

Education and War in Ukraine

(February 24—April 1, 2022)

Authors: Yuliia Nazarenko, Iryna Kohut, Tetiana Zheriobkina

Translation: Roksolana Mashkova

The next day after the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Russian troops into Ukraine on February 24, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (MES) recommended pausing the education process in education institutions at all levels and starting a two-week vacation for all students and education workers. Since then, part of the Ukrainian territory has become temporarily occupied, a number of cities, towns and villages (Mariupol, Chernihiv, Sumy, Kharkiv and others) have been turned into active battlegrounds. [More than 10 million](#) people have been forced to leave their homes: 6.5 million moved within the country, and 3.9 million went abroad. Most of these people are women and children. [UNICEF reports](#) that more than half of Ukrainian children—4.3 out of 7.5 million—have been forced by war to leave their homes. As of March 28, 144 children had died and over 220 had been wounded due to the war. 659 education institutions had been damaged by bombing or shelling, 74 had been destroyed completely.

Since March 14, the education process has begun to resume in the regions where the security situation allowed it. The decisions as to where and how classes should be held were made by regional administrations and education

institutions. The students who have left their homes can resume their studies in their temporary locations of residence, both in Ukraine and abroad. The education workers who are able to work can do it from anywhere within or outside the country. Those of them who cannot work [still keep](#) their jobs and salaries: this was guaranteed by the amendments to education laws introduced on March 20.

The Cedos Think Tank works to monitor the impact of the war on education in Ukraine. With this work, we seek to record the most important decisions and events in the field and to outline the key challenges.

In our monitoring, we use published regulatory documents, secondary data, reports by Ukrainian and international media as well as by Ukrainian representatives of the central and local governments.

This paper contains an overview of the data on the damage to education institutions, as well as of the key changes that have taken place in the organization of the education process in preschool, secondary and higher education in Ukraine.

● Infrastructure

On March 10, the MES [launched](#) an interactive map of education institutions in Ukraine that have been ruined or damaged by russia's actions in Ukraine. As of March 31, 76 institutions have been [destroyed completely](#), and 722 have been damaged.

According to these data, Kharkiv Region has suffered the most: 50 education institutions have been completely destroyed there. In Donetsk Region, 309 institutions have been damaged and 1 destroyed; in Sumy Region, 40 institutions have been damaged; in Kyiv Region, 43 have been damaged and 3 destroyed; in the capital, 73 education institutions have been damaged.

Damaged and destroyed education institutions (February 24–April 1)

	Damaged	Destroyed
Preschool education institutions	263	7
Secondary and specialized education institutions	356	61

Extracurricular education institutions	17	1
Professional education institutions	45	5
Pre-higher professional education institutions	22	1
Higher education institutions	18	1

In the regions which receive internally displaced people, preschools and secondary schools have been serving as shelters for people who need temporary accommodation. Internally displaced people are accommodated in dormitories of professional and higher education institutions. Schools and preschools also act as hubs for collecting, sorting and distributing humanitarian aid, while school buses are used for evacuation.

● Preschool education

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, kindergartens have been put on a break according to a MES recommendation under the conditions of martial law. Within 3–4 weeks, some regions [started resuming](#) preschool education; as of March 28, some kindergartens in 6 regions have resumed their work in their usual format, while in 8 other regions some kindergartens use the elements of remote education in their work with the pupils and their parents. In the rest of the Ukrainian territory, the education process at kindergartens remains suspended.

On March 14, UNICEF and MES [launched](#) an online kindergarten with educational video classes for children aged 3 to 6. The project aims to help parents keep their child busy with activities full of learning opportunities.

The MES has issued an explanation on accepting temporarily displaced children to kindergartens in Ukraine: according to the current regulations, particularly the Ukrainian Law “On ensuring the rights and liberties of internally displaced persons,” local self-government bodies have to make sure that children are accepted to preschool and secondary education institutions.

● Secondary education

Education process

Just like kindergartens, schools also went on a two-week vacation from February 24. Unlike regular vacations, pedagogical workers were not required to attend their workplaces or carry out their professional duties during this break.

Remote classes were resumed on March 14. The [Learning Without Borders](#) project for grades 5 through 11 was launched jointly by the MES and the Ministry of Culture, as well as by Ukrainian TV channels and online platforms. It broadcasts video lessons, with a different subject scheduled for each day. It is based on the nationwide [schedule](#) of classes for students in grades 1 through 11 which are held online, where the classes are also available in recorded form. Private schools and NGOs also joined in on the organization of remote classes, providing free access to their [education resources](#).

Children who have been displaced within Ukraine can continue their studies at schools in their temporary location of residence. The MES [Decree 274](#) “On some issues of the organization of general secondary education and the education process under martial law in Ukraine” allows education institutions to accept students in their temporary location of residence without documents or based on copies if their families do not have the required originals.

According to the MES, [as of March 28](#), the education process at secondary education institutions (hereafter referred to as SEIs) was taking place remotely in 13 Ukrainian regions (including Kyiv); in 4 regions, education was organized partially or the schools were still on vacation; in 5 other regions, studies had resumed remotely, the vacation continued, or studies had been paused depending on the community; and in the remaining 2 regions, secondary education had been suspended for security reasons. 5,000 children have joined the education process from their location of temporary residence after being forced to leave their homes. A week earlier, [as of March 21](#), the education process went on remotely in 11 regions: over 10,000 SEIs resumed their work in this format. Almost 3 million students went back to their studies.

In some temporarily occupied localities, the occupiers plan to change the education process in education institutions to [make it meet the Russian education standards and introduce the Russian language of study](#). There have also been recorded cases of kidnapping of education workers who refused to collaborate—for instance, [on March 29, the head of the Department of Education was kidnapped in Melitopol](#).

Some of the cities and towns under temporary occupation—for instance, Kherson since March 14—have resumed remote learning at schools in Ukrainian.

Ending the school year

On March 24, the Verkhovna Rada adopted a law which canceled the State Final Examination (SFE) for students completing their full secondary education in 2022. The MES announced the development of methodological recommendations on ending the school year under martial law; however, the recommendations had not been published yet as of March 31.

[According to](#) the minister of education and science, “all children who are now studying outside their own schools and abroad will receive a document about completing the school year. And all their grades will be recorded, regardless of where each child is studying today: at any other school which conducts in-person, mixed or remote classes or external education.”

On April 1, the MES issued a [decree](#) “On approving methodological recommendations on some issues of completing the 2021/22 school year,” which recommends SEIs to determine the day of ending the school year on their own and to compress the education materials in order to ensure the completion of the curriculum. The decree also recommends conducting final evaluations using remote learning technologies.

Working conditions of education workers

On March 15, the parliament [adopted](#) a law on government guarantees under martial law. It ensures that pedagogical workers will keep their jobs and average salaries and will be able to work from any location of their temporary residence, including from abroad.

The MES also issued [explanations](#) on the specifics of educational work in this period. Teachers who are unable to conduct classes will keep their salaries according to the labor law. A worker’s inability to carry out remote work due to the lack of required communications cannot be viewed as a violation of labor discipline. Heads of education institutions must not encourage teachers to take unpaid vacations for the period of martial law. If education institutions in localities of temporary residence of internally displaced teachers have vacancies, the teachers can be employed there if they wish so.

● Higher education

Admission campaign

On March 8, Serhiy Shkarlet, the minister of education and science, [made a proposal](#) to cancel in 2022 the External Independent Evaluation (EIE) and entrance exams for MA programs: the Unified Entrance Examination (UEE) in foreign languages and the Unified Professional Entrance Test (UPET). Instead, he proposed to organize the admission campaign using an electronic system without the applicants' participation. The minister also announced that the MES had developed three scenarios of admission to higher education institutions (hereafter referred to as HEIs) which do not involve the EIE. However, he did not explain the procedures that were to replace the UEE and UPET.

This initiative was met with a controversial response. For instance, representatives of the Lviv Region education system [appealed](#) to the MES and the Verkhovna Rada with a proposal to keep the usual admission procedure while adapting it to the circumstances of martial law. In particular, to postpone the deadline for registration and the date of the EIE by several months and to reduce the number of subjects. At the same time, the Association of Rectors of Ukraine [supported](#) the proposal to cancel the SFE and the EIE and to simplify the procedure of admission to MA programs.

On March 24, the Verkhovna Rada [adopted a law](#) “On introducing amendments to some legislative acts of Ukraine in the field of education,” which cancels the EIE, UEE and UPET for students in 2022. Instead, the law charged the MES with developing a special admission procedure within a month.

According to the [information](#) available as of April 1, the MES proposes to organize admission to BA programs by introducing a multi-subject test with questions in Ukrainian language (without literature), mathematics and Ukrainian history, as well as a cover letter. The applicants willing to pay their own tuition will only have to submit an application and a cover letter, except for medical professions as well as humanitarian and social sciences, law, journalism and similar professions, which will also have to take the multi-subject test. The applicants applying for specializations which require a creative competition will have to participate in the creative competition and submit a cover letter.

In order to be accepted to MA programs with government-covered tuition fees in all specializations except for law, applicants will have to take professional tests at HEIs and submit a cover letter. Those willing to pay their own tuition will only have to do the latter. Admission to Law and International

Law programs will require taking a complex master's text (law and a foreign language) and submitting a cover letter.

Alternative testing must be conducted for 10–15 days and last 80 minutes. This will reduce the time of the applicants' stay at the testing location, since they will be able to come to the testing location just once rather than four times and stay there for 80 minutes rather than several hours. The testing locations must be equipped with shelters where applicants will be able to seek cover in case of an air raid siren. In addition, the introduction of an alternative test significantly reduces the time and funding required for evaluation, since the test will be taken online at special testing locations, which will eliminate the need to scan papers or to evaluate open questions.

Nevertheless, the multi-subject test covers a limited number of subjects: Ukrainian language, mathematics and Ukrainian history. Therefore, the applicants who were preparing to take tests in other subjects (such as biology) instead of Ukrainian history may not have the opportunity or time to prepare for the test properly. In addition, subjects such as biology, chemistry or physics are important for a number of specializations. This may lead to a situation where their results in the third subject are worse. The test only includes 20 multiple-choice questions for each subject, which increases the risks of the negative impact of guessing or cheating: due to the relatively low number of questions, the weight of each answer in the evaluation increases.

The MES proposes using cover letters to rank the applicants willing to pay their own tuition fees as well as applicants with the same competition grades applying for places with government-covered tuition. Admission of tuition-paying applicants based solely on cover letters without assessing their knowledge may increase the risk of exacerbating inequalities in access to higher education, since the evaluation of cover letters can be subjective and lack transparent procedures. In addition, it may carry risks of corruption, because university staff are more likely to take and demand bribes from students who are not able to cope with their educational workload.

Ending the academic year

At the moment, it is unknown when the academic year will end and under what circumstances.

On March 21, the MES issued a [decree](#) which empowered the heads of higher and pre-higher professional education institutions to approve the type of examination for their students independently. On March 27, the Cabinet [adopted](#) Decree 376, which aimed to regulate the examination for students of pre-higher professional and higher education institutions. In particular, the specializations which were required to take the Unified State Qualification

Exam (USQE) now have an opportunity to complete their degrees and receive their diplomas without taking this exam.

Education process

The MES [has recommended](#) that higher education institutions resume classes in a remote or mixed format when the vacation ends, provided that there are safe conditions to do it. In addition, it recommended introducing special studying conditions (individual schedules, academic leaves) for students serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine or the Territorial Defense.

Since March 14, some Ukrainian regions have resumed the education process. As of March 22, [according to](#) the minister of education and science, universities in 15 Ukrainian regions have resumed studies, while HEIs in 4 other regions are still on forced vacation, and universities in one region are not working. In Kyiv, remote studies at HEIs resumed on March 28.

Remote learning allows HEIs to organize the education process during the war. At the same time, some students and professors are in dangerous areas, in war hotspots or in temporarily occupied territories, and they may not be able to join the process. Students or professors who are relatively safe may not have access to the internet or the required equipment. There are also air raid sirens in most Ukrainian regions every day (or even multiple times a day in many of them), during which students and professors have to take shelter. This can directly affect the organization of the education process and interrupt it. It may be useful to collect data and develop recommendations at the national level on the organization of the education process under the current circumstances of war.

The Ukrainian universities located in safer regions ([Lviv](#), [Ivano-Frankivsk](#), [Ternopil](#), [Volyn](#), [Rivne](#), [Khmelnysky](#), [Dnipropetrovsk](#) Regions) have announced that they are admitting internally displaced students. At the moment, these studies are only available as a part of academic mobility opportunities, meaning that students can take certain classes in their specializations and receive a document certifying that they have taken the classes upon completing them. However, students are de facto unable to fully transfer from their university to another one if their university does not conduct classes. There is a need for a longer-term strategy of integration and a procedure for transferring students whose universities cannot resume studies in the near future.

Some universities have also invited professors who have evacuated from warzones to join the education process.

Relocation and evacuation of universities and students

In the areas of active hostilities (Kharkiv, Chernihiv, Sumy, Donetsk, Mykolayiv Regions and Kyiv), buildings of higher education institutions have been damaged. [According to](#) the MES, at least 14 university buildings have been damaged and one has been destroyed. Some universities have suffered more than others. In particular, the Karazin National University in Kharkiv [reported](#) that almost all of its buildings have been damaged by bombing.

Ukraine already has experience in evacuating universities. Since 2014, some universities from Donetsk and Luhansk Regions as well as Crimea have been [moved](#) to safer cities within the same regions or to other regions. For instance, the Donetsk National University started working in Vinnytsia. This process is happening again. In particular, the State University of Biotechnology has [moved](#) from Kharkiv to Zakarpattia. Some of the properties of Uzhgorod and Mukachevo education institutions have been transferred to it. The [Volodymyr Dal East Ukrainian National University](#) has also been evacuated from Severodonetsk to Kamyanyets-Podilsky, and the [Luhansk Medical University](#) has been evacuated from Rubizhne to Rivne (both had previously been evacuated from Luhansk). The number of universities in need of evacuation and relocation can increase over time, so there is a need to clarify how many higher education institutions plan to move to other regions at the moment and to develop the procedure and conditions for their relocation.

There is no data yet on the number of victims among students and professors who have been in active war zones. There are known cases of targeted evacuation of students and professors from zones of active fighting. In particular, on March 7, an evacuation train was [organized](#) from Kharkiv to Ternopil Region for 486 people, including students and teachers of higher and professional-technical education institutions.

On March 6, Iryna Vereshchuk, the minister for the reintegration of the temporarily occupied territories, [reported](#) that over 2,000 foreign students were trapped in the temporarily occupied territories and in active war zones. On March 8, [according to](#) the head of the Sumy Regional Administration, 1,700 foreign students were evacuated from Sumy. The head of the Kharkiv Regional Administration also [reported](#) that nearly all foreign students had been evacuated from Kharkiv, but he did not clarify their number. At the moment, it is unknown whether any number of foreign students still remain in the territories of active hostilities or in the temporarily occupied territories and whether they were able to evacuate.

Opportunities for students and researchers abroad

In March, the World Bank [allocated](#) UAH 100 million to allow for the payment of academic and social stipends to students.

Various countries are also offering academic programs, stipends and other opportunities for students and researchers. For instance, Baltic countries [have offered](#) students who have left Ukraine to study at universities in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. In Poland, Ukrainian students can also continue their studies, and Ukrainian professors can work at universities. A consortium of partners has also [created](#) the Ukrainian Global University project which aims to give Ukrainian students, researchers and professors an opportunity to join programs at foreign universities and institutions.

The MES has also [launched a Telegram bot](#) with relevant opportunities for researchers at universities and institutions abroad. Elsevier [has given](#) free access to the electronic platforms [ClinicalKey, Complete Anatomy and Osmosis](#) for Ukrainian medical workers. In addition, Ukrainian researchers now have [free access](#) to electronic resources available within the Research4Life project.

We ask you to support the approach of victory through donations to help [the Armed Forces of Ukraine](#) and [humanitarian initiatives](#).

[The donations](#) we are currently receiving for our work will be used to research and analyse the impact of the war on a civilian population. We thank those who made donations, the Prague Civil Society Centre, the International Renaissance Foundation and the Heinrich Böll Foundation in Ukraine, for their assistance.