

Education System Resilience in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia: Policies and Practices

Analysis report

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Acronyms

EU – European Union

GDP – gross domestic product

GPE KIX – Global Partnership for Education Knowledge and Innovation Exchange

HEI – higher education institution

ICT – information and communication technology

IDRC – International Development Research Centre

IT – information technology

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PISA – Programme for International Student Assessment

SABER – Systems Approach for Better Education Results (World Bank)

STEM – science, technology, engineering, and mathematics

UN – United Nations

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNICEF – United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund

USAID – United States Agency for International Development

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

● Part 1
Introduction

Education system resilience is a relatively new concept and is more familiar and widespread in the international development discourse. The concept became particularly common following the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected all spheres of life—including education—and forced governments to respond to the threat to students' health and lives while ensuring the continuity of learning. Although the concept of resilience is not well established or widely used at the individual country level, its use as an approach to education systems can help anticipate and address various types of threats, in addition to supporting more stable development. As part of the “Observatory on Education System Resilience” initiative of the Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX), which is implemented with the support of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), the Cedos Think Tank hosts one of six observatories working on examining the meanings and practices of education system resilience and potential future disruptions to education systems in the countries of its region. Each observatory represents a specific region whose countries are GPE partners.

The Cedos team works with a region that brings together countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, namely Albania, Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Mongolia. The conditions in which these countries' education systems operate are influenced by the consequences of war (Ukraine, Georgia), natural disasters (Mongolia, Albania), the COVID-19 pandemic, political and economic crises, and changes in population structure and size, among other things. Therefore, ensuring access to quality education in these contexts critically depends on building education systems capable of responding and adapting to challenges, including shocks and disruptions, in a timely manner. In addition, education systems in these countries need professionals who possess necessary knowledge and skills to respond to crises and remain resilient in the face of change.

Despite the significant diversity of education systems across these countries, what they do have in common are the influence of the Soviet model on the current educational system and the challenge of building modern, inclusive, and resilient education systems in a context of limited resources. At the same time, depending on their specific circumstances and priorities, the countries have different understandings of education system resilience and consequently implement

different policies and practices. For example, in the Central Asian countries, one of the key challenges is ensuring access to education for a growing school-age population, while other countries—such as Ukraine and Albania—have to cope with a declining youth population and emigration. Efforts to bolster education resilience are also influenced by the geographic locations and climate conditions of these countries. For example, the Central Asian countries and Albania are located in active seismic zones, while for other countries natural disasters may have a lower priority within the risk system.

In the first section of this report, we analyze the understanding and use of the concept of resilience in the context of education systems in the countries of focus. The next section focuses on the review of policies and practices relevant to resilience in the education sector. This section is structured around the five components of the education system resilience framework used in the study: strengthening, anticipation, planning, response and recovery, and preventing and mitigation (Cameron et al., 2024).

1.1. Methodology Overview

This report is the first one within the project “Enhancing Education Resilience in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia through Knowledge and Evidence Dissemination.” It presents the findings of an exploratory desktop review, focusing on **how the countries in the region of focus understand the concept of education system resilience and how it is reflected in their policies and practices.**

In this project, we use the concept of resilience in accordance with the framework proposed by GPE KIX (Cameron et al., 2024).¹ In this report, we aimed to describe the specific features of each country and examine how they understand and practice education system resilience in line with the chosen framework. Rethinking the concept and making recommendations, however, will be the tasks of subsequent project deliverables. To identify and describe how education system resilience is understood and practiced, we conducted a

¹ Further information on the concept of education system resilience and its components is presented in Section 1.3.

document review. For this purpose, we selected several types of documents:

- official government documents, including national strategies, education system development strategies, reports on the current state of the education system, press releases of administrative bodies;
- documents published by international education organizations and other stakeholders in the education sector, including recommendations of international partners, monitoring reports;
- academic papers, including research and analytical articles;
- journalistic documents, including news articles, education blogs, websites of education organizations.

For the analysis, we selected relevant documents that had been published within the past ten years (2015 or later). The primary sources of information were publicly available documents that were translated into English. Relevant documents that were only available in the languages of individual countries were translated by the research team using online tools.

The report was prepared in several stages. First, the research team selected relevant documents for each country in the region of focus. The next step entailed organizing the collected data in accordance with the GPE KIX framework to identify the specific features of each country's education system and compare them with the components of the framework. At this stage, we paid attention to identifying references and approaches to defining the concept of resilience, as well as policies and practices aimed at developing the education system, including its resilience. The final stage involved synthesizing the country-level information, identifying similarities and differences, and drafting the research report.

Some of the most significant challenges faced by the research team in the study were the language barrier and the lack of direct access to relevant information in some countries. As a result, some materials that might have been relevant to the study were not included, such as documents of individual education institutions (e.g., curricula, school development strategies), as well as information on certain cases that had an impact on a given country's education system (e.g., information on the successful integration of innovative teaching methods, examples of effective or ineffective crisis management).

This report is exploratory in nature and aims to increase awareness of policies and practices related to resilience in the countries of focus. The research team used the GPE KIX resilience framework to structure the review and support analytical arguments regarding regional trends based on the policies and practices of individual countries. It should be noted, however, that not every example analyzed at this stage of our research has been included in the report. Therefore, the absence of an example in the report on a given country does not necessarily indicate a lack of such policies and practices in that country. Similarly, the report does not provide a comparative assessment of the countries or evaluate the effectiveness of their policies and practices related to education system resilience.

There are certain limitations to conducting desktop research. Analysis of secondary data, official documents, and research reports can serve as the basis for providing an overview of the topic in focus; however, this information does not always fully reflect reality. For example, some of the intentions discussed in strategic documents may not be implemented or only partially implemented, while research reports and secondary data are sometimes fragmented or do not reflect important details or explanations relevant to the studied topic. Lastly, not all documents are publicly available or have been translated into English, which was the main language in which the desktop research was conducted.

1.2 Regional Profiles

● Geographic Characteristics

Geographical features and climate conditions have a significant influence on the development of the countries in the studied regions and shape the specific nature of the challenges they face. The countries of focus are located in different parts of Europe and Asia: Albania in the Western Balkans; Ukraine and Moldova in Eastern Europe; Georgia in the South Caucasus; and Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Mongolia in Central Asia (World Bank, n.d.). The size of their respective territories varies greatly, from 28,700 km² in Albania to 1.5

million km² in Mongolia. The terrain of the region is also quite diverse. For example, in Tajikistan, more than 90% of the territory is mountainous, which translates into difficult conditions for organizing transport connections and developing infrastructure. In contrast, Moldova and Ukraine are characterized by predominantly flat landscapes, which provide more favourable conditions for logistics and for the development of transportation and social infrastructure in populated areas.

● Climate Conditions

Some countries are located in a temperate climate while others experience extreme temperatures in winter or summer. For example, in Mongolia, harsh climate conditions have a significant impact on people's lives, particularly the frequent and extremely severe winters characterized by intense cold spells and heavy snow cover (known as "dzuds"), which hinder population mobility (WENR, 2022). The Central Asian countries are prone to droughts due to rising temperatures as a result of climate change. Depletion of water resources, soil erosion, and soil compaction reduce crop yields, affecting the development of countries whose economies are heavily dependent on agriculture (Eurasian Research, n.d.).

Natural disasters are another factor that impacts the countries. As a result of climate change, these countries have been experiencing record levels of precipitation, which can trigger river or groundwater flooding and landslides. In 2020, a week of torrential rains led to the failure of the Sardoba Dam in Uzbekistan; this was one of the largest climate-related accidents to have ever occurred in the region (Abdukaxorov, 2025). Kyrgyzstan is also confronted with risks of annual flooding and landslides caused by heavy precipitation and glacial melt. Due to their location in active seismic zones, Albania and Tajikistan regularly experience earthquakes that affect infrastructure and population safety (Global Earthquake Model Foundation, n.d.).

● Geopolitical Context

For many years, the countries studied were either part of or under the influence of the USSR. Following its collapse, these countries have been in a state of economic and political transformation. In addition to the challenges directly linked to this transformation, issues of national security remain significant in the region. In this context, Russia's post-colonial policies toward the countries are particularly relevant, manifesting in various forms—from the use of cultural and economic influence to armed aggression.

In August 2008, Russia invaded Georgian territory, occupying South Ossetia and Abkhazia. As a result, part of the local population became forcibly displaced, and civilian infrastructure—including schools—suffered significant damages because of Russian bombing campaigns (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2009). In Moldova, part of the country's territory, Transnistria, is also under occupation by military and political forces propped up by Russia (Kieff, 2024). In 2025, Russia attempted to influence Moldova's parliamentary elections (Harward, 2025; Popescu-Zamfir, 2025). In 2014, Russia launched a war in Ukraine, followed by a full-scale invasion in 2022. This has led to thousands of Ukrainian casualties, including children; mass forced displacement within the country and abroad; damage and destruction of buildings, including educational institutions; the occupation of large swaths of Ukraine's territory, where Ukrainians face persecution and the imposition of the Russian language and Russian curricula in schools.

The Central Asian countries maintain close economic, political, and cultural ties with Russia, which the latter leverages to maintain its influence in the region. In particular, this is manifested in the spread of the Russian language, which Russia uses to wield political influence over the countries. Even though the number of native Russian speakers has been declining in recent years, the language is still widely used, including for communication with people from neighbouring countries (Bekmurzaev, 2019). The Russian language is used by government bodies and education institutions and is present in other spheres of public life. In some countries (e.g., Kyrgyzstan), Russian has the status of the second official language. Additionally, the Russian media is widely present in the region and is used by Russia to spread its narratives. In Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, 50% of the population read Russian

press at least occasionally, and Russian-language publications are widely available (Beishalieva, 2024).

Security instability in the region also manifests itself in the form of local conflicts between countries. For example, over the past seven years, there have been more than 20 border clashes between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, as the border remains disputed following the failure to fully demarcate it after the two countries gained independence in 1991. As a result of the 2022 conflict, educational institutions in both countries suffered damage and destruction (Sultanalieva, 2024; Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, n.d.).

● Demographic Trends

The demographic structure in the countries of focus is characterized by a high proportion of rural population and large-scale migration processes, including labour migration. Specifically, the rural population accounts for roughly 63% of Kyrgyzstan's total population, approximately 68% in Mongolia, and more than 74% in Tajikistan (World Bank, 2024). At the same time, the large rural population is accompanied by low population density, scattered communities, and limited access to infrastructure and services.

High levels of domestic and international migration are one of the defining characteristics of the region. The steady exodus of young workers in search of employment leads to the emergence of “children of labour migrants,” who go long periods without any communication with their parents (UNICEF Tajikistan, n.d.). Furthermore, migration also contributes to depopulation and population aging. Ukraine stands out for the scale of forced displacement caused by the full-scale war: millions of people have moved within the country or gone abroad, which has significantly altered the demographic makeup of the population and its geographic distribution (SE Information and Computing Center of the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity of Ukraine, 2025).

In some countries, early and child marriage is also observed, which can result in the exclusion of girls from the education process. In Georgia, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan, respectively, approximately 12%, 13%, and 14% of girls get married before the age of 18 (UNICEF Data, n.d.).

● Shared Trends and Challenges in Education Systems

One shared challenge of the education systems in the studied countries is a **lack of funding and qualified teaching personnel**. Some countries allocate up to 5% of their GDP to education (World Bank, 2020), while capital expenditures for school maintenance remain quite low. One of the consequences of limited education funding is a shortage of qualified teachers. Military conflicts and economic crises further exacerbate the problem by limiting professional development opportunities for teachers and decent salaries for their work.

As a result of insufficient funding, educational institutions in some countries are inadequately equipped with material and technical resources and have a low level of digital technology use. In some countries, there are also problems with the sanitary conditions of school facilities—for example, limited hot water supply, hygiene and laundering issues, leaking roofs, mould, classroom shortages, power outages, and a lack of emergency equipment, among other issues (UNICEF Mongolia, 2024).

Unequal access to education is one of the most widespread issues in the countries. This challenge affects many students and stems from a variety of factors, one of which is socioeconomic inequality. Poverty creates barriers to ensuring continual access to quality education. Students from less well-off families have poorer access to distance learning and digital resources; students from these families also demonstrate lower PISA results than their peers from higher-income families (Albanian Coalition for Education, 2018).

Another related issue is the difference in education quality between urban and rural areas. Students in rural schools have less access to quality education, partly due to unfavourable learning conditions and a shortage of qualified teachers. In the Central Asian countries, the urban-rural gap is more pronounced because rural villages and towns are located in remote and sometimes mountainous regions. For example, for nomadic families in Mongolia, commutes to school can reach 6 to 15 km or even more in the most remote areas (UNESCO, 2020).

In the studied countries, children who require adapted learning due to health or other reasons, as well as children

from ethnic minority groups, face limited access to education due to a lack of infrastructure, inclusive approaches, and quality learning materials (Slobodov, 2022). State programs often do not count for complex situations in which a child simultaneously experiences multiple challenges. Such oversight can increase the likelihood of a child dropping out of school prematurely.

Domestic and international migration also has an impact on students' access to education. Students whose parents have moved abroad or to other parts of the country in search of work are often left without proper supervision, attend school less regularly, and lack support in their studies. As a result, children of labour migrants are more likely to abandon their studies, lose interest or have poorer academic performance.

Migration processes in the region have also been affected by Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine. In Ukraine, forced displacement due to the war has caused psychological distress in students, affecting their motivation and ability to adapt to new social environments. These challenges have affected both children whose families moved within the country and those who resettled abroad. Ukrainians have also relocated to the other countries covered in this study. In some cases, this has had an impact on these countries' education systems by increasing the number of students who need to be integrated into local schools.

Commonalities among the studied countries include a high degree of inequality, especially between urban and rural areas, as well as challenges faced by individuals from vulnerable social groups. Labour migration in Central Asia, as well as forced displacement driven by Russia's war against Ukraine, have given rise to social and demographic challenges, including the separation of children from their families and limited access to quality educational services. The region's main challenges remain demographic changes, natural and climate risks, uneven infrastructure development, and the limited availability of resources in remote areas.

1.3 Education System Resilience: Definition and Use of the Term

There are several approaches to defining education system resilience. One example is the EDURES tool developed by the Council of Europe to ensure the right and access to quality, inclusive education. This tool is designed in accordance with the concept of resilience and is comprised of six principles: strengthening governance, ensuring continuity of the educational process, expanding the role of education, increasing accessibility, fostering cooperation, and increasing effectiveness (EDURES Platform, n.d.). The World Bank's SABER program focuses on collecting and analyzing information on education systems worldwide to identify initiatives and strategies that have the greatest impact on advancing education for children and youth. It defines resilience as the ability of people, communities, and the institutions that serve them to adapt, recover, and thrive during or after a crisis. It views an educational system as a means to protect children and youth, reduce the risks of hardship, and help them achieve future success (World Bank, 2016). The Asian Development Bank Institute defines resilience as the capacity to adapt to crises and shocks, analyze the needs of the education system's beneficiaries (namely students and teachers), and continually develop (King & Suryadarma, Eds., 2025).

Resilience can also be understood from a psychological perspective, where it is viewed as the process or capacity of individuals to adapt in times of crisis. In this approach, resilience is not fixed; rather, it can be strengthened or weakened depending on a range of influencing factors (Xenofontos & Mouroutsou, 2023).

In this report, we follow GPE KIX's education system resilience framework. According to it, education system resilience is the 'the capacity of an education system to absorb, resist, and adapt to disturbances while ensuring the continuity of its vital functions' (Cameron et al., 2024, p.4). Resilience can be considered through the following components: strengthening, anticipation, planning, response and recovery, and prevention and mitigation. Each of these components is presented below.

Strengthening component encompasses initiatives, efforts, and reforms aimed at enhancing the state of the education system—for example, teacher professional development,

curriculum updates, and the development of more modern learning materials and textbooks, among others. The **anticipation** component includes measures aimed to identify future threats to the education system: risk analysis, assessment of existing threats, and the study of national and international trends in education and security. Under the **planning** component, policies aiming to develop the education system (e.g., national strategies for specific periods, plans for funding allocation and international cooperation) are crafted, as are measures to identify and develop ways to counter existing and future risks that could affect the education system. **Response and recovery** refer to measures taken by countries in times of crisis to mitigate negative impacts on the education system, such as developing protocols for natural disasters and measures to ensure continuity of learning during national or global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, war, and armed conflicts. **Prevention and mitigation** entail strategies that aim to mitigate crises and problems and their negative impact on the education system, for example, by eliminating gender inequality, introducing inclusive education, and promoting climate education, among other measures (Cameron et al., 2024).

The term “education system resilience” **is not widely used in the countries of focus**. Rather—and without clearly referencing the education system per se—the term “resilience” appears in the **national development strategies of countries**—for example, national strategies, reports on the effectiveness of particular reforms and initiatives, and recommendations made by international organizations, among others. For example, in Mongolia, resilience is mentioned in the document “Towards Mongolia’s Long-term Development Policy Vision 2050” in the context of the comprehensive development of the nation, as well as in relation to countering and responding to natural disasters and severe winters (Government of Mongolia, 2020).

A closely related concept is that of *stiiikist* [translator’s note: Ukrainian for “resilience, robustness, stability, endurance”; a somewhat broader term than resilience], which is more familiar and widespread in some countries. For example, in 2021, as Ukraine was preparing for a possible full-scale invasion by Russia, the so-called concept for ensuring national resilience was adopted by Presidential Decree. It refers to *stiiikist* in different ways. One of these is **national stability**, defined as the “ability of the state and society to effectively counter threats of any origin and nature, adapt to changes in the security environment, function continuously, and quickly

recover after crises to the desired equilibrium” (Decree of the President of Ukraine, 2021). Another is **organizational stability**, defined as “the ability of state government bodies, local self-government bodies, enterprises, institutions, and organizations to identify, prepare for, and respond to threats, adapt to changes in the security environment, and maintain stable operations before, during, and after a crisis situation in order to continue functioning and ensure further development” (Decree of the President of Ukraine, 2021). Subsequently added to these definitions in the Demographic Development Strategy of Ukraine (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2024) was the concept of demographic stability, with high-quality education being identified as one of the key factors for achieving such stability.

The use of the term “resilience” is more common among **international organizations** involved in supporting the development of national education systems, particularly in the context of providing assistance for drafting or revising national education documents. The term appears in international conference reports, consultations and recommendations pertaining to education system development, monitoring and analysis reports, reports on the effectiveness of education reforms and initiatives, international support, and cooperation with other countries, among others. For example, in Mongolia, the concept of resilience is mentioned in analysis reports prepared by international partners (World Bank, 2020; UNESCO, 2020) and in reports on international support projects for the country (UNESCO, 2025).

In the studied countries, the term “resilience” is sometimes used to refer only to selected components of education system resilience, rather than all components as in the GPE KIX framework. For example, the term can be encountered in the **context of crisis management** and in the descriptions of challenges and problems that threaten the education system. For instance, in a UNICEF report on European and Central Asian experiences with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, education system resilience was considered as the ability to ensure equal access to quality learning—both in-person and remote—for all students in times of crisis, as well as the importance of increasing adaptability and digital transformation (Shamatov, Tajik, Karakus, & Mukhamejanova, 2024). In a study of the impact of the pandemic on Kyrgyzstan’s education system based on USAID and OECD sources, a conceptual framework of resilience was proposed encompassing three phases: preparedness, response, and

recovery. These phases represent an approach to planning and managing changes in education during times of crisis, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (Nietschke, Dabrowski, Conway, & Pradhika, 2022). According to the GPE KIX framework, such use of the term “resilience” aligns more closely with the response and recovery component.

In Ukraine, following the start of the full-scale war, the concept of resilience was incorporated into the “Strategic Action Plan of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine by 2027: Education of Winners” (2024). The document presents a **definition of resilience at the individual level** as a skill set that students are expected to acquire in the course of their education and understood as “learning for life, [...], acquisition of key competencies and cross-cutting skills essential for future professional success in various life spheres, resilience.”

The full-scale war launched by Russia against Ukraine has also influenced how resilience is defined in other countries. This is especially the case in those countries that have received a large number of displaced persons from Ukraine. For example, in Moldova, the concept of education system resilience in the context of accommodating displaced persons from Ukraine is understood as the ability to act and provide quality educational services to all students during crises and emergencies that impact the entire country simultaneously (United Nations Moldova, 2020; World Bank, 2023), as well as the capacity to quickly adapt to new conditions with minimal losses (Rajasekaran & Casap, 2022).

In some cases, the concept of resilience is applied to specific components of the education system rather than being used in the broader, system-wide sense proposed by the GPE KIX framework. This is due to the **presence of pressing individual challenges in each country**. For example, in Uzbekistan, one such challenge is the education system’s lack of preparedness for rapid population growth. Accordingly, the National Program for the Development of School Education in 2022–2026 (2022) focuses on increasing the number of children who have access to education and calls for the construction of new educational facilities and the renovation and modernization of existing schools, among other things. Thus, the use of the term “resilience” in relation to a single issue or area—rather than the education system as a whole—can be explained, in part, by the prioritization of more urgent issues.

As the above shows, in national strategic documents and international reports, the term “resilience” is more likely to be used in reference to nationwide strategies and crisis management measures. In more specific references to the education system, **synonymous concepts are more commonly used**, such as effectiveness, stability, adaptability, relevance, modernization, quality enhancement, or sustainability of the education system. In some cases, education strategies **use terms that**, according to the GPE KIX framework, **represent one of the components of education system resilience**—for example, education system strengthening, threat prevention or damage mitigation—as well as synonymous concepts of these terms such as education system strategic planning or support.

● Part 2
Components
of Resilience

2.1 Strengthening

As one of the components of education system resilience, **strengthening** involves measures aimed at addressing existing problems and gaps in order to build a high-quality system that is resilient to risks (Cameron et al., 2024). More specifically, this concerns those elements of the system that are the most vulnerable to various threats, are influenced by social, economic, and political factors, or are currently undergoing reform.

In this section, we describe education system policies and practices in the countries of focus that are aimed at reducing or overcoming such challenges as low education quality; outdated curricula and educational programs; unequal access to education; insufficient information and communication technology infrastructure; weaknesses in education system management (**improving administration, funding, and management**); and ineffective management of educational institutions at the national and local levels.

Strengthening education systems in the studied countries is occurring primarily in response to challenges that are common across most of them. Because many of these issues are interconnected, a large number of initiatives are **designed to address several problems simultaneously**. Initiatives and measures for strengthening education resilience can be categorized **by their scale**: (1) targeted initiatives implemented at the local level; (2) those applied to a limited number of schools and communities, including those that stakeholders plan to expand to other territories and schools in the future; and (3) nationwide projects, including those that are often implemented with the support of international partners. Separately, there are also **initiatives aimed at assessing** the scale of existing problems, the quality of education, or the implementation of education reforms, as well as efforts focused on the reforms themselves, including the development of regulations and strategic documents.

In the countries studied, considerable attention is devoted to the issue of **unequal access to education**, particularly among children living in rural areas and children from low-income families. Some measures also aim to address disparities in education access between girls or boys, for children with

disabilities, for those who have dropped out of schooling, and for children belonging to ethnic minority groups.²

For example, to address the **problem of long school commutes**, countries are developing school networks and introducing transport solutions. In **Mongolia**, UNICEF, together with the Ministry of Education and other partners, launched the pilot initiative “One Bagh, One School,” under the state program “Good School Near Me”, which plans to establish schools in the most remote settlements (*baghs*) so that children do not have to live in dormitories far from their families while attending school (Kouassi-Komlan, 2024). In **Albania**, to ensure that students in rural areas are able to attend schools outside their own village, approximately USD 11.4 million³ was earmarked in 2022 for transportation, covering around 35,000 students and 12,000 teachers (This, 2022).

Countries also strengthen their education systems through **enhancements to educational infrastructure**—for example, renovating school building and providing the necessary material and technical resources, such as classroom equipment, Internet access, and computers. In **Moldova**, the Ministry of Education launched a national initiative in 2024 to establish a Network of Model Schools, providing funds for major renovations and outfitting of 25 schools, with a focus on expanding access to quality education for students in vulnerable situations or living in rural areas. The project also aims to overcome inequalities in learning outcomes between students from rural and urban areas by transforming these schools into educational centres that will attract students from different social groups and those from less well-resourced institutions (Ciobanu et al., 2024).

Additional measures are being taken by the countries to support ethnic groups that do not speak or have limited proficiency in the state language. For example, in **Georgia**, learning centres and mobile teams offer free Georgian language courses to members of other ethnic groups (Council of Europe, 2024). In **Albania**, the “EU Regional Action for Roma Education” project was launched in 2018, which aims to boost academic performance and employability amongst Roma high school students. Key objectives of this project include raising awareness of the value of education, keeping children in school

² More detailed discussion of education system resilience in the context of groups in vulnerable situations is provided in a separate report.

³ 950 million Albanian lek (at an exchange rate of approximately 1 ALL = 0.0121 USD as of September 2025).

and supporting their academic success, building bridges between secondary and higher education, as well as between school and the labour market so that graduates enjoy better employment opportunities (Roma Versitas Albania, 2018). Another set of measures aims to address gender inequality in education, in particular by supporting girls in fields such as STEM. In **Moldova**, a series of initiatives—many with the support of the private sector—have been implemented to support and educate girls and women in IT and STEM. The goals of these programs are to encourage girls to pursue STEM and ICT careers, create platforms for developing digital skills, foster collaboration with IT companies, and prepare participants for the labour market, while simultaneously challenging societal stereotypes (Rajasekaran & Casap, 2022).

The Government of **Uzbekistan**, in cooperation with the World Bank and the International Labour Organization (2021), conducted monitoring of the forced labour situation. As a result, in 2020, approximately 96% of those involved in cotton-picking were working on a free will basis, and the recruitment of students, teachers, and healthcare workers was no longer practiced. Independent monitoring confirmed that the 2021 harvest was carried out without systemic forced or child labour.

Countries are also addressing the issue of **insufficient education quality**, which is associated particularly with **issues in the learning environment** (e.g., insufficiently modernized ICT infrastructure), a **lack of high-quality learning materials, and students dropping out of school**. For example, to reduce the risk of students not completing school in **Tajikistan**, in 2024, the parliament adopted amendments to the country's law on education whereby it became compulsory to attend school through Grade 11 or be enrolled in a vocational technical school (Asia-Plus, 2024a). Subsequently, amendments were adopted to the country's Criminal Code that tightened criminal penalties for parents or guardians who obstruct a child's access to education (Asia-Plus, 2024).

Measures to create a common educational space also warrant mentioning in the context of education quality improvements. For example, in **Ukraine**, the 2017 Law on Education established that instruction must be conducted in the state language, which is Ukrainian. Prior to its adoption, there were 581 Russian-language schools representing nearly 6% of all

students.⁴ Under the new law, such schools were required to transition to Ukrainian as the language of instruction. Schools that taught in the languages of the country's ethnic minorities were required to switch to Ukrainian beginning in Grade 5. In the long term, these changes provide students with better opportunities for a more seamless integration, particularly when pursuing higher education. Overall, this was a measure aimed at the long-term institutional strengthening of the education system, as well as a response to the war with Russia that broke out in 2014.

There are also measures aimed at addressing the **shortage of teachers, especially qualified ones**, which has a direct impact on the quality of instruction. In parallel, some measures are designed to address **poor working conditions of teachers**, including low salaries, limited professional development opportunities, and the low quality of these opportunities. To address these issues, countries are updating their standards and qualification requirements for teachers, introducing certification and appraisal mechanisms, developing new professional development opportunities, and revising teacher remuneration structures.

In **Uzbekistan**, to improve the quality of instruction, teacher certification was introduced in 2022 and is expected to be conducted twice a year (Daryo, 2022). At the same time, in response to teacher shortages, since 2021, third-year students from pedagogical colleges have been allowed to teach in schools (previously, teaching was permitted only from the fourth year) (Uralova, 2022). In **Moldova**, a performance-based teacher remuneration system was introduced in 2018. In August 2023, the “Methodology for the Evaluation of Individual Performance of Teaching Staff in Primary and Secondary Institutions” was published to support schools and district-level education departments in implementing this pay scheme (OECD, 2023). In **Albania**, the National Program for the Professional Development of Teachers was introduced in 2024, as a result of which approximately 16,000 individuals will receive training in subjects such as the Albanian language, mathematics, science, and technological (digital) skills in an effort to improve teaching quality (Eurydice, 2025).

⁴ Information on languages of instruction and language study as a subject in full-time general secondary education institutions of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, other ministries and agencies, and private institutions (academic years 2015-2016 and 2016-2017).

In addition to unequal access to education, disparities in school conditions also pose a challenge. School infrastructure in poorer rural areas can differ significantly from that of urban schools, which can have an impact on student comfort levels during the learning process. In the countries of focus, there are initiatives aimed at **bolstering educational infrastructure** or **improving sanitary conditions in schools**. These initiatives vary considerably depending on the context. Some initiatives involve the construction of new schools, while others aimed to renovate old schools, ensure reliable water supply, and improve sanitary conditions, among others. In countries marked by a general trend of population growth (Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan), new schools are often built to prevent **overcrowding in existing facilities**. Since 2019, **Mongolia** has been implementing the project “Improving the Quality and Accessibility of Education During an Economic Downturn”, under which preschools and schools are being built and expanded, thereby providing new places for children as well as jobs for adults (Khankhuu, 2025). In 2024, **Kyrgyzstan** signed an agreement with the Eurasian Development Bank to fund the construction of nine new schools. The project included not only building the schools but also fully equipping them with material and technical resources; upon completion, all schools were expected to be transferred to the state free of charge (Trend News Agency, 2024). In **Uzbekistan**, in 2025, it was planned to build 100 new schools (expected to accommodate 257,000 students), especially in remote parts of the country with the aim of ensuring a more even distribution of schools nationwide (The Gulf Observer, 2024).

In **Ukraine**, one important wartime measure has been the creation of shelters in schools. In **Moldova**, a program for the renovation and construction of washroom facilities in schools was announced in 2023. Following a competition, 100 institutions were selected to receive full support to improve their water supply and sanitary conditions (UNICEF Moldova, 2023).

Additionally, in some countries, challenges related to education quality and the development of educational infrastructure are compounded by the limited availability and use of **information and communication technologies** (ICT). Quite often, rural and remote areas lack a stable power supply and Internet access, while the equipment available to students and teachers is outdated and does not allow them to acquire effective computer skills. To address the issue, countries are implementing measures to accelerate the **digitalization of**

education, for example, by creating platforms and online courses for remote learning, providing schools with Internet access, and supplying teachers and students with electronic devices. These initiatives often seek to **address problems related to unequal access to education**. Some of these initiatives were launched in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which served as a catalyst for a broader uptake of digital technologies in education. This is discussed in further detail in Section 2.4 (“Response and Recovery”). Some examples of digitalization initiatives include:

- In **Kyrgyzstan**, in 2022, local and international partners collaborated on a practical guide describing solutions for bringing Internet to schools in the country’s mountainous regions. The goal was to provide affordable and stable Internet not only for schools but also for communities, drawing on the experience of the government, international organizations, and the private sector (UNSDG, 2022). (UNSDG, 2022).
- In 2022, **Mongolia**’s Ministry of Education and Science established on the country’s MEDLE platform an online school featuring modern platforms and digital tools for students and teachers. The school provides equal opportunities for children who were previously limited in their choice of subjects due to a shortage of teachers or overcrowded classrooms. It also accommodates children who, due to health conditions or other reasons, require a modified approach to learning (OECD, 2023).
- In 2020, **Ukraine** launched the All-Ukrainian Online School, an official platform for online and hybrid learning. This platform offers video lessons, tests, and learning resources designed both for regular learning and remote learning during emergency situations (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2025).

The countries have also been implementing initiatives to improve the management of education systems, including **administration, financing, and governance**. Some of these initiatives aimed at addressing the **lack of research and monitoring in the education sector**. All countries have either participated in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) or planned to join it in 2025 (Tajikistan). Such assessments are critically important for monitoring students’ learning outcomes and obtaining reliable data for policy development and decision-making. Some countries have introduced systems for the registration, storage, and

protection of education data. In **Ukraine**, this is the Automated Information Complex for Educational Management (AICEM, or AIKOM in Ukrainian), an information-analytical system for education management and data collection, primarily focused on general-level education (Londar et al., 2024). In **Kyrgyzstan**, in 2019, international partners and the Ministry of Education and Science digitized and mapped data from 2,137 public schools, which helped identify which schools did or did not have Internet connectivity (Kumenova, 2019).

The issues described in this section often exacerbate each other's negative effects. For example, underdeveloped school infrastructure is worsened by a lack of effective administration, while unequal access to education is worsened by the economic and social disparities between rural and urban schools.

Despite a large number of common challenges across the region, countries also implement initiatives targeting issues specific to each of them. For example, Mongolia has adopted measures aimed at overcoming unequal access to education amongst children from nomadic or rural families, promoting digitalization as a tool to overcome long commutes, and bolstering the resilience of the education systems to harsh winters. In Moldova, measures have also been taken to strengthen resilience to climate risks and natural disasters. The country has also undertaken efforts to increase the capacity of schools to enrol larger numbers of children and support their integration, particularly in response to the arrival of forcibly displaced persons from Ukraine. In Tajikistan, efforts focus on increasing student participation in completing full secondary education. In Uzbekistan, initiatives are aimed at preventing early marriages and eliminating the involvement of students and teachers in forced labour. In Ukraine, strengthening education resilience is closely linked to the challenges of war and a shrinking population. Consequently, priority is given to infrastructure renewal, digitalization, and decentralized governance.

In the countries studied, education systems are being strengthened through a combination of various interventions, aimed at improving school infrastructure, human resources, and education administration. These measures, in their turn, aim to address a set of interconnected challenges, including unequal access to education, poor education quality, teacher shortages, limited administrative capacity, insufficient inclusion of socially vulnerable groups, weak

institutionalization of quality control monitoring, and limited digitalization. At the same time, national priorities are shaped by country-specific risks, such as war, demographic changes, climate threats, or historical context—which results in somewhat different trajectories for strengthening educational resilience across the countries.

2.2 Anticipation

According to the GPE KIX framework, the **anticipation** component refers to policies and practices aimed at identifying threats to education systems that might arise in the future. Possible approaches to risk anticipation include **analyzing a country's past experience** and **existing challenges**, whether universal or specific to that particular country (Cameron et al., 2024).

As part of the desktop review, we found that initiatives focused on anticipating threats are not widespread in the countries of focus. This can in part be explained by a lack of resources, as well as by the political and economic instability characterizing these countries (for further detail, see Section 1.2, “Regional Profiles”).

Risk anticipation measures **appear in risk reduction strategies or crisis-sensitive education planning strategies**; however, these references are more often found in general national policy documents rather than in specific education system development strategies. For example, objectives of the National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan for 2019–2030 include continuous monitoring of information on potentially hazardous situations and the implementation of a risk assessment system that focuses not only on tracking natural disasters but also on identifying groups of people that may be more vulnerable to the consequences of such disasters. These measures also include monitoring the state of infrastructure and the safety of educational institutions (Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2019). The National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy of Georgia for 2017–2020 focused on developing a culture of safety and ensuring the sustainable development of the education system. It intended to prepare the country's youth for the possibility of having to

deal with crises such as natural disasters and their potential consequences. This approach can be viewed as an investment in fostering a national culture of risk prevention (Government of Georgia, 2017).

Most of the approaches to threat anticipation identified during the desktop research were based on an analysis of the country's past experience. Since natural disasters and the destruction they cause have been among the most widespread threats faced by the countries, **many initiatives have focused on finding ways to anticipate natural disasters and prevent significant damage**. In Uzbekistan, in 2025, the functionality of weather stations installed in two schools in the mountain villages of Pskem and Tepar was verified, and training activities were organized in these schools to increase preparedness for potential natural disasters. The training program was available to teachers, students, and local residents (GLOFCA, 2025).

It is worth noting that the COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased attention to threat anticipation measures. In particular, in response to the challenges the pandemic posed for education systems and learning processes, some countries incorporated **continuous monitoring of global threats into their education system strategic planning**. For example, Moldova's "Education 2030" plan calls for early risk detection with an emphasis on using the goals of education system resilience (Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova, 2023).

In Ukraine, the need to introduce threat anticipation measures for the education system has become more acute after the start of the war. Throughout the country, armed fighting, forced migration, missile strikes, power outages, and other factors continue to complicate the learning process for young children and adolescents. The unpredictability of war and the nature of military operations make it difficult to develop crisis management and damage mitigation strategies. In order to promptly identify potential threats and develop response strategies, the Ukraine Education Cluster Strategy 2025 has launched ActivityInfo, an online portal for reporting on the current state of humanitarian projects, as well as for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of actions taken by specific organizations at the oblast, raion, and hromada levels,⁵

⁵ Translator's note: roughly equivalent to provincial, county and municipal levels in Canada.

with the option to submit reports for individual educational institutions (Ukraine Education Cluster et al., 2025).

Despite the increased attention to threat anticipation initiatives across the region, such measures are often **fragmented or still under development**. These efforts may include initiatives designed to test specific methodologies, collect data, and generate assumptions about future threats. For example, in Ukraine, Finn Church Aid, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science and with financial support from Education Cannot Wait, organized the forum “Digital Learning Centres: Experience, Challenges, Prospects.” As part of this forum, a community of invited experts developed a strategy and vision for digital learning centres and identified potential risks and threats (Finn Church Aid, 2025).

As the above shows, the countries studied tend to focus more on other components of the education system resilience such as strengthening, planning, and response and recovery. In contrast, measures specifically aimed at threat anticipation are less common. Given the limitations of desktop research (Section 1.1, “Methodology Overview”), this topic will be examined in greater detail in subsequent stages of the project, namely during interviews with education systems experts from the countries of focus.

2.3 Planning

Countries develop education system strategies and resilience-strengthening planning measures largely in response to the challenges described in Section 2.1 (“Strengthening”) and the threats presented in Section 2.2 (“Anticipation”). More often than not, countries’ future plans are outlined in documents such as their education sector strategies, national development strategies, and joint documents developed in partnership with international partners, including education-focused organizations (e.g., policy development recommendations, European integration and international cooperation strategies, and analytical reports assessing the state of the education system or its individual components).

When it comes to planning the future development of their education systems, common focus areas across the countries examined in the study include the following:

- improving the quality of learning;
- ensuring equal access to quality education for all student;
- providing teachers with professional development opportunities and training greater numbers of educators;
- improving the conditions of schools (ensuring adequate sanitary conditions, reliable heating, renovations, etc.);
- raising digital literacy levels of students and teachers and equipping schools with modern technical equipment;
- advancing climate education;
- cooperating with international education organizations to foster the resilience of the education system.

In the previous sections, we described the challenges faced by the countries following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Despite the efforts made to build out their education systems, the need to restructure educational processes slowed the overall development of the education sector. As a result, one of the persistent problems in the education systems is the low quality of education. In PISA and OECD assessments, the countries often demonstrate lower-than-average results compared to EU countries, as well as lower levels of digital literacy (with students from rural or remote areas being most affected). In response to this issue, one of the main focus areas for the countries has been the implementation of initiatives aimed at **improving the quality of education**. Some of these initiatives reflect a country's response to existing threats to education system resilience or are part of the long-term transformation of its educational processes—we discussed them in earlier sections.

One key component of planning related to improving education quality has been **curriculum updating and modernization**. This includes: 1) revising curriculum content to remove outdated information and material; 2) reviewing teaching methods and existing educational programs to optimize and simplify them in line with students' needs; and 3) introducing other measures aimed at improving the overall learning process.

- The National Program for the Development of School Education for 2022-2026 in Uzbekistan calls for the development of a new curriculum that integrates insights from work of international education experts and incorporates foreign educational materials such as textbooks (Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2022).
- In Moldova, the “Education 2030” strategy envisions the development of an educational program aimed at enabling each student to achieve their potential at their own pace, as well as at shaping their values (Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova, 2023).
- In Mongolia, the “Vision 2050” strategy seeks to raise the quality of education in primary and secondary schools and enhance teaching approaches that reflect Mongolian history, language, culture, national heritage, customs, patriotic values, personality development, bilingualism, and universal human values (World Bank, 2020).

Preparing textbooks in accordance with new curricula and **ensuring the accessibility of learning materials for all students** have been an important part of planning to improve education quality. Following the collapse of the USSR, the countries that had been part of it faced the need for large-scale replacement of learning materials, as a significant portion of school textbooks at the time were printed in Russian and did not cover the historical and cultural heritage of the individual countries. However, the timely printing and replacement of learning materials were hampered by the economic instability characteristic of these countries. Even today, the countries still face a shortage of textbooks, particularly those translated into the languages of ethnic minorities as well as educational materials designed to meet the needs of students with disabilities

In parallel to updating curricula and textbooks, the countries are striving to incorporate the principles of **climate awareness** into the educational process. Most often, this entails including climate change topics in the curricula at all levels of education (preschool, general education, and higher education). The integration of climate education into the curriculum also includes a value-based dimension, namely activities aimed at fostering awareness of environmental responsibility in everyday life as well as in professional and entrepreneurial

activities. Approaches to climate education are discussed in further detail in Section 2.5 (“Prevention and Mitigation”).

In the context of improving the quality of education, the countries have also been focusing on **enhancing its relevance to the labour market**. In particular, this meant providing students with knowledge that includes not only theoretical approaches but also the skills necessary for mastering future professions and following the principles of lifelong learning. In the education strategies of the countries studied, this idea is often considered from the perspective of human capital development.

- In Albania, the process of increasing the relevance of education is closely linked to the economic sector and the labour market. The country formerly faced a shortage of educated workers; however, the situation has been improving recently due to the gradual increase in the number of people attaining education (UNESCO, 2024). One of the goals of modernizing and reforming the education system has been to adapt the educational process to the requirements of Albania’s labour market (UNESCO, 2024).
- In the National Strategy for Education Development of the Republic of Tajikistan for the period until 2030, the school is viewed as the foundation of “human capital.” The education goals set out in the Strategy include not only the sharing of knowledge, but also the development of competencies, innovative thinking, and patriotic values (Global Partnership for Education, 2020).
- In Mongolia, the Education Sector Mid-Term Development Plan 2021-2030 aims to ensure the comprehensive development of citizens through high-quality, open, inclusive, and flexible educational services. Such services are expected to increase people’s capacity to live and work in the digital age, actively participate in a knowledge-based society, and engage in lifelong learning (Ministry of Education and Science of Mongolia, 2020).
- The 2022-2030 Unified National Strategy of Education and Science of Georgia considers quality education as one of the foundations of the country’s sustainable development (Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, 2022).

In addition to providing children and adolescents with the skills they need to later enter the labour market, education system development strategies also incorporate a **value-based dimension**. More specifically this involves fostering democratic values as well as principles of equality and tolerance among youth. For example, Moldova’s “Education 2030” strategy calls for all forms of education and learning tools to be used to promote democracy, human rights, a culture of peace, non-violence, and cultural diversity within educational institutions (Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova, 2023).

In Sections 2.1 and 2.2 (strengthening and anticipation, respectively), the insufficient number of teachers, as well as the shortage of qualified teachers, were mentioned as threats to education system resilience. Quality education requires a high standard of teaching; therefore, the strategies of the countries also focus on **enhancing the skills and competencies of teachers, as well as attracting new specialists to work in the education sector**. To achieve this goal, the countries have considered measures such as increasing teachers’ salaries, organizing professional development training and courses, introducing evaluation systems and teaching quality standards for educators, and merit-based bonus schemes.

- In Albania, measures were introduced to strengthen the resilience of education sector staff. This included the development of a fair management system that incorporates feedback from teachers, as well as professional development, performance evaluation, and career advancement initiatives (UNESCO, 2024).
- Uzbekistan’s National Program for the Development of School Education in 2022–2026 includes plans to raise the prestige of the teaching profession as well as to encourage educational staff to continuously improve their skill sets, and increase their engagement and responsibility in the educational process (Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2022).
- In Mongolia, the “Vision 2050” strategy foresees the development of teachers’ standards for all school levels based on the knowledge and skills required for a given subject area (professional knowledge, teaching methods, research skills, ICT, foreign languages, etc.). These standards are to be implemented in line with policies for the professional development of teachers (World Bank,

2020).

- The 2022-2030 Unified National Strategy of Education and Science of Georgia calls for attracting new specialists to the teaching profession while also aiming to promote leadership and career development opportunities in the education sector (Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, 2022).

The countries studied are also in the process of developing **comprehensive systems for monitoring education quality** in order to have comprehensive and up-to-date information on how educational processes are carried out and the impact of innovations on the education system.

- In Moldova, a national system for the management of educational programs will be developed by 2030 and will perform the functions of diagnostics, forecasting, conceptualization, design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and feedback (Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova, 2023).
- In 2025, tests in Uzbekistan had varying levels of difficulty depending on the school despite the fact that, according to international standards, the difficulty level of exams should be standardized. The Uzbekistan 2030 Strategy calls for steps to be taken to introduce a transparent grading system for students as one of the ways to address this issue (Government portal of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2024).
- In Albania, instructions for a new assessment system were approved in 2022. The final grade a student will receive will be determined by evaluating three indicators: continuous assessment, a test exam, and a final individual assignment. This approach is expected to have a positive impact on children's academic performance (UNESCO, 2024).

In Section 2.2 (“Anticipation”), in the context of threats to education systems, we mentioned the emigration of highly educated professionals. This is largely driven by economic instability, unemployment levels, and the insecurity associated with armed conflicts. Contributing factors also include limited educational opportunities and lower education quality.

Improving the **competitiveness of the education system** relative to other countries is one important aspect of planning efforts to strengthen education system resilience. The purpose of these measures is to enhance the prestige of educational

institutions and to provide opportunities for children and adolescents to receive a high-quality education that will be recognized both internationally and within their own country.

Improving conditions in schools is another important aspect of planning efforts of the countries studied. In previous sections, we highlighted the challenges of school infrastructure, particularly the poor condition of school buildings, long-term lack of repairs, and the non-compliance of some schools with sanitary standards due to insufficient water supply, heating, and other basic utilities. These problems are most often faced by schools located in remote or rural areas. Renovating and improving educational facilities often take considerable time due to the economic instability and strained budgets. Quite often, countries turn to international organizations for assistance in addressing these challenges.

- Tajikistan, together with UNICEF, developed a roadmap for improving the sanitary conditions in schools during 2022-2024 (Ministry of Health Services and Social Protection of the People of the Republic of Tajikistan et al., 2022).
- Objectives of Mongolia's "Vision 2050" strategy include: creating a conducive environment for children and youth in schools by upgrading dormitories, green development facilities, gyms and art studios, cafeterias, and IT classrooms in accordance with required standards; ensuring an accessible learning environment for students with disabilities; and ensuring safe water supply, toilets, and hygiene facilities in schools (World Bank, 2018).
- In Georgia, improving infrastructure in schools and research institutions (building renovations, technical equipment upgrades, acquisition of equipment for research programs) is part of the 2022-2030 Unified National Strategy of Education and Science of Georgia (Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, 2022).

The need to renovate educational facilities and improve learning conditions is closely linked to the country's capacity to finance its education system. For the countries under study, economic instability and budget constraints pose threats to the resilience of their education systems and represent an area requiring further strengthening. A significant factor in overcoming financial constraints is the **involvement of support from international organizations**. For example, Ukraine has limited capacity to allocate additional funds for the

education system not only due to the economic instability characteristic of post-Soviet countries but also because of the full-scale war Russia launched in 2022. Due to the war, the country has prioritized defence expenditures, with additional funds also required to rebuild civilian infrastructure damaged or destroyed by Russian attacks. Limited financing can have a negative impact on the learning process; as a result, the Ministry of Education of Ukraine, in partnership with UNICEF, has developed recommendations on organizing programs to address learning losses (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine & UNICEF, 2023). Additionally, Ukraine's education system receives support from international organizations, including the World Bank and UNICEF. In Kyrgyzstan, European integration is enshrined in bilateral agreements with the EU, notably in the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement signed in 2019 (European Union, 2018). In 2021, Kyrgyzstan and the EU selected joint priority areas of cooperation for the period 2021-2027, namely: governance and digitalization, human development, and a green and climate-resilient economy (Delegation of the European Union to the Kyrgyz Republic, 2021). These areas of cooperation are also referenced in the National Development Strategy through 2040 as part of a multi-pronged foreign policy.

In addition to nationwide solutions, the countries also seek to promote local initiatives. For example, the 2022-2030 Unified National Strategy of Education and Science of Georgia calls for granting educational institutions greater autonomy and cultivating the principles of self-governance and accountability. This approach aims to enhance the quality of school management and promote a more efficient distribution of resources at the local level (Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, 2022). Other measures and initiatives used by the countries to address similar issues were described in Section 2.1 ("Strengthening the System").

Education system development strategies include measures to **overcome educational inequality** and implement principles of inclusive education. Such efforts aimed to overcome gender and ethnic inequalities and ensure access to quality education for children with disabilities, children from low-income families, and children living in remote communities. The strategies also envisaged creating mechanisms to bring children who are currently outside the formal education system back to school—for example, those who are homeless, victims of human trafficking, those involved in illegal child labour, or those without legal documents.

- In 2022, the Government of Georgia launched an initiative aimed at identifying children who are outside the legal system (those without documents or who have never been part of the formal education system) and enrolling these children in schools (Jam News & Nikoladze, 2021).
- In Moldova, the “Education 2030” strategy aims to create learning opportunities for students and youth from different ethnic groups in the country’s economic and cultural space (Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova, 2023).
- An EU-supported project assisting the government of Kyrgyzstan in improving the education system for 2021-2027 stipulates that all new textbooks, education standards, curricula, and learning materials will be gender-sensitive. Specific objectives are set to improve access to inclusive public education for students with disabilities, as well as to train teachers and specialists in inclusive and gender-sensitive education (European Union; European Commission, n.d.).
- The Tajikistan National Strategy for Education Development 2021-2030 calls for equal access for girls, women, ethnic minorities, and children with disabilities, as well as the development of accessible infrastructure and special education materials (Global Partnership for Education, 2020).

All countries studied are working on reducing disparities in education access and having laws aimed at promoting gender equality, eliminating ethnic discrimination, protecting children’s rights, and upholding the principles of inclusive education. However, **educational inequality remains a significant challenge for them**. Existing reforms and initiatives are often fragmented and do not always address the systemic nature of educational inequality. This issue was discussed in detail in Section 2.1 (“Strengthening”).

Some strategies have emerged in response to the education system challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, there was an urgent need to **accelerate the digitalization of education while increasing digital literacy among students and teachers**. Some of the most important planning steps included ensuring Internet coverage throughout the country and procuring computers and other digital equipment for schools. Digitalization also entailed ensuring technological literacy amongst students and teachers.

- Under Moldova’s “Education 2030” strategy, it is planned that by 2030, 80% of the country’s education institutions will be equipped with hardware, software, and other information and communication technologies, and that all education sector staff would receive training to develop digital skills (Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova, 2023).
- In Albania, with the support of the Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education, training programs in information and communication technologies were developed for teachers. These trainings were completed by 1,200 teachers in 2020 and 800 teachers in 2021 (UNESCO, 2024).
- In 2021 in Tajikistan, under state programs for introducing ICT into the country’s general education institutions, a total of 76,732 computers, 11,962 printers, 1,130 scanners, 3,274 electronic whiteboards, and 4,359 projectors were provided. In 2022, the country approved the Concept for the Transition to Digital Education in Tajikistan through 2042 (Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2022).
- As part of an EU-supported project to assist the Government of Kyrgyzstan in improving its education system for the period 2021-2027, it is planned that, by 2027, students will be assessed in their digital literacy, media literacy, and green skills, and at least 50% are expected to demonstrate basic or advanced levels in these areas at the appropriate grade (European Commission, n.d.).

For Mongolia, where many families maintain a nomadic lifestyle, digitalization is important not only for improving the education quality of children who are already enrolled in school. Stable internet connectivity is also essential for reaching more children overall and for helping vulnerable groups reduce learning gaps. Accordingly, the “Vision 2050” strategy calls for the establishment of an open education system, the development of an integrated online and distance learning platform, and the introduction of online training at educational institutions of all levels. Moreover, it is planned to develop and deliver learning programs and content in an online format (massive open online courses and open educational resources) for students of all ages, as well as to recognize and support the informal education system (World Bank, 2018).

In addition to national-level planning and strategic frameworks, initiatives to enhance resilience are also being developed **at the level of individual educational institutions**. This primarily concerns emergency situations such as natural disasters and other cases in which the lives and well-being of students and teachers may be at risk. Schools should have action and response plans in order to deal with such situations. Such plans are most commonly developed in countries where natural disasters and the likelihood of hazardous events are a constant risk. One such example is Mongolia's safety strategy. According to Article 27.1.7 of the country's General Education Law, in the event of school closures or changes to the form of instruction due to natural disasters, measures must be implemented to ensure the continuity of the educational process (UNICEF Mongolia, 2024). At the same time, schools do not always have ready-made plans and mechanisms for use during emergency situations. School principals may draft plans in a spontaneous manner based on a specific situation, or they may coordinate actions amongst themselves. Various national response strategies for emergency situations are examined in further detail in Section 2.4 ("Response and Recovery").

For Ukraine, emergency preparedness warrants a separate discussion, as the education system requires a robust safety strategy **in the context of the full-scale war**. Due to the threat of shelling and hostilities, the requirements for Ukraine's education infrastructure have changed. For example, education institutions now require bomb shelters so that students and teachers can take cover during air raid alerts. Additionally, due to power outages (especially during the winter months), generators, portable power stations, and other sources of uninterrupted power supply have become essential for maintaining the learning process.

International organizations and local civil society organizations have been supporting Ukrainian schools in constructing shelters that meet safety and inclusion standards, as well as in providing schools with generators and other necessary equipment. For example, UNICEF has designed shelters for preschools and schools and (UNICEF, 2024); charity foundation savED has created more than 30 shelters for preschools and schools (savED, 2025); and the Kyiv School of Economics Foundation has built over 90 shelters in preschools and schools and (KSE Foundation, 2022).

For those countries that have received an influx of displaced persons from Ukraine, developing strategies for integrating

large numbers of Ukrainian children into their education systems has become a pressing issue. Moldova is one of the countries that accepted the largest number of forcibly displaced Ukrainians in proportion to its own population (World Food Programme, 2025). This increased the burden on the Moldovan education system, requiring the urgent placement of a large number of children in schools. The spike in the number of enrolments became a challenge, especially in light of teacher shortages and language barriers, among other issues. In order to ensure education access for Ukrainian children, the Ministry of Education and Research introduced regulations to foster the inclusion and integration of Ukrainian children into the national education system (Broken Chalk & Bejenari, n.d.). Additionally, in 2025, Moldova introduced a new mechanism to monitor the number of Ukrainian children (both preschoolers and school students) who are studying in local schools or following remotely the Ukrainian curriculum. This mechanism aims to help determine the number of Ukrainian children in Moldova's education system and support their integration. The mechanism was initiated by the Ministry of Education and Research in partnership with UNICEF, UNHCR, and relevant education bodies. A total of 3,510 children from Ukraine have been enrolled in Moldova's general education institutions, of whom 2,530 attend schools (Moldpres, 2025).

In the countries studied, planning efforts to enhance education system resilience are predominantly reactive in nature and directly linked to identified structural weaknesses and potential risks. Key priorities of the countries' education strategies include the modernization of curricula, development of competencies among students, teacher professional development, digitalization, inclusion, and the strengthening of quality control monitoring systems, often with the support of international partners. At the same time, the implementation of some measures remains fragmented and heavily depends on funding and the countries' capacity to adapt national plans to crises.

2.4 Response and Recovery

According to the GPE KIX framework, the respond and recover component encompasses the actions taken by education systems at different stages following a crisis: short-term response and recovery, medium-term rebuilding and adaptation, and longer-term reforming and transforming (Cameron et al., 2024). Together, these stages may reflect a system's capacity adapt and reform in ways that strengthen its preparedness for future challenges.

Over the past 10 years, the countries in focus have faced various crises that have affected their education systems. One crisis common to all was the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, education systems in several countries were affected by war and armed conflicts, namely Russia's war against Ukraine launched in 2014; the influx of forcibly displaced persons from Ukraine into Moldova; and the Tajik-Kyrgyz border conflict of 2022. Other countries experienced crises caused by weather conditions and natural disasters: Albania suffered a powerful earthquake in 2019, while Mongolia faced one of its harshest winters in recent years in 2023–2024. In this section, we will examine how these countries responded to the impact of these challenges on their education systems, given that response is one of the elements of resilience.

COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the **need to integrate digital technologies** into the education process and to develop measures that make **education systems more resilient to external shocks**. The pandemic made in-person schooling impossible. The immediate response of governments in the countries was to rapidly introduce distance learning via Internet or television. For example, in **Mongolia**, lessons for elementary school students were broadcast on television, while secondary and higher education levels used telecasts and online platforms such as Moodle, Google Classroom, and Zoom (Loo et al., 2022). Similarly, nearly all countries introduced distance learning through television or other platforms such as YouTube (Darchashvili, 2023; Hoti et al., 2022; World Bank et al., 2022; Iqbal & Patrinos, 2025; Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation & Perepelytsia, 2022). In contrast, in **Tajikistan** schools were not closed for an extended period at the onset the COVID-19 pandemic. However, more than 2 million students had a longer-than-usual summer break. After that, schools permanently reopened

for in-person learning with measures taken to safeguard the health of all participants in the education process. One explanation for this decision may be the difficulty of introducing distance learning in the country, as Internet and television coverage is limited due in part to Tajikistan's mountainous terrain and weather conditions (GPE KIX & Harden-Wolfson, 2024).

Later, work began on developing and implementing distance or online learning platforms. However, the ability to use these learning formats depended on the level of digitalization of the education system, the availability of Internet and telecommunications, and the digital skills of teachers, students, and parents. As a result, education quality suffered **due to insufficient preparation of participants of the education process (parents, students, and teachers) for distance learning**, both in terms of digital skills and material and technical capacities. At the same time, measures were implemented to train teachers to improve their online teaching skills, as well as to develop and disseminate guidelines and instructions on how to work in the new format. Digitalization efforts were also undertaken, including providing equipment, internet access, and training for various participants of the educational process. For example, in June 2020, **Moldova's** Ministry of Education launched a nationwide campaign to digitalize the country's education system. Under this initiative, the Ministry developed an interactive map that allowed potential donors to see the number of teachers and students without computer equipment and other devices in each district (UNICEF, n.d.). For students from low-income families without internet at home, rural libraries were equipped with computers and Internet access through the NOVATECA project (IREX, n.d.).

The new learning format **increased workloads for both teachers and students**. Teachers were unable to keep up with the standard curriculum and were forced to adapt it to the new mode of instruction. This challenge was further exacerbated by the deterioration of the psychological and emotional well-being of students and teachers. Some countries **introduced initiatives to provide psycho-emotional support** to participants of the educational process, such as training in psychological assistance and the creation of support hotlines. In some cases, countries **suspended or repurposed measures aimed at strengthening the education system** in order to focus on addressing the consequences of the pandemic. For example, in **Albania**, after initially planning to implement the

“Prioritizing Education after Natural Disasters” project immediately following the 2019 earthquake, the education trade unions SPASH and FSASH ended up postponing its completion until 2023 due to the pandemic (Education International, 2023).

Despite all these efforts, it was not possible to prevent a decline in education quality, and the pandemic still exacerbated existing problems, including reduced education quality and increased inequality among different groups of children. Therefore, in the medium term, countries sought to shift to hybrid schooling (i.e. a combination of online and in-person formats), assess learning losses, and develop plans to address them. In some countries, medium-term measures continued to focus on psychological support for students and teachers, as well as social adaptation following periods of isolation. In their long-term strategies, countries sought to strengthen the components of their education systems that were most heavily impacted by the pandemic and to develop measures to transform the learning process in order to make the education system more resilient to future disruptions.

● War and Armed Conflicts

As a result of wars, armed conflicts, and the humanitarian consequences they create, children lose access to in-person schooling. A common feature of such situations in the countries studied is a temporary pause, which may occur either in the functioning of the education system as a whole or in the schooling of individual children. Governments use this time to adapt the education system to new challenges and develop response measures and solutions for minimizing declines in education quality. Such measures include the digitalization of education, which has been made easier after the experience of adapting the learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic. Below, we describe the measures taken in response to: 1) the start of Russia’s full-scale war against Ukraine, 2) the increased burden on Moldova’s education system as a result of the influx of displaced persons from Ukraine, and 3) the armed border conflict between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine⁶

Before it could fully overcome all the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ukraine faced a new challenge—a full-scale war launched by Russia—which worsened existing problems in the education system and created new ones. As with the COVID-19 response, the first measure was the **introduction of distance learning**. Following the start of the full-scale invasion, most schools declared a school break, though some continued to operate remotely. However, after one month, 75% of schools were teaching remotely, 18% had suspended learning entirely, while the rest were operating in a hybrid mode or on extended break (Cedos & savED, 2023). Subsequently, the situation changed regularly depending on the security situation in the specific area and the capacities of individual schools, though the number of schools with suspended learning gradually decreased (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, n.d.).

The experience of learning during the pandemic allowed both teachers and students to adapt more quickly to the shift to distance or online learning. Distance learning, including initiatives such as the All-Ukrainian Online School, made it possible to provide education to students who had been forced to move abroad or resettle within Ukraine (Cedos & savED, 2023).

At the same time, **distance and online learning did not meet the educational needs of all students.** As was the case during the pandemic, digital inequality created conditions in which some children had less access to education. While some parents used generators, batteries, or charging stations to organize learning at home, such resources were not always available especially to students from low-income households (Cedos & savED, 2023). A number of initiatives were introduced to address the need for learning devices.

The adaptation of the educational process, including the return to in-person learning, was contingent on the security

⁶ Russia's war against Ukraine began in 2014, when Russia launched military operations and occupied portions of Ukrainian territory, including the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and parts of Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts. These events affected children's ability to receive an education, especially due to the fact that some children and teachers ended up in occupied territories, were deported to Russia, or lived close to the line of contact. Children who were forced to relocate within Ukraine or abroad also temporarily lost access to schools. Educational infrastructure was damaged or destroyed. Following the full-scale invasion in 2022, these problems became more acute and more pervasive, meaning they began to affect the entire country. In this report, our analysis focuses specifically on the response of Ukraine's education system to the full-scale war.

situation in a specific area, the availability of shelters at schools, the condition of school buildings, and the size of the locality. In schools that had shelters with necessary conditions for learning, the educational process could continue uninterrupted even during shelling. Conversely, if such conditions were lacking, students could stay in the shelter, but the learning process was interrupted (Cedos & savED, 2023).

Considering wartime living conditions, several measures were crucial for adapting the educational process and fully restoring the learning process: **modifying schedules and study formats** to accommodate blended learning and power outage schedules; **setting up or properly equipping school shelters; and making up for learning losses**. Additionally, some projects were specifically dedicated to those **schools that had been destroyed or damaged and needed to be rebuilt**. The pace of reconstruction depended not only on the extent of damage but also on the security situation in the area. For example, in 2022, by decision of the Verkhovna Rada, the Fund for the Elimination of the Consequences of Armed Aggression was established to finance major repairs of public buildings that had been damaged or destroyed; the international organization Save the Children has been developing digital education centres and providing equipment for them.

Despite the ongoing war in Ukraine, **long-term strategies** are being developed by the government, municipal councils, schools, as well as international organizations and local civil society organizations, to address the after-effects of the conflict and strengthen the resilience of the education system. These efforts are primarily focused on responding to war-related losses and restoring the education process. In particular, the 2023-2027 Strategic Action Plan of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine by 2027: Education of Winners identifies among its main priorities the creation of safe conditions, recovery and response to the challenges of the war, and addressing learning losses.

Influx of displaced persons from Ukraine in Moldova

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, more than 403,885 Ukrainians crossed the Moldovan border, no fewer than 90,000 of whom remained in the country, including over 48,000 children (World Bank et al., n.d.). The sudden influx of so many children increased the burden on Moldova's education system (UNICEF Moldova & Dumitriu, 2024). The Ministry of

Education and Research adopted regulations to facilitate the inclusion of Ukrainian children in the national education system (Education Cannot Wait, 2022). During the crisis sparked by Russia's war against Ukraine, initiatives were geared toward **integrating children into the education system and providing them with psychological and social support, in addition to delivering humanitarian support**. Additionally, as in the case of the pandemic, many initiatives were related to the digitalization of education.

For example, Moldova's Ministry of Education and Research and its partners launched the EduTechLabs initiative. These labs offer psychosocial support, formal and informal education, and leisure activities; they are equipped with modern IT equipment and prepare teachers for working with recently arrived children (UNICEF Moldova & Dumitriu, 2024). A number of projects aimed at supporting children from Ukraine were carried out by the humanitarian organization People in Need. Such projects notably entailed distributing winter clothing; improving infrastructure and learning spaces; providing psychological and social support, language courses, and school meals; and supporting access to distance learning in Ukraine (People in Need Moldova, n.d.).

As for **long-term initiatives**, in 2025 the Ministry of Education and Research, in partnership with UNICEF and UNHCR, developed the Roadmap for the Integration of Refugee Children into the Education System, which aims to enrol approximately 25,000 children from Ukraine. The document outlines a strategy for 2025-2026 and aims to ensure access to inclusive, high-quality education for all refugee children (UNHCR Moldova, 2025).

Tajik-Kyrgyz border conflict

Over the past seven years, more than 20 border clashes have occurred between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in an ongoing dispute, following the failure of these countries to fully demarcate their border after they gained independence in 1991. In 2022, at least 23 preschools and schools in southwestern Kyrgyzstan were affected during the border conflict between the two countries (Human Rights Watch & Sultanalieva, 2024; UNICEF, 2021). In Tajikistan, at least one school burned down and one teacher was killed while trying to protect his students during the fighting. In Kyrgyzstan, the temporary closure of 161 schools across several regions disrupted learning, with some

children experiencing psychosocial trauma (Human Rights Watch & Sultanalieva, 2024). Later, the Government of Kyrgyzstan reported 12 damaged schools (OCHA, 2022).

At the request of the Government of Kyrgyzstan in late 2022, the World Bank redirected USD 10 million for the restoration and improvement of key educational services in affected towns and villages along the border. Under this project, seven new schools were built and three were restored over a nine-month period (World Bank Group, 2024).

Since 2022, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have made significant progress in border demarcation. However, a challenge remains as **neither government has endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration** (Human Rights Watch & Sultanalieva, 2024). The Declaration commits countries to take measures to protect education, including compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights, as well as to apply the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, n.d.).

● Climate-related and Natural Risks

Another set of challenges affecting the education system involves climate and natural risks, including extreme weather events and natural disasters. These events can lead to the destruction of education infrastructure, rendering the learning process impossible for a certain period or in a certain region altogether. Below, we examine the impact of these challenges using the examples of harsh winters (*dzuds*) in Mongolia and the 2019 earthquake in Albania.

Harsh winters in Mongolia

Due to its geographic location, Mongolia regularly faces weather conditions that have hindered the schooling of children in rural areas, even before the pandemic. About 80% of students from herder families, who live in remote areas far from schools, miss many school days due to blizzards. When they do return to school, they often fall behind in the curriculum. An added barrier for these children is the anxiety they feel about their parents and families: even when these children return to school and are eager to learn, the fact that they are continually worried about their families reduces their

motivation and makes it difficult for them to concentrate on lessons and complete their assignments (UNICEF Mongolia, 2024).

In 2023-2024, Mongolia experienced its most severe winter in 50 years. Severe snowstorms and extremely low temperatures affected more than 188,000 people, including 80,000 children (Prevention Web, 2025). In response, UNESCO, the Mongolian National Commission for UNESCO, and other national education institutions joined forces to support the Ministry of Education in developing and implementing the Dzud Emergency Education Response Program. The program focuses on the following areas: 1) strengthening education resilience and ensuring learning continuity during harsh winters, including enhancing the Ministry of Education's capacity to respond to them; 2) cooperating with education authorities in affected regions to conduct remedial classes; 3) facilitating remote learning, including through the distribution of electronic devices; 4) enhancing the capacity of teachers and educational personnel to offer psychosocial support; and 5) translating UNESCO's guidelines on education in times of emergency into Mongolian (Prevention Web, 2025).

Because such harsh winters and adverse weather conditions are recurrent in Mongolia, addressing their impacts and building a more resilient education system is part of the country's long-term educational strategies.

Massive earthquake in Albania

In 2019, an earthquake struck Albania, affecting 11 municipalities. Fifty-one people were killed, including children, and 321 educational institutions in the affected communities sustained damage (UNDP Albania & Kushti, 2022). Local schools were closed for two weeks, while 30 schools were too heavily damaged to reopen at all. The students enrolled in these schools had to be transferred to other, more distant schools, with transport costs being covered by the state (Gazeta Express, n.d.).

Following the earthquake, 21,000 children from eleven municipalities were forced to study in makeshift school facilities. Some classes had to be conducted remotely or on a part-time basis; however, prior to the earthquake, most teachers had not received sufficient training in the use of digital technologies. Later, the situation was further

exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Broken Chalk & Scarpino, n.d.).

The education trade unions SPASH and FSASH established a joint Emergency Council to monitor the situation and set up a fund to provide immediate assistance to affected students and teachers. However, due to limited union resources, the fund was unable to meet all identified needs (Education International, 2023). Further, to support the recovery of the education system, the EU4Schools initiative was launched together with EU representatives in an effort to rebuild damaged schools. Communities affected by the earthquake received assistance for school repair and reconstruction (Tirana Times, 2020).

The crisis was a catalyst for the development of measures to strengthen emergency response. SPASH and FSASH developed the “Prioritizing Education after Natural Disasters” project, under which workshops were carried out in earthquake-affected regions. In addition to the workshops, participants received brochures outlining a set of steps to be taken during crisis situations and natural disasters. The project was planned for implementation immediately after the earthquake; however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, its launch was postponed until 2023 (Education International, 2023).

Over the past decade, the countries studied have been plagued by various types of crises (security-, weather-, climate- and pandemic-related), all of which have had a significant negative impact on the educational process while exposing structural vulnerabilities of education systems. Common initial responses included school closures or a transition to distance or hybrid learning. However, the impact of such decisions was also dependent on the level of digitalization, teacher and school preparedness, infrastructure availability, and prior experience in responding to crises.

Across the region, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digitalization of education. At the same time, it also deepened existing inequalities and led to a deterioration in learning outcomes, particularly among children from vulnerable groups. The experience of responding to the pandemic increased the region’s preparedness for future crises—including war and armed conflict—but did not eliminate systemic barriers related to safety, infrastructure, skill sets, and psychosocial well-being. Russia’s war against Ukraine and its aftermath have demonstrated the importance of flexible approaches to

learning, cross-sectoral cooperation, and international support in order to maintain access to education. Climate-related and natural risks—such as harsh winters in Mongolia and the earthquake in Albania—have shown that recurring or unpredictable emergencies require long-term resilience strategies rather than purely reactive responses.

Overall, the review of how countries are responding to their crises shows that education system resilience in the region is shaped by a combination of short-term response measures, medium-term mechanisms for addressing learning losses and negative impacts on the education system, and long-term strategies aimed at transforming education while accounting for potential future risks.

2.5 Prevention and Mitigation

In this section, we provide an overview of plans, policies, and other measures aimed at mitigating the effects of ongoing crises or preventing future crises in the countries of focus.

Some countries share certain risks and challenges, including natural disasters, conflict and war, and forced human displacement, among others. As a result, their **policies and activities** for preventing these risks and mitigating their consequences are **often similar**. At the same time, differences in policies and practices are linked to varying understandings of these risks and different prioritization of them across the countries.

In this section, we focus on the following aspects of planning and practices related to crisis prevention and mitigation: 1) raising awareness of students about climate issues and disaster preparedness; 2) equipping students with skills for the future, especially information and communication technology (ICT) skills; 3) investing in education infrastructure to increase the resilience of school buildings; 4) providing psychological support to students; and 5) peacebuilding education.

A review of crisis prevention and mitigation measures shows that curriculum updates and the training of teachers to implement these updates are central to building resilient education systems. Across countries, updated curricula to varying degrees now include topics related to climate

awareness, disaster preparedness, socioeconomic studies, digital skills, as well as the cultivation of the skill sets and values needed to ensure population resilience.

International organizations actively support prevention and mitigation activities across the region. UNICEF, UNESCO, UNDP, and the EU, among others, play a key role in supporting curriculum reforms, training teachers, and developing infrastructure at various levels, from strategy and policy development to training sessions for local communities.

Climate awareness and disaster preparedness. The countries in focus face risks of natural disasters such as earthquakes (Central Asian countries, Albania), extreme heat (Central Asian countries), flooding and extreme winter weather conditions (Mongolia), and others. Natural disasters can have devastating consequences for education systems, including school closures and infrastructure damage. Therefore, disaster preparedness and climate awareness education are essential for building resilient education systems in the region. With the exception of Ukraine, all countries are currently actively working to integrate climate awareness education and disaster preparedness into school curricula and professional training. The current lack of this resilience component in Ukraine's education system is largely due to the prioritization of risks caused by the full-scale war.

Common measures across the countries include changes to primary and secondary school curricula aimed at integrating climate awareness and preparing students for potential natural disasters. A review of measures shows that all these countries are committed to incorporating climate issues into curricula.

Analysis of the experiences of the countries reveals a number of shared patterns when it comes to integrating climate awareness into curricula. Firstly, international organizations play a key role in curriculum modernization. For example, in Kyrgyzstan, the topics of sustainable development and climate change were first incorporated into curricula in 2010 with the support of the OSCE (OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek, 2010). Subsequently, an EU-backed initiative (European Commission, n.d.) supported the integration of sustainable development into the country's education reform plan, while the UNDP implemented the "Climate Box" project, which provided schools with interactive materials. In Moldova, the National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy (2024–2030) was developed with the support of the UNDP.

Secondly, in the countries of focus, the integration of climate awareness topics into curriculum is closely linked to the disaster risk reduction (DRR) component. The National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy of Georgia (2017-2020) identifies the integration of DRR into formal education as a priority, emphasizing the development of a “culture of safety” and increasing children’s preparedness for natural and climate-related crises. A similar approach is reflected in Moldova’s National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy (2024-2030), which obliges educational institutions to raise awareness of climate-related disasters and to teach preparedness and early warning systems.

Thirdly, in most countries, climate education is integrated into existing subjects rather than taught as a standalone course. For example, in Ukraine, as part of the New Ukrainian School reform (2017), information on climate change, natural hazards, and environmental sustainability was incorporated into geography, biology, and civic education courses.

Another set of measures focuses on training teachers, school administrators, and education officials on climate awareness and disaster preparedness. Similarly to curriculum update efforts, such measures are often supported by international organizations. For example, in Uzbekistan, the United Nations Development Programme, the international public foundation “Zamin” and the Education Above All foundation supported the government in integrating climate change topics into curricula. Under this program, more than 50,000 teachers across seven regions—including climate-vulnerable areas such as Karakalpakstan and Bukhara—received training on how to teach climate-focused lessons (UNDP Uzbekistan, 2025). In Moldova, the Ministry of Education, in cooperation with the UNDP and the EU, launched the “Enabling an Inclusive Green Transition in the Republic of Moldova” initiative in 2024, which introduced energy and climate modules in 87 secondary education institutions and provided teachers with training and teaching materials (UNDP Moldova, 2025).

In incorporating climate awareness content into curricula, the countries under study face challenges such as a lack of effective coordination amongst stakeholders and limited resources. For example, Kyrgyzstan’s Comprehensive Action Plan for Climate Change Education (2021) identifies the following key challenges in integrating climate awareness into formal education: 1) the absence of clearly defined timelines; and 2) a lack of clear division of responsibilities and

cooperation mechanisms among stakeholders (MECCE, n.d.). The UNESCO report “Climate Change Education Ambition in Central Asia” points out another key challenge: the lack of systematic monitoring and assessment of climate education policies and programs (UNESCO, 2024).

Skills for the future. The countries are committed to **updating curricula** in order to ensure their students—and their national economies as a whole—are more adaptive and resilient. This is closely linked to developing digital skills among both students and teachers, which will support students’ future opportunities.

In **Ukraine**, the New Ukrainian School reform supports the promotion of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) amongst students. These efforts are especially important now, as Ukraine will need more STEM professionals in the future to rebuild the country and strengthen its defence system. At the same time, reforms have introduced a competency-based model in which the focus is on soft skills such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, use of technology, and interdisciplinary learning.

Curriculum modernization efforts are often supported by international organizations. For example, UNESCO has been supporting the Ministry of Education and Science of **Mongolia** in the development and implementation of digital competency standards for primary and secondary school teachers across the country.

Alongside state-led curriculum update efforts, numerous projects implemented by local NGOs and international organizations aim to enhance the digital skills of students and teachers.

For example, in **Mongolia**, international organizations (e.g., UNICEF, Maßvoll Stiftung, Fondation de Luxembourg) support the local non-profit Girls’ Code, which teaches coding and digital skills to girls in Grades 9 through 12 (Battulga & Enkhtsogt, 2024) to overcome gender inequality in the STEM sector. Another relevant program is Digital Community Information Worker (UNICEF Mongolia, 2025). Launched by UNICEF, this program aims to equip teachers and students with digital skills and transform schools into community hubs of digital literacy.

Investments in the safety of school infrastructure. The countries studied are investing in school infrastructure to reduce the negative impacts of natural disasters and, in the case of Ukraine, protect children and teachers from shelling and air strikes. The development of safe infrastructure can be viewed as contributing to at least two pillars of education system resilience according to the GPE KIX framework: i) strengthening and ii) prevention and mitigation. This subsection focuses specifically on infrastructure development in response to crises or to mitigate the effects of known and likely future risks, such as earthquakes in seismically active countries or Russian attacks in Ukraine.

Ukraine is a particular example of investment in school infrastructure safety. During the full-scale war, Russia has continuously targeted educational facilities, and the construction of shelters has become a prerequisite for conducting in-person learning. As of October 2025, 3,958 educational institutions across Ukraine were damaged and 400 destroyed due to fighting or occupation since February 2022 (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2025a). To reduce risks to the safety of children and teachers, the government developed operational requirements for schools. To function offline, schools must have access to shelters. Furthermore, the government established safety, inclusivity, and equipment standards⁷ for newly built or renovated shelters to ensure access for all students. International organizations and local NGOs have been supporting Ukrainian schools in outfitting shelters that meet safety and inclusivity standards and are properly furnished and equipped for the learning process.

The countries under study that have experienced devastating natural disasters demonstrate some of the most systemic approach to modernizing their school infrastructure. Following the 2019 earthquake, Albania made a major amendment to its school safety requirements by introducing mandatory compliance with Eurocode 8 (European Commission, 2004), an EU standard for the design of earthquake-resistant buildings. International partners actively supported this process: the EU and the UNDP launched the EU4Schools program (European Union, 2023), which rebuilt 63 educational institutions in

⁷ CMU Resolution “Pro realizatsiiu eksperymentalnoho proektu shchodo stvorennia v budivliakh i sporudakh zakladiv osvity zakhyshchenykh prostoriv (prymishchen dlia fizychnoho zakhystu)” [“On the implementation of an experimental project on the creation of protected spaces (premises for physical protection) in educational institution buildings and facilities”].

accordance with the “Build Back Better” and “Build Back Together” principles while also incorporating energy efficiency measures and safety standards.

The countries of Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan) demonstrate a regional approach to ensuring safe schools through the Comprehensive Safe Schools Framework (CSSF) 2022–2030. In Tajikistan, UNICEF is supporting the Ministry of Education and Science in conducting a comprehensive school safety assessment, which will provide an overview of schools’ vulnerability to hazards and help inform investment recommendations. In Uzbekistan, UNICEF and the European Commission are supporting a DRR pilot project covering more than 300 schools in 36 vulnerable communities and combining infrastructure safety upgrades with training in response behaviour and preparedness.

Mental health support for students. Crises can disrupt learning in multiple ways, including by harming students’ mental health. Supporting students’ mental health is therefore essential for strengthening their resilience and preparedness for future crises. In the countries covered by this study, psychological support for students is predominantly provided by international and local non-profit organizations. At the same time, there are also examples of government-launched initiatives.

In **Mongolia**, the Ministry of Education and Science introduced Chatbox, a free service providing Grade 12 students with access to consultations with professional psychologists to help them cope with anxiety and stress before exams. In cooperation with the Mongolian Psychological Association and with the support of UNICEF, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and Badamlan NGO, training sessions were organized to prepare school psychologists at the beginning of the 2021-2022 academic year. During this period, 207 psychologists were trained for primary and secondary schools. By the 2022-2023 academic year, one-third of all public schools had a psychologist on their staff (Ministry of Education and Science of Mongolia & OECD, 2022).

In **Ukraine**, the mental health of students has been significantly affected by the war. The government, together with international organizations such as UNICEF and UNESCO, has been implementing various programs to address the issue. The Ministry of Education and Science, in partnership with the

First Lady of Ukraine and the World Health Organization (WHO), is promoting social and emotional learning to strengthen children's emotional resilience, stress-coping skills, and ability to self-regulate—all of which are particularly critical in light of the trauma caused by the war (Weekly, 2023). UNESCO has focused on supporting the provision of mental health assistance by: 1) ensuring that Inclusive Resource Centers⁸ are staffed with psychological supervisors to support their teams (UNESCO, 2025); and 2) training 15,000 school psychologists across Ukraine (Sirkovych, 2023).

Peacebuilding education. The countries studied have been impacted by war and ethnic violence. In response, governments—often with international support—have introduced peacebuilding education into curricula and other activities. In 2010, **Kyrgyzstan** faced intense inter-ethnic violence between Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities. In response, the Ministry of Education introduced civic education, tolerance, multicultural dialogue, and conflict-sensitive teaching practices into the curriculum. The Concept for the Development of National Unity and Inter-ethnic Relations in the Kyrgyz Republic (2013) sets out an objective of promoting diversity and inter-cultural communication through education. With the support of UNICEF and the UN Peacebuilding Fund, the Ministry of Education and Science implemented a pilot program for multilingual education in 56 schools (Simonsen, 2018). The Program for the Development of Multilingual and Multicultural Education (2022–2040) aims to introduce multilingual instruction in 97 schools, including 37 Uzbek-language schools and 3 Tajik-language schools.

Since 2014, **Moldova** has been implementing a peace education program with the support of the UNDP, Swedish organizations, and the GPPAC (Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict) network. This project engages teachers from areas controlled by the Moldovan government as well as from the temporarily occupied territories of Transnistria. Under the program, courses on peacebuilding and tolerance have been developed and are taught by local teachers. More than 100 schools have introduced peace education courses into their curricula, over 100 teachers have received training, and at least 10,000 children have participated in the program (Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, n.d.).

⁸ Public institutions that provide comprehensive educational and psychological support to children who, for health-related or other reasons, require a modified learning program.

● Conclusions

Education system resilience is a complex phenomenon that encompasses a wide range of measures related to strengthening, anticipation, planning, response and recovery, and risk prevention and mitigation. At the same time, the scope and inclusiveness of resilience efforts are equally important – without addressing the needs of social groups in vulnerable situations, systemic shocks tend to deepen existing inequalities.

This study is the first attempt to explore how the concept of education system resilience is understood in the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, namely Albania, Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia. This research report is based on a desktop review of various sources, including official government documents, research materials, and public discourse more broadly.

Our analysis indicates that understanding the broader country context is essential when examining the meanings and practices of education system resilience. The eight countries selected for this study differ significantly in terms of territory, climate, and cultural, economic, and political characteristics, which influence the challenges they face. At the same time, a shared historical context—past affiliation with the Soviet Union and, for some countries, the legacy of the Soviet education system—intersects with divergent development trajectories of the countries in the region. All of this directly affects how understandings of resilience, along with its policies and practices, are formed—for example, orientations toward European integration, education decentralization or preservation of centralized education model, among other factors.

The desktop review revealed that the use of the term “education system resilience,” along with its interpretation and implementation, is significantly influenced by international partners. The latter are involved both in the development of strategic documents and in the implementation of programs aimed at supporting or strengthening specific elements of resilience. This involvement substantially shapes the priorities of national education policies.

In the region of focus, policies and practices related to education system resilience reflect both shared characteristics and context-specific features. They are predominantly aimed at improving education quality, advancing digitalization,

improving working conditions of teachers, and promoting equal access to education. At the same time, some challenges are more associated with specific countries. Climate risks and natural disasters—such as extremely cold winters, heavy precipitation, and earthquakes—are particularly relevant for Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Mongolia, and Albania. Wars and armed conflicts, along with their implications, are relevant for Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.

An analysis of policies and practices using the five-component education system resilience framework proposed by GPE KIX revealed imbalance in priorities: the countries studied tend to focus primarily on responding to already existing crises and on measures aimed at strengthening education systems. In contrast, considerably less attention and fewer initiatives are devoted to the components of anticipation, prevention, and risk mitigation.

Overall, the countries in focus demonstrate a tendency to place greater emphasis on **education system strengthening** measures than on other aspects of resilience in strategic government documents (e.g., education strategies) and research-based documents. Within this component, the key activities can be divided into two types of measures, namely those focused on assessing the scale of challenges, and those directly aimed at implementing reforms and specific policy actions to address identified problems. Measures to improve education systems are primarily directed at overcoming accumulated systemic issues, such as low quality of education, outdated education programs and curricula, unequal access to education, ineffective governance of educational institutions at the local or national level, teacher shortages, and unsatisfactory working conditions. At the same time, strengthening measures often address multiple challenges simultaneously. However, their scope does not necessarily extend to the entire country; they may target specific regions, districts, or individual schools.

Initiatives aimed at **anticipating threats** that could impact the education system in the future are not widespread among the countries in the region. This is largely due to the lack of sufficient financial resources to implement such activities, as well as due to the transitional state of political systems and social institutions, shaped by the countries' historical ties to the USSR. Instead, available resources are primarily directed toward the development of crisis management initiatives and responses to existing challenges.

The **planning-related initiatives** are built around the issues of the education system that require interventions and the nature of the threats faced by the system. Accordingly, the countries' plans and strategies include measures aimed at addressing the most pressing issues in the education system. In addition, strategic planning in the countries encompasses an analysis of past crisis management experiences and the integration of lessons learned into the design of future initiatives.

The crisis situations that have occurred in the countries of focus over the past ten years have differed in terms of the scale and duration of their impact on education systems. As a result, **response and recovery efforts** required different approaches. At the onset of a crisis, it was often necessary to temporarily pause the learning process, and in the case of military conflicts and wars, schools suffered damage and destruction. In many cases, the first **short-term** response was the introduction of the distance approach to learning. Although this made it possible to maintain the continuity of learning, it also created or exacerbated the issue of unequal access to education, for example, due to schools' lack of preparedness, shortages of devices, skills, and adult support for students. At the same time, crises affected not only the educational process but also its participants, especially their psychological well-being. The measures taken by many countries were primarily for teachers or students; however, crises have shown the importance of also taking the needs of parents into account, as they play a significant role in supporting and overseeing the education of their children in times of crisis. **Medium-term** measures often involved a return to in-person learning and the creation of the preconditions necessary for this, measuring learning losses and working to address them, which could include developing new materials and platforms, training teachers in new skills, or organizing additional classes for students. **Long-term** initiatives focused on taking into account the challenges and weaknesses of education systems revealed during crises and developing strategies to strengthen education systems, particularly in the context of responding to potential future crises.

The ability of education systems to respond effectively to crises was shaped not by individual measures, but through a synergy of institutional coordination, the presence of clear procedures for action, flexibility of governance at the local level, and external support. In addition, previous experience with crises and the capacity of systems to ensure learning

continuity through digital technologies proved to be important factors in enabling an effective response.

Preventing future crises and mitigating their impact on education systems largely involve a combination of changes in curriculum content, teacher training, psychological support, and investments in infrastructure, often with the involvement or at the initiative of international partners. In the countries of focus, a strong focus on implementing education for climate awareness and disaster preparedness is critically important, as some countries face risks related to extreme temperatures (hot or cold) or earthquakes. The experiences of the countries also demonstrate that developing safe educational infrastructure is one possible response to various types of crises (including earthquakes, floods, armed conflicts, and wars), and this can simultaneously serve both to strengthen education systems and to prevent and mitigate crises and their consequences. Such measures differ depending on the country-specific context and may include updating construction standards for educational facilities or their reconstruction, as well as creating or equipping school shelters.

This report captures what relevant education policy documents, as well as reports from international organizations, analytical papers, research studies, and other publicly available sources, say about policies and practices related to education system resilience in the countries of focus. The findings of this study should be interpreted with caution, considering the limitations of the desktop research methodology. For example, our research was based primarily on publicly available sources, which do not always fully reflect actual practices. Furthermore, it does not cover all relevant documents, including those not publicly accessible.

The study shows that efforts related to education system resilience in the countries of focus are predominantly shaped by responses to past crises and that systemic approaches to risk anticipation and prevention remain less developed. The countries face similar structural challenges and significantly rely on the support of international partners to develop and implement relevant policies. Across the eight countries studied, education system resilience is an evolving priority that has been significantly shaped by past crises, and that holds considerable potential for deeper institutional embedding as the region continues to develop its approaches to education system strengthening.

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