make their choice due to parental recommendations or the belief that TVET offers better job opportunities.<sup>20</sup> The role of parents in shaping educational preferences reflects a broader cultural influence on career pathways, where family expectations can sometimes override personal aspirations. However, this can also be taken as an opportunity to increase the number of youth pursuing TVET education by raising their parents' awareness and decreasing the prejudices against the TVET system.

Notably, the availability of scholarships significantly influences youth preferences, with the proportion of students choosing TVET due to financial support more than doubling from 7% in 2023 to 17% in 2024.<sup>21</sup> This more than twofold increase highlights the importance of financial accessibility in educational decision-making. It also suggests that with the right economic incentives, TVET's appeal could be strengthened, particularly for students who might otherwise opt for higher education but face financial constraints.

However, while financial support has boosted TVET enrollment, it continues to struggle with a deteriorating reputation. The perception of TVET as a prestigious educational path has declined significantly, with only 13% of students considering it prestigious in 2024, compared to 28% in 2023.<sup>22</sup> This sharp decline highlights a growing prejudice against TVET education and career, reinforcing the narrative that TVET is a "fallback option"

19 IREX, Youth Opinion Survey: Wave 3, June-July 2024, Ukraine.  
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/627a2e40fe005402b6dbb84a/t/66b9aba9b244736a38a1aef4/1723444139621/UNITY+Youth+Poll+2024+ENG.pdf>

20 IREX, Youth Opinion Survey: Wave 3, June-July 2024, Ukraine.  
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/627a2e40fe005402b6dbb84a/t/66b9aba9b244736a38a1aef4/1723444139621/UNITY+Youth+Poll+2024+ENG.pdf>

21 IREX, Youth Opinion Survey: Wave 3, June-July 2024, Ukraine.  
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/627a2e40fe005402b6dbb84a/t/66b9aba9b244736a38a1aef4/1723444139621/UNITY+Youth+Poll+2024+ENG.pdf>

22 IREX, Youth Opinion Survey: Wave 3, June-July 2024, Ukraine.  
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/627a2e40fe005402b6dbb84a/t/66b9aba9b244736a38a1aef4/1723444139621/UNITY+Youth+Poll+2024+ENG.pdf>

rather than a first-choice career pathway. This trend could further dissuade young people from pursuing TVET, regardless of financial support or employment opportunities if left unaddressed, which is supported by many informants as well.

*“We need to break stereotypes among VET providers and employers. A single success story of a woman tractor driver can change perceptions.”*

*(Key Informant, Donor, Kyiv)*

As a result, the Government of Ukraine decided to take necessary action and start a large-scale reform process in 2024 in the TVET system through a new legislative framework that aims to involve businesses more in the TVET education process, provide a more comprehensive assessment of qualifications, and further autonomy of these institutions.<sup>23</sup> However, a united response, including a stronger public-private partnership along with the support of international and national civil society, is crucial to restoring the perspective of TVET education and professions for Ukraine’s recovery and rehabilitation. Increasing private-sector involvement is expected to significantly enhance TVET by aligning curriculum development more closely with real-world labour market needs, ensuring that graduates possess relevant and up-to-date skills. Effective practices recommended for employer-driven TVET programmes include structured apprenticeships, dual training models combining classroom learning and practical workplace experience, and formal partnerships where employers actively contribute to curriculum design, instructional resources, and professional mentorship. Additionally, establishing standardised skills certification programmes, validated by industry stakeholders, can further improve the recognition and credibility of TVET qualifications, thereby facilitating youth employability and addressing employer concerns about skills mismatch.

### **Existing Sectors**

Urban centres generally offer more diverse and higher-paying job opportunities. According to key informants, the service and creative sectors dominate youth employment in urban locations. Many youth work in cafes, restaurants, and shops. These sectors provide accessible entry points but often lack long-term growth potential.

Meanwhile, rural areas often rely on local businesses and agriculture, which provide limited and seasonal employment, as per informants. These rural areas already had poor infrastructure and limited access to transportation, healthcare, and education, including TVET centres, exacerbated by the war, leaving many rural communities with no viable economic activity. According to the FAO, land contamination from unexploded ordnances (UXOs) is reported to further limit job availability in the sector, affecting 43% of households in frontline areas.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, many youth often leave to pursue education and employment in cities, abroad, or military service. Several strategies could be utilised to address these challenges, including increasing access for those residing in rural areas through satellite campuses and/or mobile training units, and focusing on skills relevant to the local economy, such as modern agricultural techniques and sustainable farming practices.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, investing in agricultural innovation, including precision farming technologies, agro-drones, and sustainable irrigation systems, may significantly increase the appeal and profitability of agriculture for youth, opening new employment avenues in tech-driven agricultural services.<sup>26</sup>

Although agricultural opportunities remain at some level, mined fields, destroyed equipment, and the absence of youth make this sector unsustainable for many. According to NGO Youth Platform, these resulted in a decline in productivity—reported by 43% of crop-producing and 17% of livestock-producing households—and reduced job opportunities for youth.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the perception of agriculture prevents many youth from engaging in the sector. According to FGD participants in Cherviv, Odesa and Mykolayiv, agriculture is often considered a last resort, primarily occupied by the elderly or those unable to access higher education and urban employment. One of the other reasons youth reported avoiding agriculture is due to its physically demanding nature and lack

23 Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (MoES), Education Digest, December 2024, Ukraine

24 FAO, Food security and agricultural livelihoods assessment: Monitoring Report, Ukraine, December 2023.

25 International Fund for Agricultural Development [IFAD], “Empowering Rural Youth Through Vocational Training,” Rome, 2023. <https://www.ifad.org/en/w/projects/2000004014>

26 IFAD & Green Reporter, “Empowering Rural Youth Communities through Agricultural Technology,” Rome, 2023. <https://green-reporter.com/empowering-rural-youth-communities-through-agricultural-technology-unlocking-opportunities-for-sustainable-growth-and-development>

27 NGO Youth Platform, Youth Needs Assessment, Ukraine, 2023.



of career prospects. Therefore, many prefer white-collar roles through higher education instead of pursuing careers in TVET roles along with agriculture. Moreover, the income from agriculture is perceived as low, which is also another factor preventing youth from assuming agriculture as a profession.

*“There are virtually no young people left in the villages; the population is primarily retirement age.”*

*(Key Informant, Local NGO, Chernihiv)*

Additionally, advanced agricultural technologies were found to limit rural job opportunities for youth in some locations, such as Sumy. According to participants, the number of workers needed to take over these jobs decreased as the advanced technology limited the need for human resources.

### **Emerging Sectors**

The IT sector remains the most popular emerging industry for youth employment due to its flexibility and remote work potential. In 2023, the industry saw significant growth, with 307,000 people engaging despite the destruction and economic instability caused by the war.<sup>28</sup> This was emphasised by many key informants and FGD participants’ youth, along with the strong educational foundation in Ukraine’s IT-related fields, providing many skilled graduates with increasing opportunities. Notably, in locations such as Odesa and Mykolayiv, where youth have reliable internet, providing them access to remote IT-related job opportunities. Furthermore, many youth reported transitioning from traditional roles in the beauty industry to more IT-related ones, such as IT testing, cryptocurrency trading, e-commerce and digital marketing. However, significant barriers limit wider participation in the IT sector, notably language barriers, particularly a lack of proficiency in English, and substantial gaps in advanced technical training. IDYs and those youth who reside in rural areas lack access to the quality educational resources, infrastructure, and professional mentorship necessary to acquire and refine critical IT skills. Limited English proficiency significantly restricts opportunities for international collaboration, remote employment, and access to technical documentation and advanced online training programmes, most of which are predominantly offered in English. Additionally, advanced IT training courses, coding boot camps, or digital literacy programmes are often concentrated in urban centres, creating geographical and financial barriers for rural and displaced youth. The lack of structured, affordable, and accessible training further exacerbates skill disparities, restricting equitable participation in this high-potential sector. English language courses specifically tailored for IT employment could empower youth to navigate international digital environments, expanding their access to global job markets. Accessible coding boot camps, structured to accommodate various proficiency levels and delivered through hybrid or fully remote models, could overcome geographical and financial barriers. Practical training programmes designed to develop remote-work competencies, including communication, project management, and collaboration skills, could further prepare youth for sustainable employment within Ukraine’s rapidly expanding IT sector. Implementing these targeted interventions would effectively bridge existing skill gaps, promote broader inclusion, and equip diverse groups of youth with the tools required for meaningful participation in digital careers.

Considering all these challenges, such as mass displacement, job shortages, a mismatch between available skills and market demands, and negative perceptions surrounding TVET, coordinated actions can be the most effective way to address them. This could include increasing public-private partnerships, strengthening rural TVET infrastructure, and introducing incentives for companies that invest in youth employment in TVET professions. The private sector can play a critical role by actively participating in curriculum design, offering structured internships and apprenticeships, and establishing industry-recognized certification programmes aligned with labour market demands. This could enhance the relevance of TVET programmes by integrating scalable digital literacy and language training, developing hybrid and mobile solutions for rural and displaced youth, and promoting successful vocational career stories to combat negative perceptions. I/NGOs and CSOs could further facilitate awareness campaigns targeting parents and youth, offer targeted information provision, mentorship and entrepreneurship support for TVET education and professions.

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28 Sifted, The state of Ukrainian tech: How does it really look in 2024?, 14 February 2024, Ukraine. <https://sifted.eu/articles/ukrainian-tech-2024-brnd?>



Youth facilitator



Youth facilitator

## 3.2 Barriers to Transitioning From TVET/High School to Employment and Coping Strategies

Several challenges prevent youth from participating in TVET programmes and entering the labour force, as reported by FGDs and informants across locations. The most frequently mentioned barrier was the lack of local job opportunities in rural areas, as per 15% of youth, which reflects a critical issue where youth are unable to find viable employment in their immediate surroundings, leading many to migrate to urban centres in search of better opportunities. These migration patterns highlight the systemic issue of geographic inequality, where rural youth are at a distinct disadvantage in terms of accessing both TVET education and employment opportunities. Financial constraints were another major issue, as per 14% of youth, underscoring how economic barriers significantly hinder youth from pursuing TVET programmes or even securing employment. For displaced youth, these limited financial resources are particularly acute as they face additional challenges related to relocation and adaptation to new communities, further limiting their access to both education and employment.



Kharkiv 2024. Photo by: Filippo Mancini/NRC.

Theme	Sub-Themes	Percentage of Youth Mentioned
Geographic Disparities (Urban vs. Rural)	Limited access to TVET institutions from rural areas	13%
	Poor transportation infrastructure	10%
	Lack of local job opportunities	15%
	Poor internet connectivity affecting online learning	12%
Displacement and Bureaucratic Barriers	Documentation challenges for IDY (e.g., lost diplomas, IDP status verification)	9%
	Financial constraints limiting access to TVET and employment	14%
	Social integration difficulties in host communities	8%
Educational and Structural Challenges	Outdated TVET curricula misaligned with market needs	10%
	Lack of practical training and apprenticeships	11%
	Shortage of qualified TVET instructors	7%
Economic and Employment Barriers	Low wages and job insecurity in TVET professions	12%
	Exploitative employment practices (e.g., unpaid probation, Lack of contracts)	9%
	Employer preference for university degrees over TVET qualifications	10%
	Negative perceptions of TVET as a 'less prestigious' path	13%
Social and Cultural Barriers	Gender discrimination in technical fields	6%
	Marginalization of Roma, LGBTQ+, and youth with disabilities	5%
Coping Strategies	Self-learning through online courses	8%
	Migration to urban centers for better job prospects	10%
	Participation in informal apprenticeships and skill-building programmes	9%

Table 2 Barriers to Transitioning from TVET/High School Education to Employment.

The perception of TVET education as a less prestigious option also surfaced frequently, with 13% of responses, indicating that societal stigma is a significant barrier. Many youth still view university education as the only pathway to success, which undermines the potential of TVET to offer meaningful career prospects. This perception is compounded by low wages and job insecurity in TVET professions (12%), which further discourages youth from pursuing TVET education. The mismatch between low wages and high expectations from employers creates a disincentive for young people to invest time and resources into TVET, particularly when they perceive the return on that investment to be insufficient.

Geographic challenges, such as limited access to TVET institutions in rural areas (13%), poor transportation infrastructure (10%), and lack of internet connectivity (12%), emerged as pressing concerns. These barriers make it difficult for rural youth to access quality education and training, which in turn limits their ability to compete for higher-skill jobs. For many, the cost of transportation and the lack of infrastructure restrict access to educational opportunities, further deepening the rural-urban divide in employment prospects.

In addition to these barriers, structural issues such as outdated curricula (10%), a shortage of qualified instructors (7%), and inadequate practical training opportunities (11%) point to systemic deficiencies in the TVET system itself. These issues prevent youth from gaining the practical skills required by the labour market, leaving them ill-prepared for the demands of employers. Furthermore, the employer preference for university degrees (10%) over TVET qualifications compounds the difficulty for vocational graduates, reducing their chances of securing stable, well-paid employment. Meanwhile, social and cultural barriers, such as gender discrimination in technical fields (6%), marginalization of Roma, LGBTQ+, and youth with disabilities (5%), and societal stigma against TVET (13%), highlight the intersectional challenges that certain groups face. These social biases contribute to the exclusion of marginalized youth from both education and employment, further entrenching inequality in the labor market.



### **Geographic barriers**

Disparities between urban and rural areas continue to limit opportunities to access TVET and exacerbate inequalities in the labour market as per 13% of youth FGD participants. Youth residing in rural areas have limited access to TVET education as TVET facilities are mainly established and operational in central locations such as city or oblast centres, and transportation from rural areas to those central ones is highly limited. According to 10% of FGD participants youth, there are not enough public transportation options or disabled-friendly public spaces that youth with disabilities can access smoothly. Furthermore, transportation costs have become another factor preventing rural youth from accessing TVET education, as it often requires daily commuting, according to 14% of FGD youth. This underscores how economic barriers significantly hinder youth from pursuing TVET programmes or even securing employment. As a result, many rural youth are unaware of available opportunities or pathways to acquire skills for emerging industries.

*“These educational institutions are located mainly in certain districts, and residents of areas like Shevchenkivskyi have to travel long distances. This can take a very long time and is a major barrier for many.”*

*(Male, FGD, Zaporizhzhia)*

Employment opportunities are reported to be more diverse and applicable to various skill levels in urban areas, such as IT roles, government positions, and other private sector jobs in the service and hospitality sectors. Additionally, urban areas benefit from a stronger presence of multinational companies and a higher demand for professional skills, which can lead to better career progression opportunities for educated youth. According to key informants, short-term TVET programmes are particularly effective in helping youth secure jobs in service roles, such as baristas, cooks, or hairdressers. These jobs provide a stable income and attract youth seeking quick employment without extensive educational requirements.

*“Employers are looking for quick-trained workers, but training programmes are still too long for urgent labor market needs.”*

*(Male, FGD, Chernihiv)*

Conversely, rural areas face significant challenges in retaining young workers. 16% of youth reported fewer job opportunities for them to take over in rural areas during the FGDs. While some large agricultural enterprises offer competitive salaries and benefits, as the informants in Dnipro emphasised, poor infrastructure, such as inadequate transportation and educational facilities, discourages many young people from pursuing careers in agriculture. Seasonal labour and small-scale businesses dominate the rural economy, but these roles lack the stability and growth potential needed to attract younger demographics. Furthermore, the limited availability of modern amenities and professional development opportunities exacerbates the migration of rural youth to urban centres or abroad.

However, TVET has significant potential to improve youth employment in rural areas. Short-term, industry-aligned training programmes in fields like agriculture, logistics, and construction could provide immediate employment opportunities while addressing critical labour shortages. To bridge the gap, targeted interventions are needed to improve infrastructure and provide access to TVET through adequate transportation.

*“There is no infrastructure in rural areas to support higher education/TVET opportunities or specialised training, especially in technical disciplines. This restricts access to quality education for rural youth.”*

*(Male, FGD, Chernihiv)*

### **Educational and structural obstacles**

The shift to online learning has impacted the overall quality of education, including TVET. With many teachers and facilitators struggling to adapt to digital platforms, students have faced a significant decline in engagement and learning opportunities. According to FGD participants, many teachers lack skills in conducting effective online classes, decreasing the quality. Therefore, many youth often lack access to quality TVET education and career guidance, significantly reducing their ability to compete for high-skill jobs.



*“Studying online is a completely different kind of education... there are no laboratories, computer bases, or simulators.”*

*(Female, FGD, Kherson)*

Furthermore, the internet infrastructure is highly challenging in rural areas, making it difficult for students to compensate through online education activities, as per 12% of youth participated in FGDs. Particularly in winter, the issues around the internet become more demanding, along with intense attacks experienced during the same period. Moreover, reliance on digital platforms assumes a baseline level of digital literacy among youth. Key informants noted that young people from underserved backgrounds may struggle to navigate online education portals or virtual consultation systems without tailored support. Therefore, transitioning to digital service delivery marks progress in modernising TVET education, highlighting the urgent need for targeted interventions. Policies to bridge digital infrastructure and skills gaps are essential, such as subsidised internet access, provision of digital devices, and community-based digital training programmes. These measures would ensure that all youth, regardless of location or socioeconomic status, can benefit equally from modernised employment services. Additionally, online TVET education limits hands-on practice and interaction further, preventing those youth transitioning from TVET education to high-skill TVET professions, as per FGD participants due to employers’ unrealistic demands for extensive work experience, even for entry-level positions. Therefore, inadequate practical training opportunities leave students unprepared for the realities of the workforce.

*“Educational and infrastructural gaps make it challenging for rural youth to access high-skill job opportunities, and the lack of targeted TVET exacerbates the issue.”*

*(Female, FGD, Kharkiv)*

Similarly, the learning experience through these internship programmes is found highly insufficient, as youth are provided with basic tasks that they don’t find to improve their skills further, as per FGD participants. This suggests an improvement in internship mechanisms offered to youth through revision of the curriculum and employers’ training in effective and efficient internship curricula to ensure youth and companies benefit most from the cooperation.

*“Young people need better internships that provide real skills, not just symbolic tasks. Companies should involve them in meaningful work, like learning circuits or fire safety.”*

*(Male, FGD, Zaphorizhia)*

The limited capacity of facilitators in adult education further exacerbates the quality of TVET education as reported by the 7% of FGD youth. While Ukraine has a substantial pool of teachers/facilitators experienced in teaching children, there is a significant shortage of teachers/facilitators equipped to address the needs of adult learners. Representatives from the Government of Ukraine have acknowledged this gap as a critical barrier in TVET education, underscoring the need for trained teachers/facilitators in adult education in the TVET system.

Moreover, TVET courses often fail to provide adequate career counselling, leaving students poorly informed about TVET career paths available. Many youth report feeling misdirected in their choice of professions, often leading to retraining later in life and delaying their entry into the workforce. 15% of key informants reported that the education system in Ukraine is not successful in informing and directing students into these TVET programmes based on their skills and market conditions. Therefore, many youth consider a university education the only way to get a prosperous job in the market.

*“Youth doesn’t receive proper professional orientation at schools. Little attention is paid to giving young people the whole range of information about what TVET can offer.”*

*(Key Informant, INGO, Spain)*

As a result, 5% of youth-participating FGDs across locations recommended mentorship programmes, as they think mentorship would provide them with necessary career counselling in a certain TVET profession.

The lack of information is not limited to the TVET programmes and potential career opportunities, but many youth are also unaware of free or subsidised TVET opportunities, although some vouchers and grant supports are provided. Moreover, 17% of youth reported not being provided with necessary financial literacy and entrepreneurial education for creating their businesses and providing job opportunities for others in the market. Without targeted informational campaigns, critical programmes offering financial assistance, such as vouchers or grants for TVET, remain underutilised.

*“Many young people simply don’t know that such opportunities exist. To spread this information, we must work with youth councils, open portals, and other mechanisms.”*

*(Key Informant, Local NGO, Chernihiv)*

### **The mismatch between low wages and high expectations**

Low wages present significant challenges for youth pursuing TVET education and employment in the market, as reported by the 12% of youth who participated in FGDs. Many employers expect to pay minimum wages while demanding high levels of professional competency, discouraging young people from investing in TVET. This disparity between effort and financial reward creates a significant disincentive for youth to consider vocational professions as viable career paths. For instance, formal internships and entry-level positions often offer wages as low as 10,000 hryvnias, whereas informal jobs, such as those in fast-food establishments, can pay up to 25,000 hryvnias, as per informants. This wage gap underscores the undervaluation of TVET professions in the formal economy, making informal employment more attractive despite its lack of stability and benefits.

Employers’ reluctance to offer competitive wages significantly impacts youth retention in TVET fields. Younger workers, who often face greater economic pressures to achieve financial independence or support personal expenses, are especially vulnerable. This mismatch between job requirements and compensation undermines the sustainability of TVET pathways as a career option. Employers aiming to minimise costs have created an environment where vocational professions are undervalued and unattractive despite their critical role in addressing labour shortages in essential sectors.

*“It’s very difficult when you try to get a job, and they require experience, but when you’re 18, you have almost no experience. And to gain that, you might have to work for free, which is not a fair option.”*

*(Female, FGD, Chernihiv)*

Exploitation and informal employment practices further increase these challenges. 9% of youth report being offered unpaid “probation” periods or jobs without formal contracts, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation.



However, economic pressures force them into informal or low-paying jobs, perpetuating cycles of underemployment and limited career growth, as per 12% of youth FGD participants. Particularly displaced youth often prioritise quick income generation over longer-term education or training due to immediate needs, as per informants. Their access to TVET education is often limited as they are also not aware of opportunities within their new communities as well. Addressing these systemic issues requires urgent advocacy, including increasing these informal practices and insufficient payment implemented by employers and improving practical training and career counselling services. By tackling these barriers, the value and sustainability of TVET pathways can be restored, helping to bridge labour shortages and create equitable opportunities for youth in critical sectors.

### **Limited funding for TVET programmes**

TVET education in Ukraine has suffered from limited funding and qualifications offerings for decades.<sup>29</sup> Supported by the key informants, these challenges are exacerbated by the war, with approximately 171 TVET institutions damaged and 12 destroyed.<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, the need for funding has increased as many businesses are disrupted, and IDPs lost their employment matching their skills. Along with the need for reforming those TVET programmes, there is now a significant need for reskilling those IDPs, increasing the funding needed, as per informants. Additionally, TVET centres in host regions—particularly in the western and central parts of the country—face pressure from increased demand, while TVET centres in the south and east remain underutilised due to security concerns, as per informants.

### **Legal barriers and bureaucracy**

According to 9% of FGD participants, for those youth who are mainly displaced, the lack of necessary documentation, such as educational certificates or IDP status certificates, creates significant barriers to accessing TVET education and employability. For instance, youth from non-government-controlled areas (NGCA) often cannot obtain the required documents, which effectively excludes them from educational opportunities, as per informants. Bureaucratic issues such as excessive documentation requirements and prolonged registration processes discourage youth from participating in formal employment. Long queues and inefficient systems often leave them feeling unsupported and alone.

*“I had to rewrite my IDP certificate, which took valuable time and nerves. No one helps with this; you’re on your own.”*

*(FGD, Mykolayiv)*

Further bureaucratic challenges are experienced by the IDYs, such as delays in updating official documentation required for employment, which can prevent timely access to job opportunities. These challenges are particularly acute for youth, who are often pushed into low-paying informal jobs with limited prospects for skill development or career growth, as per FGD participants and informants. The lack of awareness about legal rights and responsibilities also compounds these barriers. Many young people are unfamiliar with their entitlements, such as the ability to sign volunteer agreements that include travel or meal compensation. This knowledge gap leaves them vulnerable in both educational and professional contexts, undermining their ability to advocate for themselves and access available support.

Informal employment practices are widespread, leaving youth vulnerable to exploitation and undermining their ability to build stable careers. Many young people work without formal contracts, preventing them from accessing their labour rights, including health insurance or pension benefits. Moreover, the conscription of men results in higher informal employment rates among men, as both employers and employees prefer not to have a formal contract that informs the government about the employment.

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29 European Trade Union Committee for Education, Challenges and risks of vocational education and training system in Ukraine, 10 February 2016, Ukraine. <https://www.csee-etu.org/en/news/archive/1340-challenges-and-risks-of-vocational-education-and-training-system-in-ukraine>

30 Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (MoES), Education Digest, December 2024, Ukraine.

### **Traditional societal norms and associated stigma and discrimination**

The societal emphasis on higher education further prevents youth from pursuing these pathways. According to 13% of youth who participated in FGDs, families and youth often prioritise university degrees in fields like law or economics, even though job opportunities in these areas are frequently scarce. According to FGD participants, many are forced to assume positions different from their actual area of expertise based on their education, as these fields have limited opportunities. This preference exacerbates an imbalance in the labour market, leaving essential TVET sectors understaffed while oversaturating others with job seekers.

*“Everyone wants their child to have a higher education... However, we cannot employ everyone as an economist or lawyer. Today, the state needs workers. We have a skew in education.”*

*(Key Informant, Government Authority, Donetsk)*

Discrimination and stigma are some of the factors that also hinder the ability of youth, particularly those IDYs and from disadvantaged, marginalised or minority communities, to access TVET and employment. Groups such as Roma, LGBTQ+ individuals, women, and IDYs face inequalities in accessing crucial services, including education and employment, as per 5% of youth participated in FGDs.

Displaced youth often struggle to integrate into new communities, which impacts their access to TVET and employment opportunities as social networks for securing information are often missing. Additionally, many displaced youth feel isolated or unwelcomed in host regions, which further reduces their engagement with local TVET programmes. For instance, some displaced youth are found facing discrimination, particularly if they come from Russian-speaking eastern regions.<sup>31</sup>

*“Native Russian-speaking youth face stigma in the West, which prevents them from accessing TVET programmes, employability and even basic services like shelter.”*

*(Key Informant, INGO, Regional)*

IDYs experience this stigma and discrimination from their employers as well. They frequently stereotype IDYs as transient and unreliable, fearing they might leave once their original homes are liberated. This perception creates a structural disadvantage, impeding their ability to secure stable employment. Key informants revealed that many employers also hesitate to invest in training displaced youth due to uncertainties about their long-term presence. According to FGD participants, this reduces their job opportunities and ability to pursue a scalable career, developing their skills through constant learning.

*“Employers understand that displaced persons may not stay long, so they are hesitant to invest in training them.”*

*(Key Informant, INGO, Dnipro)*

For Roma youth, the lack of documentation, such as birth certificates or school diplomas, remains a persistent issue. Without these, they are excluded from formal education and TVET opportunities, perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalisation. Employers, too, often view Roma communities with bias, further compounding their struggle to integrate into the labour market.

*“Roma populations often lack registration or paperwork, which hinders their ability to access education and employment.”*

*(Key Informant, INGO, Kyiv)*

Gender discrimination is another pervasive barrier, particularly for young women aspiring to enter technical fields, as reported by the 6% of youth who participated in FGDs. Women face prejudices during recruitment processes, as highlighted by informants and 6% of FGD participants, where women are explicitly told that some roles, such as engineering or construction, are unsuitable for women. Beyond workplace biases, cultural and familial expectations often restrict women’s career paths, discouraging them from pursuing fields perceived as male-dominated.

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31 IREX, United Voices in Action Attitudes, Challenges, and Opportunities for IDPs Integration in Selected Host Communities, 7 February 2023, Ukraine. [https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/IREX\\_Presentation\\_0702\\_Attitudes%2C%20Challenges%2C%20and%20Opportunities%20for%20IDP%20Integration%20in%20Selected%20Host%20Communities.pdf](https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/IREX_Presentation_0702_Attitudes%2C%20Challenges%2C%20and%20Opportunities%20for%20IDP%20Integration%20in%20Selected%20Host%20Communities.pdf)



*“I was told during an interview that they don’t hire women for engineering roles, even though the position didn’t require physical labour.”*

*(Female, FGD, Sum)*

For LGBTQ+ youth, the legal documentation issue also exacerbates the challenges in accessing education and employment. Particularly transgender individuals, for instance, often face mismatches between their gender presentation and official documentation, leading to exclusion from formal opportunities or even forced conscription. Discrimination as a result of traditional gender roles and responsibilities adds another layer of complexity, deterring LGBTQ+ youth from accessing equitable resources.

*“Some transgender people are legally documented as male but present as female. This discrepancy leads to conscription for some and difficulty securing jobs for others.”*

*(Key Informant, INGO, Kyiv)*

Physical accessibility further limits opportunities for youth with disabilities. While some institutions attempt to provide infrastructure, such as ramps and elevators, these efforts are often incomplete, leaving upper levels inaccessible to wheelchair users and effectively barring them from participating in higher education and TVET education.

*“Even where ramps or accessible facilities exist on the ground floor, there are often no elevators to higher levels, making it nearly impossible for wheelchair users to attend classes.”*

*(Key Informant, INGO, Odesa)*

These systemic and intersecting barriers highlight the need for comprehensive policy reforms and change in how those are perceived as a result of traditional gender roles and responsibilities. Addressing discrimination and stigma through legal and legislative systems and community practices can create a more inclusive and diversified work environment in the labour market, which is expected to significantly impact the economy and human rights advancement in Ukraine.



### 3.3 Capacity and Qualifications of Youth

The labour market in Ukraine presents a complex demand that consists of both technical and soft skills, shaped by industry and sector trends, differences in regions, and the ongoing challenges of war and economic instability. According to 22% of youth who participated in FGDs, the most needed technical skill was reported as basic computer literacy, such as proficiency in Excel, Microsoft Office, and social media management. This skill is essential across various sectors, especially given the rapid advancement of IT systems and their influence on existing traditional mechanisms over the decades. The improvement of language skills, particularly in English, followed by Ukrainian, is identified as the second most crucial technical skill by 20% of youth. This is primarily because they aspire to work remotely for international IT companies, leveraging both their IT and language skills to remain less vulnerable to market instability.

Additionally, 17% of youth pointed to the demand for IT and digital skills, though outdated curricula hinder employability in this area, further exacerbating the skills gap.

In the realm of soft skills, 13% of youth recognised the importance of adaptability, teamwork, and problem-solving. Employers emphasise these attributes, but youth often feel that the current education system does not sufficiently equip them with these essential qualities. However, according to 18% of youth, their interpersonal communication skills have been significantly decreased since the COVID-19 outbreak as a result of remote education and limited opportunities for socialisation with their peers.

A smaller group (8%) expressed the need for leadership training, resume writing workshops, and entrepreneurship education to help them better navigate the labor market. These findings suggest that while technical skills are critical, soft skills are equally necessary for successful employment integration.

Rural-urban disparities also play a significant role in shaping youth opportunities. About 17% of urban youth reported having better access to digital training, TVET institutions, and career networks. In contrast, rural youth, highlighted by 15% of participants, face barriers such as the lack of educational infrastructure, limited internet access, and fewer skill-building opportunities. This gap exacerbates inequalities and limits the potential for rural youth to thrive in the competitive job market.

Theme	Sub-Themes	Percentage of Youth Mentioned
Technical Skills Gap	Demand for IT and digital skills, but outdated curricula hinder employability	17%
	Shortage of skilled tradespeople (welders, carpenters, electricians) due to displacement and conscription	3%
	Healthcare sector needs rehabilitation therapists and mental health professionals	2%
	Basic computer literacy (Excel, Microsoft Office, social media management) essential across sectors	22%
	Language skills – English and Ukrainian	20%
Soft Skills Gap	Employers emphasize adaptability, teamwork, and problem-solving, but education does not adequately develop these	13%
	COVID-19 has negatively impacted youth communication and interpersonal skills	18%
	Need for leadership training, resume writing workshops, and entrepreneurship education	8%
Rural-Urban Disparities in Skill Development	Urban youth have better access to digital training, TVET institutions, and career networks	17%
	Rural youth lack educational infrastructure, internet access, and skill-building opportunities	15%
	Internally Displaced Youth (IDY) show resilience and adaptability but face barriers in employment integration	28%

Table 3 Skills Gap for Youth.

The challenges faced by IDY were mentioned by 28% of youth, who acknowledged their resilience but noted the significant barriers these individuals encounter in terms of employment integration. Despite their adaptability, IDYs face unique challenges in securing stable employment due to their displacement, highlighting the need for targeted interventions that address their specific needs.

Other critical gaps were mentioned less frequently. Only 3% of youth identified a shortage of skilled tradespeople, such as welders, carpenters, and electricians, largely due to displacement and conscription. During this research, it was observed that youth had limited knowledge about these professions, their availability in the labor market, and the opportunities they offer. This lack of awareness and interest may explain why few youth reported being aware of gaps in the labor market related to these professions.

Additionally, 2% of participants recognised the specific need for healthcare professionals, such as rehabilitation therapists and mental health experts, in response to growing demands in these sectors.

### **Skills gap**

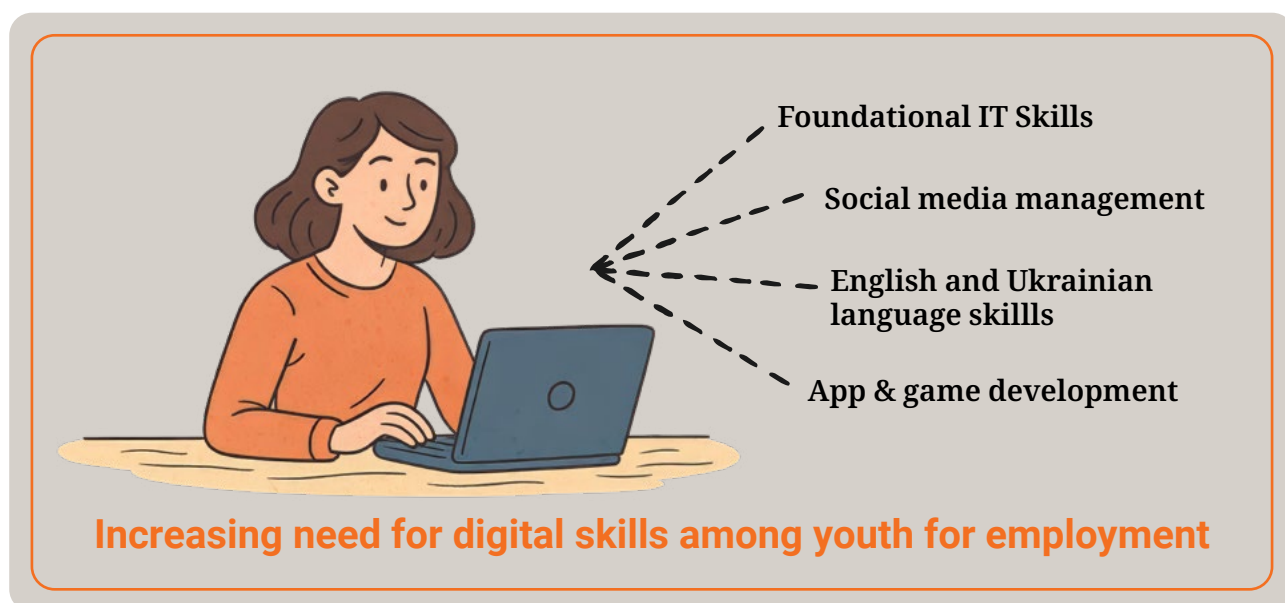
The technical skills currently in high demand in the market vary significantly across sectors, with traditional sectors and emerging sectors, including manufacturing, sales, construction, IT, and healthcare.

As per many key informants and 90% of FGD participants youth, IT is the rising star among emerging sectors where there is a considerable need for human resources but also a gap in the quality of skills graduates bring to the workforce. Despite the presence of IT-specialised universities, many still rely on outdated curricula and infrastructure, leading to insufficient preparation for real-world challenges, which is considered challenging for employers in recruiting youth. For example, some universities still teach programming on obsolete systems like Windows 98, leaving graduates unprepared for industry demands. Moreover, the IT sector remains attractive for its high salaries and international opportunities. However, the sector also becomes saturated, leading to diminishing salary growth.

*“Digital and online skills are one of the main demands because everybody is moving toward technology and online work.”*

*(Key Informant, INGO, Kyiv)*

However, not only IT-related job opportunities but also computer-related skills are reported to be popular in the country. According to government authorities, there is also an increasing need for computer-related technical skills, including proficiency in software like Excel, basic digital literacy, and foundational knowledge in IT. This was supported by 22% of youth FGD participants across locations; computer-related skills are found highly crucial in finding employment in the current market, along with English and Ukrainian language skills. Furthermore, many are found in improving their proficiency in using social media management (SMM) tools, app development, and even game development.



*“In today’s digitalised world, you need to have computer skills, including the use of printers, scanners, and various programmes. For example, I use Microsoft Office and interactive software for teaching as a teacher.”*

*(Female, FGD, Sumy)*

Similarly, many informants have stated that there is a growing need for tradespeople, such as welders, electricians, carpenters, and construction workers. For instance, there are waiting lists for employment because of a significant labour shortage of welders. This was supported by the FGD participants reporting a significant shortage of skilled tradespeople due to conscription and displacement, emphasising that practical experience is often lacking even among available workers.



*“There’s a decent shortage of personnel in general. Many people have gone to the front, and even those willing to work lack practical experience.”*

*(Male, FGD, Mykolaiv)*

Healthcare also represents a critical gap, particularly in specialised roles like rehabilitation therapists to support military personnel, along with the psychological support professionals, not only under the current war conditions but also during the post-war period as the mental well-being of the millions of women, men, girls and boys in Ukraine is highly impacted.

On the other hand, 13% of youth FGD participants and 12% of informants say there is a growing importance of soft skills as technical ones, particularly adaptability, resilience, communication, stress management and conflict resolution. Employers highlight self-presentation, teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving as essential for career success. However, according to the 18% of youth, these skills are found to be highly limited, as they have been participating in education activities remotely since the COVID-19 outbreak, which they reported to be impacting their soft skills, particularly communications and teamwork.

*“Many employers cite poor prioritisation and time management as reasons for firing employees. TVET institutions should teach skills like leadership and effective task management to prepare students for the realities of work.”*

*(Female, FGD, Zaporizhzhia)*

Moreover, these soft skills are found underdeveloped in formal education mechanisms, leaving youth unprepared to collaborate effectively as team members in professional settings, as per informants. Therefore, 8% of participants across locations recommended that TVET institutions offer classes and workshops on leadership, resume preparation and job application skills, team communication, and psychological resilience to better prepare students for the workplace by ensuring that these essential soft skills are included in the curriculum.

Lastly, entrepreneurial interest among youth was also evident. They expressed a desire to create their own teams or launch businesses.



### Rural-urban disparities

Ukrainian youth display various technical and soft skills influenced by their location, which impacts their access. For instance, many youth reported working on their proficiency in digital tools and English, particularly in urban areas, as rural youth have significant difficulties accessing these courses. Further, youth in urban areas typically have access to more educational resources, training programmes, and extracurricular activities that foster both technical and soft skills, as per informants. Life skills training, including CV building and presentation skills, is commonly provided in urban youth centres, as noted by informants. In contrast, rural youth face stark disparities. In small villages, soft skills like teamwork and leadership are almost absent due to the lack of clubs, developmental programmes, and youth centres, which creates unfair competition among youth in urban and rural areas to find employment.

*“The difference between urban and rural youth opportunities is striking. In the city, youth can attend a variety of programmes. In villages, there are almost no such opportunities.”*

*(Key Informant, Local NGO, Chern)*

IDYs are reported to often demonstrate heightened resilience, adaptability, and planning skills due to their experiences of displacement. According to the informants, IDYs have shown a higher ability to respond to stressful situations more easily. Moreover, they are found to have skills in planning under uncertain conditions, which gives them an advantage.



Kharkiv 2024. Photo by: Filippo Mancini/NRC.

### 3.4 TVET Mechanism and Further Support by Actors

TVET education and employment of the youth in Ukraine are supported by a network of actors, including government authorities, private businesses, international, national, and local non-governmental organisations, as well as local community groups/networks. However, issues have been identified by the youth that could be considered crucial in improving access to TVET, helping these programmes increase their capacity and quality, and enhancing their partnership with private and non-governmental organisations to ensure a more holistic and comprehensive approach. Youth participants most frequently pointed to unequal access to TVET institutions, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas, with 16% identifying this as a major barrier. This reflects a significant equity concern, where the availability of TVET services is located in central areas, leaving those in marginalised or frontline regions with limited or no access to critical education and vocational training opportunities. This, in turn, prevents large segments of youth from developing job-ready skills, effectively excluding them from participating in the labor market and deepening socioeconomic inequality. The second most cited issue was limited funding (13%), which constrains the expansion of TVET programmes and limits the availability of up-to-date equipment. This funding shortage directly impacts the capacity of institutions to deliver relevant and high-quality training aligned with labor market demands. As a result, youth may graduate without acquiring the practical or modern technical skills needed by employers, reducing their employability and undermining the effectiveness of TVET as a workforce development tool.

Theme	Sub-Themes	Percentage of Youth Mentioned
Government Efforts in Strengthening TVET	Limited funding constrains TVET expansion and equipment availability	13%
	Bureaucratic inefficiencies delay programme implementation and reform	10%
	Unequal access to TVET institutions, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas	16%
Private Sector Engagement in TVET	Limited public-private partnerships provide apprenticeship and skill-building programmes	12%
	Lack of employer incentives reduces industry participation in TVET training	9%
	Mismatch between TVET curricula and evolving industry needs	10%
NGO and International Organization Support	NGOs offer free training and mentorship programmes to enhance employability	12%
	Short-term project funding limits sustainability of NGO-driven TVET initiatives	9%
	Limited job placement support after NGO-led vocational training programmes	8%

Table 4 Challenges faced by Government of Ukraine, Private Sector and Non-Governmental Actors.

Additionally, 12% of youth acknowledged the value of public-private partnerships and NGO-led programmes that provide apprenticeships, training, and mentorship. However, they also reported concerns around the sustainability and reach of these initiatives, particularly where support is tied to short-term funding cycles (9%) or limited by a lack of employer incentives (9%). These limitations reduce the scalability of promising initiatives and hinder consistent engagement from the private sector. This also creates instability in programming and limits the number of youth who can benefit from hands-on experience or industry exposure, weakening the link between training and actual employment opportunities. Meanwhile, 10% of youth mentioned bureaucratic inefficiencies that delay reforms and obstruct timely programme implementation, while another 10% pointed to a persistent mismatch between TVET curricula and evolving industry needs—further highlighting the gap between training and actual employment opportunities. These inefficiencies slow updates to curricula and delay policy changes that could streamline TVET operations, further weakening the system’s responsiveness. Youth may therefore find themselves trained in outdated fields or with irrelevant content, leaving them ill-prepared for current job market demands, increasing the time it takes to secure employment, or pushing them into underemployment. Although limited job placement support following NGO-led programmes was the least reported issue (8%), it nonetheless highlights a critical missing link in connecting training to actual employment.

Because youth generally found viewing job placement support as a government service rather than an NGO-led initiative, they have few expectations that NGOs would provide such assistance in the first place. This limited awareness reduces the likelihood that they would cite a lack of NGO support as a pressing concern during the study, even though the gap remains significant, highlighting the need for increased awareness in civil society's engagement with TVET and job placement programmes. The lack of job placement follow-up means youth may complete programmes without any guided pathway into employment, which discourages participation in future trainings and limits the return on investment from such initiatives.

Altogether, these challenges reflect structural and systemic gaps that hinder the effectiveness and inclusiveness of the TVET system. They collectively reduce the reach, relevance, and impact of TVET programming, creating a cycle where youth are not adequately prepared for the labor market, and employers are not incentivised to invest in workforce development partnerships. Addressing these areas—particularly access inequalities, sustainable funding, curriculum relevance, and stronger cross-sector collaboration—will be essential to ensuring TVET fulfills its potential in supporting youth employment and resilience in Ukraine.

### **Government efforts**

As the primary mandate of TVET education and youth employment, the Government of Ukraine (GoU) offers various services through a wide range of programmes, including TVET institutions, state employment centres, and youth councils at the local level. Government actors primarily focus on policy-making, regulatory oversight, and funding TVET programmes, while local authorities and employment centres handle practical programme implementation and direct youth engagement.

The GoU aims to equip youth with practical, market-relevant skills, fostering competitiveness, career mobility, and long-term employability through TVET education and further support for increasing employment.<sup>32</sup> Recognised as the top priority, TVET has undergone reform since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. This includes modernising management and funding systems, adapting educational programmes to market needs, enhancing career guidance, and fostering collaboration with the private sector.<sup>33</sup> The effectiveness of these reforms is constrained by limited funding, which delays resource allocation and reduces equipment availability, thereby directly hampering youth employment readiness and the overall effectiveness of TVET programmes. Bureaucratic inefficiencies exacerbate these issues, further delaying necessary reforms and limiting rapid response to emerging labor market needs. This leaves youth at risk of being underqualified for high-demand roles, and the slow pace of system adaptation weakens trust in public institutions as reliable providers of employment pathways.

Although TVET was mainly designed to train youth before the war, it has become an important tool for reskilling adults, as per the representatives of the GoU, supported by FGD participants. Therefore, the GoU started the “Education for Veterans” platform, which provides veterans with a catalogue of educational programmes in TVET, pre-higher and higher education institutions, aiming at integrating veterans into the community and labour market.<sup>34</sup> This programme indirectly supports youth by creating more structured labor market entry points and reducing potential competition for general TVET programmes. However, limited funding and bureaucratic delays present significant challenges, potentially competing with youth-focused TVET initiatives if not managed carefully. Without careful coordination, overlapping demographic priorities may overstretch limited resources, diluting the effectiveness of youth-targeted interventions.

In order to do that, employment centres that are run by the GoU across locations demonstrated promising practices, with those in the West being more active, particularly in locations like Kyiv and Lviv, as per many key informants. For example, Kyiv and Lviv-based centres facilitate internships for youth, offering placements in government agencies and private companies to expose young people to practical work environments. However, in conflict-affected or rural areas like Zaporizhzhia and Chernihiv, these services are far less developed.

32 FCA, FCA strengthens Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Ukraine amidst conflict, 14 September 2024. <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/fca-strengthens-technical-and-vocational-education-and-training-tvet-ukraine-amidst-conflict>

33 European Council, Eurydice, Ukraine: Reforming vocational education as a cornerstone for national development and recovery, 15 October 2024. <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/news/ukraine-reforming-vocational-education-cornerstone-national-development-and-recovery>

34 Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (MoES), Education Digest, December 2024, Ukraine.



Regional disparities significantly impact the effectiveness and accessibility of these programmes, particularly affecting youth employment opportunities in conflict-affected or rural areas. Structural inconsistencies mean that access to training, mentorship, and financial resources is limited, deepening regional disparities. This could result in fragmented service delivery across the country, where youth in high-risk regions are the least supported, even though their need for skills development and employment is often the greatest.

These employment centres also actively work on increasing accessibility to their services through digital tools and mechanisms. According to key informants, a centralised online database of job vacancies launched by state employment centres is intended to simplify job searching for youth across Ukraine. This platform consolidates available vacancies nationwide, allowing users to independently browse listings, register for support, and receive consultations remotely. Such digital solutions have the potential to bridge some access gaps, but they also require sustained investment in digital literacy and internet infrastructure, especially in rural or under-served communities.

*“Today, anyone can log into our single job portal and look for a job independently. This centralised approach simplifies access and reduces the need for physical visits to employment centres.”*

*(Key Informant, Local Authority, Donetsk)*

Furthermore, the government offers other programmes in which it offers wage subsidies to employers hiring individuals under 35 with limited work experience. Programmes like “Made in Ukraine” provide entrepreneurial grants of up to 150,000 UAH (500,000 UAH in Kharkiv) to youth-led businesses, with the condition of job creation. These initiatives encourage self-employment and stimulate local economies but require stronger outreach and follow-up support to ensure their full utilisation. Additionally, employers who recruit youth under 35 receive 50% of the minimum wage contributions by the GoU for the first 6 months of employment. This government support goes up to 12 months for youth under 25 years old.

*“If an employer hires young people under 35 without prior experience, we compensate 50% of the minimum wage for six months. This creates real opportunities for first-time job seekers.”*

*(Key Informant, Local Authority, Donetsk)*





### **Private sector support**

One of the actors playing a crucial role in youth's TVET education, skills development and employment is reported to be the private sector, particularly in regions where government mechanisms are limited or disrupted. The private sector primarily engages in practical training, skill-building, internships, and apprenticeship opportunities, complementing government-led programmes by directly addressing industry-specific skill gaps. However, limited incentives, such as unclear tax benefits and bureaucratic complexities in establishing partnerships, significantly hinder broader private sector participation. Streamlined regulations, tax incentives, and clearer guidelines could encourage increased industry engagement.

According to 17% of key informants and 12% of youth FGD participants, large companies, such as Metinvest and Interpipe in Dnipro, or Philip Morris in Chernihiv are leading efforts to bridge the skills gap by partnering with TVET institutions and universities to deliver TVET programmes tailored to industry needs. These collaborations are particularly prominent in industries like manufacturing, metallurgy, and logistics, where the demand for a skilled workforce remains high. By aligning youth skills with labour market demands, these initiatives provide pathways for young people to gain practical knowledge and secure meaningful employment. Such alignment helps reduce unemployment and increases youth competitiveness in the job market, but the reach of these partnerships is still limited to certain sectors and regions, leaving many young people without access to similar opportunities.

*“Companies like Philip Morris offer job opportunities for youth in roles such as sales, which provide consistent employment for individuals without advanced qualifications.”*

*(Male, FGD, Chernihiv)*

As 20% of informants have noted, internships and mentorship programmes offered through private-sector partnerships help youth overcome one of the most common barriers to TVET and employment—the lack of hands-on experience. 65% of youth FGD participants across locations supported this, reporting the need for further public-private partnerships, particularly for the provision of internships, apprenticeships, and entry-level job opportunities. This demonstrates a significant demand among youth for more hands-on learning models, which are often lacking in traditional TVET programmes. Without these components, youth may struggle to transition from education into work. Therefore, formalising apprenticeship standards per sector and offering employer subsidies for hosting interns could improve participation and quality assurance.

*“We need better connections between employers and young people. Programmes that offer internships, apprenticeships, or even entry-level job placements would help us gain the experience employers always ask for.”*

*(Female, FGD, Dnipro)*

In regions like Kherson, the private sector has also driven innovative solutions by addressing both immediate and long-term employability needs. Local hubs have initiated diverse training opportunities, including beauty courses, IT training grants, and free design education. These efforts not only equip young people with vocational skills but also empower them to start small businesses, fostering local economic resilience. Yet, geographic concentration of these activities/programmes in relatively stable western regions limits their national impact, particularly in frontline areas where the need is highest. This remains youth residing in frontline areas systematically disadvantaged, further marginalising them.

*“I’ve seen some private companies offer internships or entry-level positions, but these are very limited. IT companies are better at this—they sometimes provide training for young people. But for other industries, there’s almost nothing.”*

*(Male, FGD, Kharkiv)*

The western regions of Ukraine, where relative stability has allowed for large-scale investments, have seen the emergence of public-private partnerships (PPPs) as a promising model for economic recovery and workforce development. According to the key informants, events such as the “Rebuild Ukraine” conferences have showcased how businesses from Europe and the United States engage with Ukrainian authorities to drive investments into infrastructure, TVET education and youth employment. These partnerships represent a tangible step toward sustainable development.

*“Public-private partnerships are not just humanitarian interventions; they represent Ukraine’s determination to drive its own recovery and create sustainable job opportunities for youth.”*

However, these PPPs and private sector investments remain geographically concentrated in western regions, compared to the frontline areas. Although in some cases, TVET centres in these locations established direct partnerships with local businesses, it still remained limited, as per informants. Expanding private sector partnerships to underserved regions is essential to ensure all youth have access to training, employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities. While private sector involvement is critical in ensuring demand-driven skills development, the inconsistency and geographic concentration of engagement limit broader outcomes for youth employment. Youth in frontline regions remain excluded from industry partnerships, leading to a talent divide between urban and rural areas. Furthermore, the lack of systemic incentives—such as streamlined tax benefits and longer-term collaboration frameworks—discourages smaller or regional businesses from engaging, thereby narrowing the reach and impact of TVET-public-private cooperation.

### **Non-governmental organisations role**

International, national and local non-governmental organisations are one of the important actors supporting youth's access to TVET education and transition into the workforce by providing skills training, career counselling, and psychosocial support. They often implement programmes funded by international donors focus on employment, entrepreneurship, and capacity-building initiatives, through local partners. NGOs primarily address short-term employment and skill-building needs, often compensating for gaps left by government programmes. However, their reliance on short-term project-based funding reduces long-term sustainability, limiting continuous youth employment and weakening the sustained effectiveness of TVET programmes. This restricts the ability of NGOs to provide consistent, high-quality programming, which can interrupt learning and undermine trust with youth beneficiaries. To address this, sustainable financing models such as multi-year donor grants, co-financing with local governments, and private sector sponsorships should be explored and mainstreamed. These approaches would provide greater predictability and continuity in service delivery.

One example is the USAID-funded UNITY programme, which helps young people build skills and find jobs through mentorship and cross-sector collaboration. Similarly, UNICEF's Upshift and UNESCO-backed initiatives connect youth—especially in rural areas—with professionals and mentors who provide guidance and motivation.



Kharkiv 2024. Photo by: Filippo Mancini/NRC.

*“There are many interesting charitable organisations in our community that offer significant support. They allow young people to write projects, learn new skills, and gain experience. This experience can be very useful in finding a job later. These organisations also create a sense of belonging and motivation among youth.”*

*(Male, FGD, Dnipro)*

The EU plays a major role in supporting TVET and invested €58 million through EU4Skills to align training with labour market needs. ReSkill UA, supported by USAID and Coursera, is also expanding opportunities by offering free online training to 30,000 Ukrainians. Meanwhile, the Erasmus+ Programme is set to launch seven new projects in 2024, benefiting 20 Ukrainian VET providers under the Ministry of Education and Science. Despite these efforts, funding remains a challenge. TVET programmes require costly equipment and ongoing maintenance, making continued investment essential, according to the GoU representatives.

Through these funds, I/NGOs either offer programmes themselves or support youth councils/centres providing youth with these services. Many services and activities are not only limited to TVET education but also include job search techniques and career workshops, leadership training and mentorship, language courses and digital literacy, legal documentation and mental health support, including art therapy. Many FGD participants reported that those language and digital literacy courses are crucial in finding higher-paid job opportunities and are popular among youth nationwide. However, they have a highly limited capacity and significant demand as these are mostly free. In addition, although digital TVET options offer scalable solutions, digital exclusion in rural areas remains a barrier. Expanding mobile-based learning, investing in internet access, and promoting digital literacy are essential for equitable access.

*“NGOs provide critical support, including financial assistance, soft skills training, and job-matching services.”*

*(Key Informant, INGO, Kyiv)*

Therefore, long-term sustainability also remains a significant challenge. According to 43% of key informants and 26% of FGD participants, donors often prioritise emergency humanitarian support over livelihoods programming, leaving gaps in funding for TVET—a critical pathway to sustainable employment for youth. Furthermore, 13% of FGD participants youth across locations reported having difficulties in benefiting from these services organisations provide as the criteria for these TVET education and employment support services is very specific, such as being a woman or persons with disabilities, requesting for broader target group to be included. To maximise impact, stakeholders stress the need for integrated, coordinated approaches that align TVET programmes with labour market demands, prioritise multi-year funding, and engage private sector partnerships. By addressing these systemic challenges, NGOs and international agencies can continue to empower youth with the skills and opportunities needed to thrive in a rapidly changing workforce.

More targeted and coordinated actions across all stakeholder groups is key in addressing these challenges and increase the impact of TVET for youth employment. The government of Ukraine must prioritise equitable funding to expand TVET infrastructure in underserved areas, incentivise meaningful private sector engagement through co-financing and policy support, and strengthen digital tools through expanded online platforms and mobile access. Employment centres should continue to improve their reach by integrating digital job-matching services and remote consultations tailored for young people. The private sector must expand its contributions beyond urban centres and dominant industries by investing in internships, apprenticeships, and skills-building initiatives in high-need sectors and regions. These partnerships should offer clear pathways from training to employment, supported by incentives such as tax benefits and public-private collaboration frameworks. Private sector support in digital learning infrastructure could also play a transformative role, particularly by addressing connectivity gaps and supporting the development of practical, mobile-friendly e-learning content.

NGOs and international donors, meanwhile, must shift from short-term, project-based models toward sustainable, multi-year funding mechanisms. A blended financing approach involving co-investment from local governments and private partners could provide greater stability. NGOs should also broaden their eligibility criteria to reach youth who fall outside narrowly defined vulnerable groups while continuing to prioritise inclusion. Expanding hybrid learning options and coordinating programmatic efforts through multi-stakeholder coalitions will ensure more efficient resource use and consistent support to young people. Building a more inclusive, resilient, and future-oriented TVET ecosystem in Ukraine requires a collective commitment to long-term planning, integrated delivery, and youth-centred design.

## 3.5 Mental Health and Well-Being of The Youth

### 3.5.1 Psychological Impact of War

The mental health and well-being of Ukrainian youth have been significantly affected by war, displacement, and socio-economic instability. Many young people have been exposed to trauma, violence, and displacement, leading to high levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion. These challenges are exacerbated by uncertain futures, financial insecurity, and limited access to mental health support, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas. The war has impacted the well-being of women, men, girls, and boys across the country.

According to IOM, 50% of IDPs reported experiencing symptoms of depression, with the highest rates in Southern oblasts (46%), followed by the East and Center (40%). Moreover, depression was found to be prevalent among 60% of unemployed IDPs and IDPs in households struggling to meet basic needs, showing the impact of employment on well-being.<sup>35</sup>

*“The trauma of the invasion has left a lot of young people feeling hopeless. Why bother building a career when you don’t even know if you’ll survive tomorrow?”*

*(Male, FGD, Kharkiv)*

Similar results are reported by the youth who participated in FGDs. According to 17% of youth, there is a profound sense of emptiness and a loss of hope, particularly among those who are displaced. Air raids and drone attacks are a constant source of distraction and fear, creating significant barriers to focus and productivity, according to both female and male youth, particularly in the frontline areas. Moreover, 17% of FGD participants’ youth articulated feelings of guilt and helplessness, often stemming from being away from the frontlines while others fight. These challenges imposed by the war conditions disrupted daily routines and limited the capacity to plan for the future, particularly their engagement in the labour market, per youth participating in FGDs. Coupled with the high levels of stress and anxiety, this impedes cognitive performance, making it challenging for many to focus on learning or work. Furthermore, youth frequently noted that these concerns create an environment of persistent fear, making long-term planning feel futile and eroding any sense of control or agency.

Social isolation is reported to be one of the significant impacts of war on youth’s mental well-being, as 10% of youth FGD participants reported that without peer networks, young people find it harder to cope with stress or stay motivated academically and professionally. In addition to heightened feelings of loneliness, isolation can limit opportunities for sharing information, constructive feedback, and mutual support, which are critical for personal growth and resilience. Lacking the social reinforcement and practical help that peer groups often provide, many youth struggle to navigate academic requirements or job-related challenges, compounding their sense of hopelessness. Ultimately, this decreased interaction further erodes self-confidence and emotional well-being, creating a cycle where socially isolated youth face additional challenges in both education and employment contexts.

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35 IOM, Mental Health in Ukraine: Displacement, Vulnerabilities and Support - Thematic Brief (November 2024), 11 November 2024, Ukraine. <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/mental-health-ukraine-displacement-vulnerabilities-and-support-thematic-brief-november-2024>



### 3.5.2 Barriers to Mental Health Support

Despite existing efforts, access to mental health services remains limited, especially in rural and frontline areas. According to HIAS, 42% of community members are found unaware of how to access professional help. The research highlighted a general lack of awareness about mental health and the availability of services, alongside an insufficient number of services, particularly in rural and remote areas.<sup>36</sup> Supported by our research findings, the limited awareness is not only found for the available services but also in understanding and managing stress. As per 35% of youth FGD participants, educational institutions do not also offer any structured psychoeducation, leaving young people with minimal guidance on well-being and self-care. In the absence of formal instruction, many youth turn to online resources that may contain inaccurate or even harmful information, potentially worsening their mental health challenges. This lack of evidence-based guidance could also perpetuate myths and misconceptions, making it harder for youth to recognise when professional help or healthier coping strategies are necessary. Consequently, without a reliable framework for understanding mental health, students may dismiss early warning signs of distress or rely on unproven approaches, further jeopardising their overall well-being. Expanding psychoeducation in schools can equip students with evidence-based information about stress management and mental health from an early age. It can help address this gap, normalise help-seeking, and ensure they rely less on inaccurate online sources.

Among those who had awareness of MHPSS services, 7% of youth reported having access difficulties not as a result of limited awareness but more of long travel distances and limited financial means to enable them to afford transportation costs, keeping youth from getting even the most basic mental health care as a result. In such cases, integrating digital mental health support, such as telehealth services or mobile apps, could help youth overcome logistical and financial barriers, offering them remote access to professional care even in remote or conflict-affected areas.

The stigma around mental health, particularly prevalent among older generations, is reported to be another barrier that prevents youth from getting the necessary support from their families as well. According to 6% of youth FGD participants, stigma was noted as often preventing youth from seeking help and thereby exacerbating unaddressed mental health challenges. Youth also highlighted how their families are sometimes dismissive or reluctant to acknowledge issues related to mental well-being, making it harder to obtain the support they need. Increasing funding for youth-focused mental health programmes, particularly those that involve family engagement, such as parenting programmes, could both expand service capacity and facilitate targeted education for older generations, weakening stigma at its roots. Combating stigma requires collective efforts, such as community-led awareness campaigns, psychoeducation in schools, and support from trusted local authorities, to normalise help-seeking and reinforce the idea that mental health care is integral to personal growth and professional development.

### 3.5.3 Coping Mechanisms and Resilience

While the psychological toll is high, various coping mechanisms have emerged. These included both positive and negative coping mechanisms, depending on the awareness of the youth individuals and the support they received from their surroundings. On the negative side, many youth in frontline regions have begun relying on increased alcohol and substance use, self-isolation, and social withdrawal, often exacerbated by intimate partner violence within families or witnessing such violence at home. Such behaviors not only heighten emotional distress and dependence but also make it harder to engage in healthier coping strategies or professional opportunities. Moreover, increased substance abuse and isolation can create cycles of marginalisation, further cutting young people off from education and employment pathways, and potentially leading to long-term socio-economic setbacks.

*“Some of them have increased drug and alcohol use, while others resort to isolation to manage trauma.”*

*(Key Informant, INGO, Lviv)*

36 HIAS, 18 Months Later: A Mental Health and Psychosocial Needs Assessment Across Ukraine, October 2023, 4 December 2023, Ukraine. <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/18-months-later-mental-health-and-psychosocial-needs-assessment-across-ukraine-october-2023>

Conversely, community-driven initiatives—particularly youth councils, centers, and similar organisations—play a significant role in creating positive coping mechanisms for youth through expanding awareness of mental health, offering structured activities, and creating spaces for connection and growth. Through volunteerism, music and art workshops, and peer support networks (each noted by 8% of FGD participants), young people can process trauma in a non-stigmatising setting, foster a sense of belonging, and develop communication skills vital for both personal resilience and career development.

Access to education and employment also emerged as a crucial positive coping mechanism for 60% of youth FGD participants, offering a source of routine, social support, and renewed hope. By establishing structured tasks and reliable peer networks, schools and workplaces can function as stabilizing forces, grounding youth in consistent activities and shared goals. This sense of belonging helps mitigate the anxiety and despair common in conflict-affected environments, while encouraging young people to invest in long-term growth. Over time, steady access to learning or employment not only provides immediate relief from stress but also reduces the likelihood of resorting to negative coping strategies, ultimately bolstering individual resilience and the broader community's capacity to recover.

By focusing on these purpose-driven activities, programmes can help alleviate feelings of guilt that arise from perceived inaction during conflict. In the long term, such positive coping outlets not only boost youth well-being but also equip them with practical skills—such as teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving—that translate into greater employability and social integration.

Moreover, integrating mental health support into education and employment programmes is critical in creating more positive coping mechanisms, as teachers and employers who recognise psychological distress can cultivate environments that promote youth well-being. Drawing on the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings<sup>37</sup> and the WHO's mhGAP Intervention Guide<sup>38</sup>, schools can introduce structured teacher training that enables the early identification of psychological distress, provides essential psychosocial support, and facilitates timely referrals to specialised services. Embedding psychoeducation modules into both formal curricula and TVET could help youth develop practical coping skills alongside academic or professional competencies, reducing the risk of substance use and other harmful behaviors. In parallel, workplaces can adopt mental health policies that provide confidential counseling, regular check-ins, and peer support groups, emphasising safe and dignified assistance. Such measures, combined with flexible work arrangements, help youth manage stress effectively while sustaining their motivation to learn and remain gainfully employed.

International, national, and local humanitarian actors should also prioritise the integration of MHPSS into education and livelihoods programmes. By systematically embedding structured psychoeducation sessions into educational programmes, NGOs can equip youth with essential coping skills and resilience strategies, significantly reducing vulnerability to mental distress. Livelihood programmes can similarly integrate psychological support through regular counseling, mentorship, and peer support networks, ensuring participants receive holistic care. NGOs can also train their programme staff to proactively recognise and address mental health concerns, facilitating early intervention and referrals to specialised care when necessary. Establishing partnerships with local mental health providers and leveraging digital mental health tools further enhances accessibility, especially in rural or conflict-affected regions. Through these integrated approaches, humanitarian NGOs not only address immediate psychosocial needs but also foster long-term emotional well-being, enabling young people to pursue educational goals and sustainable livelihoods effectively.

Ultimately, these evidence-based approaches—ranging from structured teacher support to the integration of psychoeducation into employment initiatives—bolster resilience, foster a sense of purpose, and create a more supportive environment for youth navigating the ongoing challenges of the war and displacement.

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37 Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings. 2007. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/iasc-guidelines-for-mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-in-emergency-settings>

38 World Health Organization (WHO). mhGAP Intervention Guide – Version 2.0. 2016. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241549790>

## 3.6 Participation and Engagement

In Ukraine, youth participation is facilitated through a combination of formal and informal mechanisms, offering young people opportunities to engage in decision-making, community development, and advocacy. While these mechanisms are promising, their effectiveness varies widely across regions and depends on community leadership, resources, and youth initiatives.

### 3.6.1 Formal Participation Mechanisms

Many informants believe youth councils serve as a main platform for formal participation. These councils act as advisory bodies to local governments and are established at city, village, and community levels. They are designed to provide young people with a platform to voice their opinions and influence local decision-making. Youth councils also offer a structured environment for young people to organise and advocate for specific causes. Successful advocacy campaigns have included petitions for community improvements, such as planting flowers on streets, highlighting the tangible impact these councils can have when utilised effectively. Supported by the FGD participants, these councils significantly increased the participation and engagement of the youth.

*“In Zaporizhzhia, the level of social movement has increased. Many young people are joining advisory bodies like youth councils at city councils or councils for accessibility.”*

*(Male, FGD, Zaporizhzhia)*

Along with youth councils, there are youth centres that serve as hubs for training, social interaction, and community service, particularly for displaced youth, which makes them feel heard and seen, increasing their sense of belonging and motivation to contribute to the community highly during the FGDs. In many of these centres, structured mentorship programmes could connect experienced youth leaders with role models, offering practical skill-building opportunities, personalised guidance, and sustained motivation through the sense of belonging to remain involved in community initiatives.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, by fostering peer support networks, these programmes cultivate a stronger sense of belonging, thereby reinforcing participants’ commitment to leadership development and overall community engagement.<sup>40</sup>

These centres are also funded by different international organisations, such as UNICEF’s Upshift<sup>41</sup> and the British Council’s Youth Connect<sup>42</sup>, which combines education and practical action. These initiatives equip young people with skills in advocacy, project management, and rights education, fostering leadership and enabling youth to initiate and lead community projects. Youth councils and centres established through international funding, such as USAID DOBRE<sup>43</sup>, have led to substantial local development in some regions as they received equipment and support to run active, youth-led programmes. While these international funding opportunities have significantly bolstered resources and programme quality, they may create issues around long-term sustainability and potential dependency, underscoring the importance of fostering local ownership and establishing self-sustaining structures. In fact, the World Bank indicates that relying heavily on external funding can hinder the development of local capacity and limit programme effectiveness over time.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, studies show that local institutions are more resilient when they diversify their funding streams and emphasise capacity-building, allowing them to transition away from donor dependence. Youth-led councils and centres can better maintain

39 Youth.gov, “The Role of Mentorship and Leadership Programs in Youth Engagement,” 2021, Washington, DC <https://youth.gov/youth-engagement>

40 YMCA, “Implementing Effective Mentorship in Community Programs,” 2021, Geneva. <https://www.ymca.int/resources>

41 UNICEF, Young people in Ukraine forge plans for fairer future, 25 October 2024, Ukraine. <https://www.unicef.org/ukraine/en/stories/young-people-forge-plans>

42 British Council, Youth Connect for Ukraine – Activities in Ukraine, Ukraine. <https://www.britishcouncil.org.ua/en/programmes/society/youth-connect-ukraine-activities-ukraine-new#:~:text=The%20programme's%20ambition%20is%20to,part%20of%20a%20European%20network.>

43 USAID, The USAID “Decentralization Offering Better Results and Efficiency” (DOBRE) in Ukraine, December 2023, Ukraine. <https://globalcommunities.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Ukraine-DOBRE-Program.pdf>

44 World Bank, “Ensuring Aid Effectiveness: Best Practices in Developing Regions”, 2020, Washington, DC. <https://www.worldbank.org/ensuring-aid-effectiveness>

their operations even as international grants fluctuate by integrating strategies such as community-based fundraising, partnerships with local businesses, and government support.<sup>45</sup>

Moreover, some councils and youth-led organisations like People.ua offer platforms for public speaking, leadership training, and advocacy. As per FGD participants, these initiatives inspire young people to engage in community service and policy discussions, empowering them to effect tangible change. Particularly, the role of these councils and centres in smaller communities becomes much more critical in engaging youth in decision-making. As per informants, these communities often lack alternative structures and rely heavily on youth councils and centres to provide leadership and training opportunities. Conversely, larger cities like Kyiv face challenges in mobilising youth, partly due to greater institutional complexity and perceived apathy among young people. According to key informants, the engagement of the youth is found to be more dependent on how actively the centres function. Informants emphasise that in smaller villages, youth councils and centres often serve as the primary formal avenue for civic involvement, whereas in larger urban areas, young people contend with multiple competing opportunities, resulting in more complex pathways to participation. In well-funded councils and centres, youth not only receive high-quality training and resources but also have greater opportunities for meaningful engagement. Under-resourced councils and centres, however, struggle to maintain consistent programmes, leading to lower youth participation rates. Some informants from the Lviv region specifically noted an increase in local youth-led projects once a well-structured youth council was formed, indicating a direct correlation between the council's presence and increased participation.

*“We see that if a youth centre actively conducts training on rights, advocacy, project management, and offers to fund for initiatives, young people are very active.”*

*(Key Informant, Youth Centre, Lviv)*

However, these youth councils often lack independence, with local administrations exerting control over their operations, as per many informants. This undermines the councils' potential to empower youth and limits youth's meaningful engagement. Another challenge lies in the limited scope of some youth centres, which may prioritise leisure activities over empowering youth in decision-making.

## 3.6.2 Informal Engagement Mechanisms

### Youth-led Organisations

Youth-led organisations are the most common informal engagement mechanism that enables youth to participate meaningfully. Often formed by and for young people, these organisations foster grassroots initiatives, develop leadership skills, and address pressing social issues. They provide youth opportunities to lead, advocate for change, and influence their communities. As key informants have stated, these organisations serve as spaces where young people can contribute ideas, influence local realities, and engage in advocacy efforts.

Unlike formal mechanisms like youth councils and centres, which are dependent on local administration offices to some extent, youth-led organisations operate with greater flexibility and independence, enabling them to undertake innovative and community-oriented projects. One notable strength of youth-led organisations is their informal power and community connections. According to the informants, these organisations often build strong relationships within communities, allowing them to mobilise resources, gain support, and enact change effectively. This informal influence is significant in smaller communities, where formal mechanisms for youth participation may be underdeveloped. Therefore, supporting those youth-led organisations is crucial to ensure the youth's further engagement, particularly at the community level.

*“Youth-led organisations are spaces where young people can contribute with their ideas on how to shift the reality where they live.”*

*(Key Informant, INGO, Kyiv)*

According to key informants, these youth-led organisations provide youth with different activities and services, including leadership programmes to enable youth to connect with professionals, project budgeting and man-

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45 USAID, “Local Solutions: A Fundraising Strategy”, 2020, Washington, DC. <https://www.usaid.gov/local-solutions>



agement trainings, TVET and entrepreneurship courses, to equip young people with practical skills for employment, as per FGD participants. Some of these organisations also provide grants and funding opportunities to young people for starting their own businesses. However, 43% of youth who participated in FGDs reported limited awareness and knowledge of the activities and services provided by youth-led organisations. This was supported by the IREX, with 48% of youth reported being aware of youth-led organisations, only 5% stated being a member of those organisations, highlighting limited awareness and participation.<sup>46</sup> This significant gap can be explained by the limited visibility of tangible impacts, and the clear opportunities these organisations offer can decrease young people's motivation to actively participate. To address these challenges, improved outreach efforts, clear communication about the value and practical benefits of participation, and accessible pathways for involvement are essential.

### **Volunteering**

According to informants from youth-led organisations, volunteering is another common informal participation mechanism adopted by the youth. Volunteering holds cultural significance in Ukraine, being deeply embedded and often serving as a gateway for young people to participate in community development and decision-making.

These informal volunteer activities are generally organised by the youth-led organisations, aiming to contribute to community resilience. From organising clean-up drives to supporting IDYs, youth-led organisations channel volunteer efforts into impactful projects. Echoed by 70% of the FGD participants who are youth, these informal volunteer groups organise food deliveries and aid distribution. While these efforts are less structured than those in larger cities, they remain impactful, providing essential support to vulnerable populations. However, fostering a broader culture of social volunteering remains a challenge, as much of the focus tends to be on military-related activities. Supported by the youth survey, while awareness of volunteer programmes among Ukrainian youth aged 16-35 is remarkably high, with 88% reporting familiarity with such opportunities, only 47% have actively volunteered for a social or political cause, highlighting a significant gap between awareness and participation in youth volunteerism. Several factors contribute to this discrepancy, including the prioritisation of military-related efforts due to ongoing conflict, limited access to diversified volunteer opportunities, and a lack of structured support or incentives for social volunteering. Additionally, cultural perceptions and social expectations may influence young people's engagement, as volunteering for military purposes often holds greater prestige and recognition compared to social causes.

Digital platforms considerably enhance youth engagement by providing accessible channels for organising volunteer activities and mobilising support according to 21% of FGD participants. Telegram groups, YouTube channels, and blogs have become spaces for young people to share job opportunities, organise fundraising campaigns, document their experiences, and mobilise collective action, extending the reach and impact of informal volunteer initiatives.

## **3.6.3 Barriers to Meaningful Participation**

Youth participation plays a vital role in Ukraine's post-war recovery, resilience, and democratic governance, yet systemic barriers persistently exclude young people, especially those displaced, living in frontline regions, or coming from the marginalised communities. The most pressing barriers include safety and security risks, which prevent youth from participating meaningfully, along with the psychological toll of war, such as trauma, emotional exhaustion, and conscription fears, particularly among male youth. This is followed by accessibility barriers, including limited awareness of the presence of youth councils, as well as the lack of information about the services and activities they provide, coupled with inadequate infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, such as limited electricity, internet access, and disability-friendly facilities. Financial constraints, driven by rising living costs and unemployment, further exclude many young people from participation. Structural gaps, such as fragmented initiatives, under-resourced programmes of these councils and centres, and a highly limited

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46 IREX, Youth Opinion Survey: Wave 3, June-July 2024, Ukraine. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/627a2e40fe005402b6dbb84a/t/66b9aba9b244736a38a1aef4/1723444139621/UNITY+Youth+Poll+2024+ENG.pdf>

number of trained youth facilitators, also contribute to this exclusion. These challenges are compounded by intersectional discrimination against IDYs, LGBTQAI+ youth, and the youth from the Roma community, who face layered exclusion from safe spaces and leadership opportunities.

### **Safety concerns**

Safety and security concerns are among the most significant barriers to youth participation in Ukraine. Constant attacks and shelling, particularly for those residing in or near frontline areas, compel youth to prioritise their immediate safety over community engagement. This persistent danger disrupts daily life, instilling a pervasive sense of fear and uncertainty that further discourages involvement in community activities and decision-making processes.

According to the UNDP, 27% of Ukrainian youth identified personal or family physical safety as a top concern, highlighting the pervasive impact of ongoing conflict on their daily lives. Furthermore, the war has led to substantial displacement among young adults, disrupting social networks and reducing opportunities for civic engagement. The UNDP reports that many young people have been forced to relocate from conflict-affected areas, severing their community ties and limiting their involvement in local decision-making processes, governance and recovery efforts.<sup>47</sup>

### **Psychosocial barriers**

Psychosocial toll of the war on the well-being of youth is reported to be another barrier impacting the youth's meaningful participation. According to 47% of FGD participants, engaging in the community and making meaningful contributions under survival risks is highly challenging. This finding aligns with a study conducted by the British Council among Ukrainian youth, which found that more than half of the respondents described the war's impact on their lives as highly damaging. The study highlighted how profoundly the war impacted their daily lives, future aspirations, and significantly reduced their motivation to engage actively within their communities.<sup>48</sup>

Additionally, all male youth FGD participants (100%) reported having a fear of conscription, which prevents them from actively participating in decision-making processes. While both male and female youth experience general anxiety, trauma, and emotional exhaustion from ongoing conflict and insecurity, male participants face an additional psychological burden explicitly related to this fear of conscription. This fear not only heightens their stress and anxiety but also significantly reduces their willingness to engage openly in public forums, attend community events, or participate in the activities of youth councils and centres due to concerns of being identified or recruited. Consequently, this targeted pressure on male youth contributes to a notable gender-specific gap in community engagement and civic participation.

*“...And then there's the fear of mobilisation. Every time you go out, you look over your shoulder, worried that someone will stop you. It's hard to think about volunteering or joining an event when you're afraid of being taken away.”*

*(Male, FGD, Khar)*

### **Lack of Information and Awareness**

A recurring issue highlighted across regions is the lack of accessible and effective dissemination of information about opportunities for youth engagement. Many female and male youth across study locations reported that many peers have little or limited information about programmes, initiatives, or community events due to inadequate outreach. This is particularly acute in rural areas, where internet connectivity is limited, and communication relies on outdated methods such as posters in cultural centres. According to the IREX, only 47% of the youth aged 16-35 are aware of the existence of these youth councils, with only 7% reporting active participation,

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<sup>47</sup> UNDP, Impact of War on Youth in Ukraine, Ukraine, 2023.

<sup>48</sup> British Council, Understanding Ukrainian young people's current concerns, needs and hopes: looking ahead to a future rebuilding of Ukraine, 2024. [https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/2024\\_ukraine\\_concerns\\_needs\\_hope\\_report\\_screen-compressed.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/2024_ukraine_concerns_needs_hope_report_screen-compressed.pdf)

showing the need for more structured outreach activities.<sup>49</sup> Similar results are found by the UNDP, only 2% of youth reporting to participate youth councils in 2022.<sup>50</sup>

### **Infrastructure and Accessibility**

Another challenge affecting the accessibility of youth in formal and informal mechanisms is found in infrastructure, particularly for people with disabilities and those living in rural areas. According to FGD participants, there are not enough public transportation options or disabled-friendly public spaces that youth with disabilities can access smoothly. In regions like Sumy, constant power outages further increase accessibility issues, leaving youth disconnected from digital opportunities. Even basic infrastructure like ramps or elevators is missing in many buildings, creating significant barriers for individuals with disabilities. These limitations prevent many youth with disabilities from accessing spaces and participating in events designed for community engagement.

*“There aren’t enough accessible public spaces or transportation options, which makes it difficult for them to participate in community events or initiatives.”*

*(Female, FGD, Dnipro)*

These barriers are further exacerbated for those with limited financial resources, considering increasing living costs and limited employment opportunities, which also prevent youth from accessing these formal and informal mechanisms. Transportation, purchase of materials, and programme fees make participation unaffordable for many youth from low-income families or residing in rural areas, along with the limited transportation opportunities.

### **Structural barriers**

FGD participants reported that numerous youth programmes and initiatives are often fragmented and poorly coordinated, making it challenging for young people to navigate or engage effectively. Youth councils, which should serve as platforms for advocacy and engagement, often lack proper training and direction. Supported by the informants, youth councils are a good platform for youth to connect with their peers. However, they do not provide systematic information on youth participation as a concept, what advocacy is, and how it could work, which decreases the impact of these programmes and sustainability.

According to informants, one of the reasons for this is the lack of dedicated youth workers and well-functioning youth spaces in many communities. In Ukraine, only 39 youth spaces exist across 69 communities, many of which operate at a low capacity. Youth workers often serve on a volunteer basis or through temporary grant-funded projects, leading to inconsistent support when funding ends. Additionally, most youth councils and centres lack information on finding and applying for these grants, limiting their capacities significantly. Informants revealed that creating those councils also becomes an income source in some cases, where the intention is not to implement those programmes but to earn money through the system abuse.

Unlike teachers or social workers, youth workers have no formally recognised position in many communities. This gap highlights the need for systemic change, including legislative action to establish youth policies as a priority on par with economic and social policies. Strengthening youth organisations, creating permanent roles for youth workers, and ensuring sustainable funding are essential steps to empower young people as drivers of community development.

Even if the programmes and initiatives are organised well, and dedicated youth workers are recruited and placed, many youth reported having limited trust in government authorities regarding a tangible outcome of their participation, as many things that their opinion will not be considered and create a change.

*“Many of us feel the local authorities don’t listen to us. Meetings with officials often result in no action, discouraging youth from engaging in future discussions or initiatives.”*

*(Female, FGD, Dnipro)*

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- 49 IREX, Youth Opinion Survey: Wave 3, June-July 2024, Ukraine. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/627a2e40fe005402b6dbb84a/t/66b9aba9b244736a38a1aef4/1723444139621/UNITY+Youth+Poll+2024+ENG.pdf>
- 50 UNDP, Impact of War on Youth in Ukraine, 2023, Kyiv. [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-07/undp-ua-impact-war-youth-eng-findings-recommendations\\_2023\\_2.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-07/undp-ua-impact-war-youth-eng-findings-recommendations_2023_2.pdf)

### **Limited availability**

One of the barriers that prevented participants from reaching a consensus across FGD locations was the lack of time available to participate in community and volunteer activities. Many youth juggle multiple responsibilities, including academic commitments, employment, and family obligations, which leaves little room for their engagement in these activities.

*“The barrier is time. People who work and study have little time to participate in these activities.”*  
(Female, FGD, Chernihiv)

Similarly, these time constraints also play a significant role in hindering youth from assuming leadership. Opportunities to lead require sustained commitment, but many young people feel unable to dedicate the necessary time to grow into leadership roles. The lack of time for leadership activities often forces young people to choose between immediate, practical responsibilities and long-term development opportunities. For instance, programmes requiring regular participation, such as youth councils or community projects, may lose out to the more pressing demands of education or employment.

### **Intersectional barriers**

Discrimination and stigma against disadvantaged, marginalised or minority groups, such as LGBTQAI+ individuals, IDYs, and the Roma community, further complicate their participation, as many of those feel excluded or not accepted by the community. According to FGD and KII respondents, IDYs come across some stigma and discrimination due to the language barriers, from where they are displaced and how.

Similarly, LGBTQAI+ youth experience as a result of their appearance, mimics and gestures, etc., which doesn't only impact their meaningful participation but also access to safe and secure accommodation, education and job opportunities, particularly for trans individuals, as per informants.

*“There are stereotypes and discrimination against certain groups, like people with disabilities or members of the LGBT community or Roma. This creates barriers because these groups feel excluded or unwelcome in many community activities.”*

(Female, FGD, Dnipro)

The female FGD participants in Chernihiv reported similar discrimination and stigma against Roma community members. According to the participants, Roma are found to be one of the groups experiencing discrimination in accessing services, including employment.

Despite all these barriers, youth in Ukraine continue to demonstrate significant resilience and potential. While programmes have successfully focused on life skills and engagement opportunities, there is a need to adapt these methodologies to frontline areas, recognising the essential role of youth in the reconstruction and recovery of Ukraine, as actively engaged youth can bring innovative perspectives, energy, and commitment to rebuilding social and economic systems. By contributing to decision-making processes, youth not only shape policies that address their specific needs but also foster inclusive environments that strengthen community ties and promote trust in institutions. Furthermore, actively engaged youth can help bridge community divides and foster social cohesion in post-conflict contexts, ensuring local voices are reflected in governance reforms.<sup>51</sup> These contributions are especially vital for catalysing long-term recovery efforts, as youth-led initiatives often bolster local capacity, revitalise economies, and create sustainable livelihoods.<sup>52</sup>

Although these youth councils and youth-led organisations provide many programmes and services, their roles need to be formalised and integrated into broader systems, such as livelihoods and education, to maximise their impact on youth during the recovery phase. Digital platforms like Telegram and SMS hubs have successfully engaged youth and could be further utilised to promote training, gather feedback, and encourage participation. Community-based networks, trusted within local contexts, are vital in providing accountability and fostering transparency. By strengthening these networks and leveraging innovative tools, Ukraine can empower its youth to take on leadership roles in the nation's recovery, ensuring their meaningful and sustainable contributions.

51 UNICEF, “Engaged and Heard!: Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement,” 2021, New York. <https://www.unicef.org/media/101506/file/ENGAGED%20AND%20HEARD:%20GUIDELINES%20ON%20ADOLESCENT%20PARTICIPATION%20AND%20CIVIC%20ENGAGEMENT.pdf>

52 World Bank, “Youth Entrepreneurship in Fragile Contexts,” 2020, Washington, DC. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence/publication/youth-entrepreneurship-fragile-contexts>



## 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine, combined with economic volatility, has significantly affected young people's prospects for education, employment, and social engagement. Amid widespread displacement, infrastructure damage, and ongoing insecurity, youth across the country are navigating disrupted life trajectories with limited access to quality education, including TVET, and employment. The TVET system holds significant potential as one of the drivers of Ukraine's recovery and rehabilitation by meaningfully involving youth. However, several barriers and factors limit its effectiveness. Regional disparities leave rural and frontline communities underserved and prevent youth residing in these areas from accessing TVET education.

The limited internet and electricity in these areas also hinder access to online TVET education. Outdated curricula fail to match labour market demands, and deep-rooted social stigma continues to position TVET as a second-class option compared to university education and white-collar jobs. Many young people, mainly IDYs, youth women, Roma youth, LGBTQ+ individuals, and those with disabilities, face compounded barriers that restrict their access to both TVET and employment. These barriers found including the lack of transport, limited digital access, gender discrimination, and insufficient practical experience.

Meanwhile, the mental health-related issues are found to be as critical and under-addressed. The psychological toll of war—including trauma, anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion—is acutely felt by youth across locations. For many, the persistent uncertainty, fear of conscription, and daily exposure to violence have eroded motivation and hope for the future. These challenges directly impact learning, job-seeking behaviour, and long-term planning. Social isolation, limited financial resources and transportation infrastructure, particularly those residing in rural areas and stigma around mental health, especially within families, further prevent youth from accessing care. Despite the growing need, services remain scarce, particularly in rural areas, and awareness of available support is low.

Despite these barriers, Ukrainian youth demonstrate a resilient spirit and a willingness to contribute to social cohesion and peacebuilding. Many find meaning and strength through peer-led initiatives, volunteering, entrepreneurship, and community engagement. Youth councils, centres, and youth-led organisations offer essential platforms for skill development, psychosocial support, and civic participation—but their reach and sustainability are highly uneven. In well-supported areas, these mechanisms cultivate leadership and community cohesion; in underfunded regions, they risk becoming tokenistic or inaccessible. Moreover, systemic issues—such as limited outreach, insufficient youth worker capacity, and lack of coordination—diminish the potential of these programmes to create scalable, lasting impact.

What youth consistently express—across all focus groups and interviews—is a desire for dignity, structure, and opportunity: to learn relevant skills, contribute meaningfully to Ukraine's recovery and rehabilitation, and recover a sense of agency over their futures. In this context, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) is uniquely positioned to respond, leveraging its global knowledge and experience in designing, implementing, and advocating for TVET and livelihoods programmes. The NRC can play a strategic role in addressing the very challenges highlighted by Ukrainian youth, investing in targeted interventions that build youth capacities, promoting psychosocial well-being, and creating inclusive spaces for meaningful participation. This can significantly contribute to restoring hope, agency, and opportunities for youth in Ukraine, particularly for those who have been displaced. This focus could be achieved by targeting the following four interconnected areas as per NRC's global strengths and priorities:

1. **Expanding TVET and Education:** Facilitate improved access to and quality of TVET for youth, particularly for those residing in frontline and rural areas.
2. **Mitigating Employment Barriers:** Addressing immediate, medium-term, and long-term barriers that prevent youth from transitioning from TVET to employment, particularly IDYs.

3. **Integrating Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS):** NRC to integrate MHPSS into its TVET education and livelihood programmes, while also advocating for public-private partnerships incorporating MHPSS into the TVET system and employer-provided benefits. This approach will strengthen youth well-being and enhance their capacity for sustained engagement in education and the workforce.
4. **Promoting Youth Civic Participation:** Empower youth-led initiatives, councils, centres and digital forums that enable young people to shape and support Ukraine's recovery and rehabilitation.

These four domains correspond to NRC's youth programme goals of (1) enhancing well-being and engagement, (2) equipping youth with livelihood skills, and (3) fostering community contributions. To address these critical challenges and leverage NRC's extensive experience, the following key actions are recommended from the assessment and categorize into three main groups as per their urgency level:



Kharkiv 2024. Photo by: Filippo Mancini/NRC.

## 4.1 Short Term Recommendations

### 1. Expand Mobile and Digital TVET Access

**Objective:** →  
Increase access to TVET for displaced youth and those residing in rural, remote and frontline areas..

**Action:**

- a. Deploy mobile training units to underserved communities, ensuring flexible, location-adaptive learning.
  - b. Develop e-learning platforms with hybrid (online and in-person) modules that provide certifications aligned with market demands.
  - c. Partner with telecommunications providers to subsidise data costs, ensuring affordability and digital inclusion.
- 

### 2. Provide Financial Support to TVET Students

**Objective:** →  
Remove financial barriers to participation in and completion of TVET.

**Action:**

- a. Introduce cash-based support (CBI) and vouchers covering tuition, transportation, and learning materials.
  - b. Target subsidies towards low-income and displaced youth, prioritising those at high risk of dropping out.
  - c. Develop a scholarship fund in collaboration with donors and private-sector stakeholders to enhance long-term sustainability.
- 

### 3. Support Youth-Led Informal Education and Capacity-Building Initiatives

**Objective:** →  
Enhance the employability, social integration, and personal development of youth, especially displaced, marginalized groups and those residing in rural, remote and frontline areas, through accessible, youth-led learning opportunities focused on both technical and soft skills.

**Action:**

- a. Provide financial and technical support to youth councils, centers, and youth-led organisations to deliver informal education programmes tailored to local needs and youth priorities, including language classes (e.g., English, Ukrainian), coding and digital literacy courses, project management, and stress management workshops.
- b. Encourage peer-to-peer learning models and collaborative teaching approaches that position young people as both learners and facilitators.
- c. Establish mentorship programmes that connect experienced TVET professionals with young people to provide guidance, increase awareness of TVET education and potential career opportunities, and reduce prejudice surrounding TVET professions.

#### 4. Improve Mental, Psychosocial and Emotional Well-being of Youth

**Objective:** —————>

Improve access to MHPSS services for youth, particularly those who are displaced or residing in frontline and rural/remote areas.

**Action:**

- a. Deploy mobile MHPSS teams in rural/remote, frontline, and hard-to-reach areas, integrating psychologists, social workers, and youth facilitators.
- b. Establish and scale digital MHPSS platforms, including confidential tele-counseling services, SMS-based support lines, and mobile apps offering self-help tools tailored for youth.
- c. Partner with telecom providers and youth organisations to disseminate information on available services and increase digital literacy for MHPSS access.

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#### 5. Foster Youth-Led Peer Support Networks

**Objective:** —————>

Promote mental well-being and social cohesion among youth through peer-driven initiatives that create safe spaces for dialogue, learning, and collective support.

**Action:**

- Foster youth-led peer support networks by establishing youth mental health clubs within youth councils, community centers, TVET institutions, and online platforms to facilitate regular dialogue among young people. These spaces can be used to exchange experiences, share coping strategies, and promote psychoeducational learning. By encouraging peer-led facilitation and leadership, such networks build a culture of trust, mutual support, and mental health awareness. This approach enhances community-based collective action, reduces stigma, and empowers young people to be agents of change in supporting one another's psychosocial well-being. Activities may include;
- a. Group discussions,
  - b. Arts-based healing sessions,
  - c. Storytelling,
  - d. Community outreach campaigns, and
  - e. Collaboration with local MHPSS professionals for mentorship.

## 4.2 Medium Term Recommendations

#### 1. Strengthen Apprenticeship and Job Placement Programmes

**Objective:** —————>

Facilitate the transition of youth into formal employment and sustainable livelihoods.

**Action:**

- a. Forge partnerships with private-sector companies, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and government agencies to develop structured apprenticeship and mentorship programmes.



- b. Establish youth employment hubs that connect trained individuals with job openings and internship opportunities.
  - c. Offer post-training coaching and career guidance to support long-term job retention and entrepreneurship.
- 

## 2. Support Rural Youth Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development

### Objective: →

Promote sustainable livelihoods and local economic recovery by empowering rural youth to launch and grow small businesses, particularly in agriculture and community-based enterprises.

### Action:

- a. Collaborate with financial institutions, microfinance providers, and donors to develop youth-friendly loan schemes, grants, and savings programmes tailored to the needs of rural entrepreneurs.
  - b. Establish mentorship and business incubation programmes that connect aspiring youth entrepreneurs with experienced professionals in agriculture, agribusiness, digital services, and small-scale manufacturing.
  - c. Provide targeted training in financial literacy, business planning, marketing, and digital tools to equip young people with the skills necessary to manage and scale their enterprises.
  - d. Support local cooperatives and youth-led enterprises through market linkages and value chain integration, ensuring long-term economic inclusion and community resilience.
- 

## 3. Integrate MHPSS Services Into Education and Livelihoods Programmes

### Objective: →

Ensure that MHPSS services are integrated into TVET and livelihoods programmes by both governmental, non-governmental and private sector actors.

### Action:

- a. Equip teachers/facilitators with skills to recognise and address psychosocial distress among students. This includes training in Psychological First Aid (PFA) and classroom strategies that promote social and emotional learning (SEL) in the TVET system.
- b. Advocate to the Government of Ukraine for including structured MHPSS components, such as stress management, emotional regulation, and social-emotional learning, within TVET programme curricula.
- c. Advocate for and collaborate with employers to implement workplace wellness and staff-care initiatives, including regular mental health check-ins and referral pathways to professional support.

#### 4. Strengthen Youth Councils and Informal Networks

**Objective:** —————>

Build the capacity of both formal and informal youth-led structures to increase the meaningful participation and engagement of youth at local, regional and national levels.

**Action:**

- a. Provide technical and financial support to youth councils and youth-led grassroots networks, particularly for displaced youth and those residing in rural, remote, and frontline areas.
- b. Advocate for more independent youth council structures and mechanisms in close collaboration with national, regional, and local authorities, to ensure that youth councils can operate with greater autonomy, free from undue political or administrative influence, while maintaining constructive partnerships that support youth-led priorities and local authorities.

### 4.3 Long-Term Recommendations

#### 1. Align TVET Curricula with Market Demands

**Objective:** —————>

Ensure that TVET programmes, align with employer demands and emerging job sectors by advocating for stronger cooperation between public-private partnerships, along with civil society.

**Action:**

- a. Conduct regular labor market assessments to identify high-demand skills, ensuring curricula remain relevant.
- b. Facilitate stronger public-private partnerships between the Government of Ukraine and the private sector, including co-designing training modules to maximise employability outcomes.

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#### 2. Expand Digital Participation Platforms

**Objective:** —————>

Leverage technology to broaden the meaningful participation and engagement of youth, particularly those displaced and residing in rural, remote, and frontline areas.

**Action:**

- a. Partner with relevant tech companies and local authorities to create secure digital spaces, such as mobile apps, online forums, and virtual town halls, where youth can contribute to decision-making processes.
- b. Ensure digital platforms are youth-friendly, multilingual, and inclusive of displaced populations, with clear data privacy safeguards.
- c. Utilise these tools to facilitate real-time consultations, polls, and civic education content, thereby amplifying youth voices in local governance.



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