

# Education of Ukrainian refugees abroad

(February 24 — June 20 2022)

**Autor:** Yuliia Nazarenko

[According to the UN](#), 1.8 million children have left Ukraine since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. The highest number of them, 1.1 million, have left for Poland, as well as for other countries neighboring Ukraine: Moldova, Romania, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary. At the moment, we do not have reliable data on how many students and educators have moved abroad. Minister of Education and Science Serhiy Shkarlet [says](#) that 672,000 secondary school students and 26,000 teachers have left the country due to the war. The number of college students who have left is still unknown.

The governments of countries receiving displaced people from Ukraine, among other support measures, have also offered them an opportunity to continue their studies at different levels of education. Ukrainian children are entitled to attend kindergartens and schools at their locations of temporary residence. In most European countries, secondary education is mandatory, so a significant fraction of Ukrainian students study both at local schools and remotely at Ukrainian schools at the same time. Foreign universities and institutions have started launching dedicated programs, providing stipends and other support to

Ukrainian students. However, there are a number of problems faced by students abroad: the language barrier, double workload, lack of technical equipment for studying, academic differences, etc.

This paper provides an overview of the situation with preschool, secondary and higher education for Ukrainian refugees abroad as well as the key problems faced by students. To write this brief, we used reports in Ukrainian and international media, materials by international organizations, statements by Ukrainian and foreign government representatives.

## ● Preschool education

European Union countries provide access to kindergartens for refugees from Ukraine free of charge at the location of their temporary residence. Children can attend both public/municipal and private kindergartens. For instance, in [Latvia](#), due to an insufficient number of vacancies in public kindergartens, Ukrainian children will be given an opportunity to attend private kindergartens whose fees will be covered by local governments. There are also cases when kindergartens were opened specifically for Ukrainian children abroad. Such a kindergarten was [opened](#) for the children of Ukrainian refugees in Plovdiv, Bulgaria.

## ● Secondary education

During their stay in the European Union, refugee children from Ukraine are entitled to free secondary education at their location of temporary residence (in both public and private schools). In most countries, secondary education is mandatory—therefore, all children of school age must attend schools.

There can be several options for organizing the education of Ukrainian children in schools abroad:

- 1) Studying together with local children. For instance, in [Poland](#), 90% of students study in the same classrooms as Polish children, and another 10% take preparatory courses.
- 2) Studying with refugees from different countries. In some countries, Ukrainian children are first [assigned](#) to adaptive or integrative classes where they can study with children who speak other languages. In these classes, they are taught the national language, introduced to the local

education system, provided mental health services, and their skills are assessed.

- 3) Children of different ages studying in the same group. In some countries, special classes are created for Ukrainians where students of different ages can study together, since there are not enough children to create same-age classes. For example, in the [Czech Republic](#), such classes can be created if a school has more than 15 children of different ages, and then they will be taught specific subjects from the Ukrainian school curriculum.

In addition, there are examples of self-organized Ukrainian schools abroad. For example, in the [Netherlands](#), a school has been organized for students in grades 5 through 11 which now teaches about 100 students. Another school for Ukrainian students has been [opened](#) in Bucharest on the premises of a Romanian college; this school plans to provide education to 200 children of different ages.

The Ministry of Education and Science (hereafter referred to as the MES) [has recommended](#) that Ukrainian students abroad continue their studies in Ukrainian schools remotely. They can continue their education at the schools where they studied before and which have resumed remote education or transfer to another Ukrainian secondary education institution. There is also an opportunity to [study](#) remotely not only at public Ukrainian schools but also at private schools free of charge. In addition, it is possible to enroll children in the International Ukrainian School (a public international remote learning school which allows a student to obtain primary, basic and complete secondary education remotely) based on an individual form of studies. Even though explanations have been provided on how to study remotely from abroad, the MES currently does not publicly consider as a problem the double workload which students have to deal with due to studying both in schools abroad and in Ukrainian schools at the same time.

At the moment, the exact number of students who studied remotely until the end of the academic year 2021/2022 is unknown. In late May, Minister of Education and Science Serhiy Shkarlet [stated](#) that 672,000 Ukrainian secondary school students had left the country. The governments of some countries also publicly report how many students from Ukraine attend local schools. For example, about 200,000 Ukrainian children study in [Poland](#). However, there is a lack of information at the moment regarding the number of children who join remote classes from abroad. In May, the Minister of

Education also reported that 3.6 million students returned to their classes, but he did not clarify whether this number included the students who are now abroad. In late May, the Head of the Verkhovna Rada Committee for Education [stated](#) that 80% of Ukrainian children who had left the country were studying remotely in Ukrainian schools. There are also some reports on the data for specific regions. For instance, back in late March, the Head of the Department of Education of the Zakarpattia Regional Military Administration [reported](#) that 18,000 children were participating in remote classes from abroad.

The MES announced back in March 2022 that high school diplomas would be given to all students regardless of whether they were in Ukraine or abroad, and all their grades would be registered. According to [recommendations](#), evaluation must take into account the grades received by students regardless of their location, including grades from schools at their location of temporary residence. Students in grades 9 and 11 who are currently abroad can receive their diplomas in several ways. Documents about basic and general secondary education can be [obtained](#) at Ukraine's diplomatic offices abroad in the host country after applying for them beforehand. Students enrolled in the International Ukrainian School can receive their diplomas there.

A number of countries (such as Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic) also work with the Ukrainian MES and encourage Ukrainian students to study remotely at Ukrainian schools. Warsaw [has opened](#) dedicated remote learning classrooms within the Ukrainian remote learning system for students in grades 9–11.

In Italy, the local MES [has encouraged](#) Ukrainian language classes for children from Ukraine; in Germany, the Minister of Education [has emphasized](#) the importance of preserving the Ukrainian identity during assimilation into the local education system. In some countries, such as [Lithuania](#), students can choose Ukrainian as a second language. In [Latvia](#), half of the teaching in grades 1 through 6 is conducted in the languages of national minorities (Ukrainian in this case), and the other half in Latvian. In [Bulgaria](#), a remote learning platform provides access to Ukrainian school textbooks for grades 1 through 11.

In addition, different countries have extracurricular Ukrainian schools or Ukrainian weekend schools (Saturday or Sunday schools) which enroll the children of Ukrainian refugees and teach them classes according to the Ukrainian curriculum. For example, Ukrainian extracurricular schools in [Greece](#) teach classes three times per week.

Many countries where Ukrainian students had to move to organize integration measures, particularly local language classes. These can be specially organized language courses, beginner language classes or language camps. For example, the Irish Minister of Education [has announced](#) the preparation of a 2-week summer camp for children with additional needs which will provide English classes as well as reading and writing classes.

In order to facilitate the integration of Ukrainian schoolchildren, European education departments [provide](#) teachers with materials on how to overcome the language barrier, how to talk with children about war, and how to provide mental health support. In a number of countries, such as Poland, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Finland, Slovakia, Ukrainian teachers can be employed, but in some countries they have to pass certification. Teachers are also offered local language classes. In [Denmark](#), Ukrainian pedagogues are involved in the development and content of the curriculum. [According to](#) the Ukrainian Minister of Education and Science, the Ministry works with other ministries and an inter-parliamentary education group so that Ukrainian teachers abroad could teach children from Ukraine.

## ● Higher education

Young people abroad who graduated high school this year and plan to continue their education can do it both at Ukrainian universities and in the countries of their temporary residence. This year, instead of the External Independent Evaluation (EIE), Ukraine introduced the National Multi-subject Test (NMT) for enrollment into higher education institutions. Unlike the EIE, it is taken digitally at specially equipped centers rather than physically on paper. The test itself includes questions on three subjects: Ukrainian Language, Ukrainian History, and Mathematics—thus, all these subjects are passed on the same day.

The NMT can be taken both in Ukraine and abroad. [According to](#) the Ukrainian Minister of Education and Science, the NMT will be held in most EU countries according to the same principle as in Ukraine—that is, in dedicated computer centers, coordinated by Ukrainian-speaking teachers. For now, the NMT is [considered](#) only for the countries where the time difference is not significant. The plan is that 28,000 high school graduates [will take](#) the NMT abroad. At the moment, we know that the highest number of applications for the NMT abroad have been filed by Ukrainian graduates in Berlin, Munich and Warsaw.

After the beginning of the full-scale invasion, institutions and universities abroad started to create various opportunities for Ukrainian students and

scholars. They are offered to continue their education in western universities or to participate in various education programs. Some countries (such as [Poland](#) or Lithuania) also waive or postpone tuition and dormitory fees for Ukrainians. The governments of some countries (such as the Czech Republic or the US) allocate additional financial support for the needs of Ukrainian students and introduce stipends for Ukrainians. In some countries, there are specific programs that target students and PhD candidates from Ukraine, such as the [Solidarity with Ukraine](#) program which allows students to continue their studies in Poland.

In addition to continuing education and financial aid, a number of universities [assist](#) with student employment, provide accommodation and free meals, offer psychological and legal support. For scholars and professors from Ukraine, a number of institutions provide employment opportunities.

Some universities develop adaptive curricula in Ukrainian for refugees from Ukraine. For instance, Collegium Civitas in Warsaw [has developed](#) adapted Ukrainian-language curricula for first-year students. After completing the first year, they will continue their studies in Polish. Some [countries](#) offer classes to learn their national language.

Among the network of European universities, some try to [support](#) students, professors and scholars not only in the academic field, but also by organizing humanitarian aid. For example, the French [Université Paris Cité](#) offers mental health support to students who have already reached France and collects food, hygiene products, clothes and medicine to be sent to Ukraine. Humanitarian aid is also collected by the Jagiellonian University, Radboud University and others.

At the initiative of the Kyiv School of Economics, the Ukrainian Global University project [has been created](#) with the aim to provide Ukrainian students, scholars and professors with an opportunity to join programmes of foreign universities and institutions. The National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy has also [announced](#) the opening of its campuses in Europe and North America, where 500 students will be able to study every semester.

## ● Problems faced by Ukrainian students abroad

- **Language barrier.** Language in particular is one of the difficulties faced by students who continue their education abroad. For secondary school

students, teaching is conducted mostly in the local national language, which Ukrainian students did not learn at their schools. Meanwhile, college students may have an opportunity to study at English programs, but the language barrier may be an obstacle to their integration in the host country.

- **Double workload of Ukrainian students.** A significant share of Ukrainian schoolchildren who have moved abroad study at local schools, because secondary education is mandatory in most European countries; at the same time, they continue to study remotely at Ukrainian schools. One of the reasons for this is avoiding wider academic differences or problems with registering their grades. The double workload is a problem in any case, but this problem may get even worse if [classes](#) at both schools are held at the same time. The [website](#) of the Ukrainian Education Ombudsman also reports complaints from college students who are made to study at the same time in both Ukrainian and foreign universities.
- **Lack of the Ukrainian Studies component.** If children only study at a local school in the country of their stay, they may not study the Ukrainian language, literature, history, law, etc., and they may lose the time they could use to study these subjects. One of the solutions that are partially applied is the opportunity to study them asynchronously, by receiving materials for independent learning from teachers, but this is less effective than proper classes.
- **Possible lack of technical equipment for studying.** Ukrainian students [may](#) not have the required technical equipment for studying, which will make it more difficult for them to participate in both Ukrainian remote learning and in their studies abroad.
- **Academic difference.** Curricula and education standards [may](#) differ in Ukraine and in students' host countries. For example, some European countries have 12-year schools, while Ukraine still has an 11-year curriculum. This will affect the difficulty of learning for students.
- **Lack of knowledge and resources among teachers abroad.** European countries have varying experiences in integrating refugees into the education system. The countries which have received the highest number of Ukrainian refugee children may face problems with providing a sufficient number of teachers. In addition, not all teachers may be familiar with the methods of teaching children who speak

different languages. Even though some countries are developing curricula and study materials for integration, this is not happening everywhere.

- **Inviting Russians to programs open for Ukrainians.** Even though many institutions and universities provide stipends and open programs for Ukrainians leaving Ukraine because of the war, these programs or stipends are also being opened for Russians. While trying to support students and scholars from Ukraine, foreign institutions [provide an option](#) for Russians to use identical opportunities, justifying this by saying that not all Russians bear responsibility for the war in Ukraine. This contradicts the declared goals and is not ethical, because each place given to representatives of Russia could have been given to someone from Ukraine who is in a more vulnerable situation. In addition, the presence of people from Russia negatively affects the mental and physical safety of Ukrainians.

## ● Recommendations

In all likelihood, some families will not return to Ukraine before the beginning of the academic year 2022/2023, and many people will continue their education at kindergartens, schools and universities abroad. At the same time, those who return may have special educational needs. The responsible government bodies should prepare for this during the time that remains until the beginning of studies. We recommend considering the following measures.

- Collect data on the number of students who will continue their education abroad in the new academic year. To do this, the MES can coordinate its efforts with Ukrainian education institutions which can survey parents regarding their plans, and with the governments of countries which receive refugees which can provide data on the number of those who need to continue their education.
- Ensure the teaching of the Ukrainian language, literature, history, and society for those who study abroad. It is important that these classes are not in conflict with offline classes in host countries. Possible solutions include online courses, remote evening schools or weekend schools. In addition, Ukrainian teachers abroad can be involved to teach in Ukrainian and according to Ukrainian standards.
- Conduct an assessment of education losses and academic differences.



- Provide compensatory classes to those who will resume their education in Ukraine. In case of a lack of resources, it is worth considering fundraising from various sources, particularly by applying to international and charity organizations which collect donations in support of Ukrainians who have suffered from Russian aggression.
- Work to minimize the problem of double workloads for Ukrainian students in the new academic year by coordinating with other countries in terms of organizing classes, recording grades, involving Ukrainian teachers abroad.
- Improve and simplify the international academic mobility opportunities for students and professors to avoid double workloads and create opportunities for maintaining a connection with Ukraine and the Ukrainian education system for Ukrainian refugees abroad.
- Stimulate and encourage the creation of joint programs by Ukrainian and foreign higher education institutions.
- Develop an action plan to reduce the risks associated with a possible increase in academic migration from Ukraine in the context of the long-term strategy for bringing refugees back.

Take steps to continue the systemic education reform which has slowed down significantly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, war, and lack of political will.

*This text is written in participation with Tetiana Zheriobkina and Iryna Kohut.*

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.