

SPOTLIGHT ON CHILDREN & YOUTH: EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF DISPLACED UKRAINIANS

JANUARY 2024



World Vision 

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

This report presents an analysis of focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted over the course of December 2023 and January 2024 with children affected by the conflict in Ukraine, including those displaced within Ukraine as well as those in Romania, Moldova, and Georgia. The primary objective is to understand children's perceptions of their well-being, new environments, educational setups, and coping strategies in the context of displacement and conflict.

This study addresses critical gaps in the current understanding of the experiences of displaced Ukrainian children. By focusing on specific age groups and genders, it provides a nuanced perspective that is essential for tailoring interventions effectively. Moreover, this study complements the existing needs assessment and other assessments conducted by the Ukraine Crisis Response team over the last year. It serves as a vital component in informing the development of a new strategy by providing a deeper understanding of the unique needs and challenges faced by children affected by conflict and displacement.

METHODOLOGY

Between December 16 and January 17th, 2024, a qualitative methodological approach was employed and thirteen (13) FGDs were conducted with Ukrainian children aged 8 to 19 in Ukraine, Romania, Moldova, and Georgia as illustrated in Figure 1. These discussions were designed to elicit nuanced insights into children's perspectives on their well-being, educational experiences, social interactions, and adaptation to their current situations whether living as internally displaced people in Ukraine or in neighbouring countries.



Source: World Vision Romania - PCC Hub in Suceava, Romania

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The FGDs sought to answer four sets of questions about the experiences of children and youth. These are:

- i. What is the perception of children in Ukraine and those in host countries with regard to their general well-being?
- ii. How do children in Ukraine, and those in host countries perceive their new environments/settlements? In what ways do they find support within these spaces? What elements are missing or problematic?
- iii. How do children in Ukraine, and those in host countries perceive their new educational setups? Do they feel a sense of belonging within these setups? If not, what are the barriers hindering their integration?
- iv. How do displaced children in Ukraine cope with feelings of sadness or depression? Are there observable signs of emotional distress, such as sleeping disorders, anxiety, or other manifestations? Additionally, do they seek support from someone within or outside the household, or do they often navigate these challenges independently? How frequently do these children express a need for support?

Location	Total FGDs	Participants (Boys, Girls, Age Group)
Ukraine (Chernivtsi)	2	Boys: 10, Girls: 10, Age Group: 8-14
Ukraine (Dnipro)	2	Boys: 9, Girls: 11, Age Group: 15-17
Romania (Bucharest)	2	Boys: 8, Girls: 7, Age Group: 10-17
Romania (Constanta)	1	Boys: 7, Girls: 8, Age Group: 9-16
Moldova (Chisinau)	1	Boys: 6, Girls: 3, Age Group: 8-13
Moldova (Balti)	1	Boys: 6, Girls: 3, Age Group: 7-14
Moldova (Anenii Noi)	1	Boys: 3, Girls: 12, Age Group: 9-17
Georgia (Batumi)	1	Boys: 3, Girls: 9, Age Group: 10-19
Georgia (Tbilisi)	2	Boys: 12, Girls: 11, Age Group: 11-15
	13	Total: 138 (64 boys, 74 girls) ages 8-19

Figure 1: Focus group discussions by location

Data was analysed using a static code tree via MaxQDA to identify common themes, trends, and location-specific challenges; whenever possible, specific findings were disaggregated by sex and age group ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the diverse experiences within this demographic.

Participants for focus groups were selected using a mixture of purposive and random sampling. Child and youth participants in Georgia, Moldova and Romania were randomly selected from the participant list of child friendly spaces in the cities and locations with the highest number of Ukrainians. In Georgia, this included Tblisi and Batumi, in Romania this included Bucharest and Constanta, and in Moldova the groups took place in Anenii, Balti, and Chisinau. Children within Ukraine were randomly selected from IDP classes at schools with World Vision offices, specifically in Dnipro and Chernivtsi, although they are not directly engaged in WV programming. Children and youth received a clear explanation about the research, why they were invited to participate, what would be expected of them, and they were assured that they did not have to participate or speak if they did not want to. Prior to starting each group, the facilitator asked children and youth for their agreement to participate and reiterated that they could ask to leave or stop participating at any time. In addition, some ground rules for the discussion to be safe and comfortable were discussed (e.g. please don't interrupt others while they are speaking, everyone may share their own opinion, etc).

FGDs were led by a MEAL Officer from World Vision in Ukraine, Moldova and Romania. A designated notetaker was on site to take detailed notes in Russian or Ukrainian, depending on the preferences of the participant group. In Georgia, focus groups were led by a local consultant and the notes were taken by accompanying World Vision MEAL staff. In all cases, the original transcripts were translated from Russian or Ukrainian into English for analysis. As mentioned in the limitation section below, this may have resulted in some misunderstandings or missed nuances, but the risk is considered minimal given the topics and steps taken to translate as best as possible. These steps included the reliance on a MEAL staff to conduct the translation (rather than a website or system), as well as a meeting between this report writer and the facilitators to ensure a clear understanding of the sentiments shared by participants.

Limitations

- Sample Size and Representation: The number of FGDs and participants in each location may not be representative

of children and adolescents affected by the conflict and displacement. Efforts were made to diversify participants by engaging various communities, schools, and local organizations.

- Selection Bias: FGD participants were selected based on availability and willingness to participate, introducing selection bias, especially outside Ukraine where they were existing participants in WV's programming. This may limit the representativeness of expressed views to those with access to the locations where FGDs were conducted and where WV programming is implemented, with the exception of FGDs in Ukraine. Where feasible, random sampling methods were used to select participants for the FGDs to minimize selection bias by including children and adolescents who were not self-selected or participants in WV programs as in Ukraine.

- Age and Gender Grouping: While data was disaggregated by age and gender, broad age categories may lead to overlooked nuanced differences within groups. Efforts were made to highlight findings specific to narrower age groups with an emphasis on overall trends.

- Language and Translation: FGDs were conducted in Russian or Ukrainian with translations in English were provided for analysis. Despite multiple translators and cross-verification, translation could influence the analysis and interpretation.

- Moderator Influence: Moderator presence and approach could influence participants' responses. Training was provided to minimize moderator influence ensuring neutral questioning techniques and creating a comfortable environment for open discussion and consistent guidelines across all FGDs

- Depth of Exploration: Time constraints and the group setting of FGDs, may have limited the depth of exploration. Participants might have been reluctant to share sensitive or personal information in a group setting, leading to a lack of depth in some responses.

- Subjectivity in Interpretation: Qualitative data analysis inherently involves subjectivity. A collaborative review process among colleagues familiar with the contexts aimed to ensure a balanced interpretation.

- Contextual Factors: Findings are context-specific and might not be generalizable to other settings or populations. Researchers considered unique contextual factors in each location to accurately interpretate findings within specific settings. translation could influence the analysis and interpretation.

KEY FINDINGS AND TRENDS

- **Safety and Security:** A recurring theme is the importance of safety and stability. Children in Ukraine long for pre-conflict normalcy, while those displaced appreciate the relative safety in host countries. However, it is worth noting that in Georgia specifically, adolescent girls aged 15-16 in Tblisi and Batumi mentioned several examples of times when they feel unsafe or at risk of sexual harassment.
- **Family and Social Connections:** The presence of family and maintaining friendships are vital for children's well-being. This is consistent across locations and age groups. Children reported some challenges in adapting and making new friends in their host countries, and particularly in Moldova, where young boys – as opposed to young girls who often said they were happy in their new home and made friends despite linguistic barriers – cited challenges in adapting to their new home and making friends due to language and limited activities.
- **Educational Concerns:** Education is a significant worry, especially for older children. Disruptions in Ukraine and challenges adapting to new educational systems in host countries, along with language barriers, particularly in Romania, are major concerns. In Georgia and Moldova, children often highlighted challenges with the curriculum and adapting to different teaching styles.
- **Cultural Adaptation and Identity:** Displaced children express mixed feelings about cultural adaptation, grappling with a sense of loss regarding their Ukrainian identity and efforts to integrate into local cultures. This was a shared concern across all countries and sex.
- **Recreational Activities:** Engagement in hobbies and recreational activities provides comfort. However, limitations in access to such activities are noted, in terms of affordability, particularly in Romania, and availability. Younger children in Romania and Georgia talked about their appreciation for the different facilities and activities available while participants in Moldova often felt facilities were lacking.
- **Coping strategies:** In terms of coping strategies, boys generally focused on physical activities and hobbies as a way to handle negative feelings or overcome issues, while girls typically highlighted activities like listening to music, reading, going for walks, and social interactions. These trends were similar across countries, highlighting the importance of understanding age and gender-specific needs and priorities.
- In Romania, despite language barriers, children reported feeling welcomed. Some older children noted instances of negative attitudes but recognized these as exceptions.
- In Moldova, younger children, especially boys, expressed more negative feelings towards their new environment, citing challenges related to public transport, outdoor activities and making friends, especially in Anenii Noi and Balti. Young girls between 8-14 years old reported feeling comfortable and generally happy in their new home, although a few reflected on missing Ukraine this was not as pronounced or consistent as for little boys.
- Georgian host environments were perceived differently across age groups. Younger children focused on positive aspects like food and play areas, while older children mentioned challenges, including experiences of harassment among adolescent girls.
- Displaced children within Ukraine expressed a strong desire to return home, despite appreciating the safety and opportunities in places like Dnipro. However, children highlighted an appreciation for being able to make friends and adolescents mentioned many opportunities and activities in Dnipro.
- Younger children (10-14 years old) tended to talk more about immediate surroundings, daily activities, and personal interactions and how they impact their mood and perception of their new school and home. Concerns were often about school experiences, playing with friends, and attending clubs. Older children (15-17 years old) discussed broader issues, including future prospects, quality of education, cultural differences, and – more often than the younger children – expressed a strong desire to return to Ukraine. These age-based differences were similar and evident across all locations.



Source: World Vision Moldova

1. Exploring the Perceptions of Children in Ukraine and Host Countries: Overall Wellbeing

In the face of displacement and conflict, children's perceptions of their general well-being are shaped by a complex interplay of factors, as revealed by FGDs held in Ukraine and neighbouring countries. These factors encompass a broad spectrum of experiences and emotions, reflecting the diverse and nuanced ways in which children are affected by their circumstances.

One of the most salient themes across all locations is the fundamental need for safety and security. In Ukraine, children's yearnings for the safety and normalcy of pre-conflict life are palpable.

"When everything is fine, when you wake up and realize that you are alive," - 15 year old male in Dnipro, Ukraine

This quote shared by a youth from Dnipro, Ukraine encapsulates the sentiments of many older children. The older youth (15-17) in particular highlighted that they feel good when there are no air warnings (specifically those in Dnipro), when they know their loved ones are safe, and when they are not consistently worrying. Similarly, displaced Ukrainian children in Romania, Moldova, and Georgia frequently underscore the sense of relative safety they experience in their host countries, contrasting it with the insecurity they left behind. Older children often spoke about the importance of stability as a key influence for when they can/do feel good; this is articulated by a 16 year old girl living in Batumi who explained,

"I feel good when I see my plans, when I can think about what I will do tomorrow or in the near future". - 16 year old female Ukrainian refugee in Batumi, Georgia

The critical role of family and social connections in fostering children's well-being cannot be overstated. Children and youth, irrespective of age or location, emphasize the significance of being with family members and staying connected with friends. The following remark from a 14-year-old Ukrainian girl in Georgia poignantly highlights the comfort and stability that family presence provides:

"When I am at home, surrounded by my relatives, I don't mean an apartment, but home is a place where you feel comfortable, where you are loved, where you are appreciated and respected" - 14 year old female Ukrainian refugee in Tbilisi, Georgia.

Educational concerns emerge prominently, especially among older children. The disruption of schooling in Ukraine due to conflict is a source of worry, while adaptation to new educational systems and overcoming language barriers pose challenges for those in host countries, notably in Romania.

Cultural adaptation and identity are other critical aspects that children in host countries grapple with. They express a sense of loss regarding their Ukrainian identity, even as they endeavor to assimilate into the local culture. Interestingly, a 16-year-old girl in Tbilisi, Georgia, shared insights on the influence of numerous Russians in Georgia, noting:

"Well, probably people who always confuse Ukrainians with Russians. I don't know, it hurts somehow. Yes, and they also say that we don't care at all. Ukrainians are Russians. It's the same thing, according to them." - 15 year old female Ukrainian refugee in Tbilisi, Georgia

Other comments about maintaining Ukrainian identity and preserving one's roots while adapting to new surroundings highlight how children and adolescents face a delicate balancing act. A 16 year old girl in Batumi, Georgia reflected that she hopes Ukrainians are able to keep their identity. She shared her feelings about how perhaps Georgians "...just feel very influenced by the Russian language, even if you ask a Georgian something, they will answer you in Russian. Yes, and I would like to see Georgians unite and somehow popularize their traditions, their culture, because it is as rich as ours. Well, to somehow feel that they are Georgians. So there was an identity. Like us, like Ukrainians..." (16 year old female Ukrainian refugee in Batumi, Georgia).

Engagement in hobbies and recreational activities was frequently mentioned as a source of comfort and normalcy, helping children cope with stress and change. However, most children and youth do not currently attend clubs or after-school activities and explained that they do not have the same options as they did back home. Others mentioned that the costs of such activities are prohibitive. Despite not engaging in structured activities, most younger children (ages 10-14) focused on activities they enjoy, like spending time with family, playing games or sports when asked about what makes them feel good, indicating that these are important pillars of their sense of wellbeing.

2. Ukrainian Children's Perceptions of New Environments: Support, Gaps, Challenges

FGDs present varied perspectives from children in Ukraine, Romania, Moldova, and Georgia on their experiences in the new environments to which they have been displaced. Some of the key themes identified related to children's perceptions and experience of their new homes across locations are presented in this section.

A common theme across locations is children's appreciation for safety and stability in their new environments, especially when contrasted with the uncertainties in Ukraine. "Here, I don't hear sirens or explosions. I can sleep," shared a boy, 13, from Moldova, highlighting the relief found in the absence of conflict. While most children express gratitude for the safety in host countries, their experiences with social integration vary. In Romania, language barriers are a significant challenge, yet many children report positive feelings of being welcomed. Despite encountering language difficulties, Ukrainian adolescents exhibit understanding mixed reactions from locals in Romania:

"I think it's normal when there are people who don't support us, it's their opinion... But in general, most of the Romanians are very kind to us, they always ask us how to help, they always invite us somewhere and I am glad that there are such bright people in Romania." - 13 year old female Ukrainian refugee in Bucharest, Romania

However, it's worth noting that in Constanta, there were several anecdotes of not feeling welcome by local populations. A 12 year old boy in Constanta explained, "A Romanian man came up to me on the bus and told us to get the hell out of here. This is their country. That's a bad attitude towards me." Another 16 year old girl in Constanta described a situation near her home, saying, "When we park the car near the house, they constantly throw eggs or tomatoes from the higher floors, or smear them on the car when they see that the license plates are Ukrainian".

In Moldova, younger children, mainly boys aged 8-13, express discomfort with their new environment, citing issues with public transport and a lack of outdoor activities. Fewer older children (ages 15-17) participated in focus groups, so it is difficult to identify any trends, but the older participants did express feelings of homesickness for Ukraine and a strong desire to go back. There are similar findings in Georgia, where younger children (ages 10-14) focused on concrete pleasures and activities they enjoy in Georgia, like the delicious food, beautiful cities, and areas to play (fields, stadiums, etc). One group of adolescents (16-17 years old) in Batumi, Georgia, gave several examples of times they did not feel welcome in the city. Two out of nine

adolescent females also discussed experiences or fears of sexual harassment in the streets and parks, explaining that they often face unwanted comments from men. While children everywhere expressed concern, longing, or feelings of homesickness in response to various questions about when they feel good, what's missing from their new home, and how they're coping, groups in Georgia highlighted this more frequently. Adolescent girls mentioned the impact of hearing or watching news from Ukraine as a significant stressor,

"Especially when I'm in an online class and I hear... 'Sorry, we can't continue, we've recently had bombing, we may have power outages. I start to worry about them.'" - 14 year old female refugee in Batumi, Georgia

For children and adolescents displaced inside Ukraine, perceptions of their new homes are mostly positive, but most participants expressed their wishes to go home, too. The older children (15-17) discussed the many opportunities available to them in Dnipro and the fact that they have many friends in the area. Younger children living in Chernivtsi explained that, while they like their new home, they would prefer to be at home.

In terms of things that are missing from their new home, younger children tended to focus on specific facilities they are used to using at home, like soccer fields, volleyball courts, a swimming pool, etc regardless of the location. Older children tended to focus more on structural issues like transportation (e.g. poor public transport options or traffic), the need for renovations in their homes, and noted the importance of overcoming the language barrier (especially in Romania). In Dnipro specifically, group participants ages 15-17 focused on the need for repairs to their shelters as the most pressing need or concern.

Generally speaking, younger children (10-14 years old) tend to focus on immediate, tangible aspects of their new environments, such as playgrounds, schools, and food. They are more sensitive to changes in routine and familiar surroundings. Older Children (15-17 years old) discuss more abstract concepts like cultural identity, future prospects, and the impact of displacement on their life goals. They are more likely to analyze the supportive nature of their new environment critically. As far as gender differences go, boys often highlight aspects like sports facilities, outdoor activities, and the presence of peers as important in their new environment. Girls tend to focus more on social dynamics, safety, and educational opportunities. They are more likely to discuss emotional support and the need for stability.

gender differences go, boys often highlight aspects like sports facilities, outdoor activities, and the presence of peers as important in their new environment. Girls tend to focus more on social dynamics, safety, and educational opportunities. They are more likely to discuss emotional support and the need for stability.

“And now it's probably more news from Ukraine, bombing, anxiety. And yet you still associate Ukraine with such a peaceful home, with your childhood. And when you see that your street was bombed. It's very difficult, it's very hard. And it can be like this mood all day long. You just don't know what will happen next” – 16 year old female Ukrainian refugee in Batumi

The children and youth participants perceive their new environments as supportive in several ways related to safety and security, continuation of education, and community support. Some of the key challenges they face in their new homes are related to language barriers, cultural displacement, and not having access to sufficient recreational opportunities. Children's perception of their new environments and settlements is a complex interplay of safety, educational opportunities, social integration, cultural adaptation, and recreational access. While there are supportive elements in these environments, challenges such as language barriers, cultural displacement, and limitations in recreational activities also significantly impact children's experiences. Understanding these nuanced perceptions is vital for addressing the diverse needs of children affected by displacement and conflict.

Source: World Vision Romania



3. Children's Views on New Educational Settings in Ukraine and Host Countries: Inclusion, Barriers, and Adaptation

Access to education is a crucial factor in children's perception of their new environments. Children's sense of belonging in their new educational setups is mixed. While some feel welcomed and integrated, others feel like outsiders due to cultural and language differences as well as differences in curriculum and teaching styles. Important to note is the fact that in several locations, children are attending two schools simultaneously: the online/virtual Ukrainian school and an in-person school in their area of displacement. Children expressed different opinions about both school types and many described challenges related to attending a later 'shift' of in-person school, impacting their ability to partake in extracurricular activities and adapt to their new home.

When speaking about in-person school, children often highlighted challenges due to differences in curriculum, teaching methods, and school culture. Negative perceptions of teachers are common, particularly in Moldova where children explained they often don't understand the lessons and have trouble making friends.

Younger children, particularly those aged 10-13 years, tend to be more sensitive to changes in teaching styles and school routines. Boys often expressed enthusiasm for new educational opportunities, focusing on positive aspects such as new subjects and extracurricular activities. However, they also acknowledged difficulties in adapting to different teaching styles and language barriers. Girls in this age group emphasized challenges more, like feeling overwhelmed by the new curriculum and experiencing isolation due to language barriers.

Adolescents (14-15 years old) showed a deeper understanding of their educational situation. Boys often expressed a pragmatic view, recognizing the importance of education for their future but feeling the pressure of adapting to a new system. They frequently mentioned the challenge of balancing academic demands with the need to integrate socially. Girls in this age group also highlighted these challenges but tended to focus more on the emotional and psychological impact of the transition.

"My mom and I love Ukraine very much, we miss it very much, even though my mom was born here. We miss Odessa, we want to go back as soon as possible" – 10 year old female Ukrainian refugee in Anenii Noi, Moldova

Language emerged as a significant barrier, more pronounced among older children, who were more aware of the nuances of language in understanding and engaging

with the curriculum. "It's hard to follow classes when you don't fully understand the language," a 14-year-old boy in Moldova explained. The quality of educational opportunities was also a concern, with perceptions varying from satisfaction to concerns about educational standards and support systems. Older children expressed more concerns about how the new educational setup aligns with their future goals. Several youth reflected on academic gaps due to curriculum disparities, while others felt the current school was much weaker than what they were used to.

Making new friends and integrating socially in schools is crucial for children's adaptation to their new educational setups. The extent to which children feel part of their new educational setups varies. Some appreciate the support and efforts made by teachers and schools to integrate them, while others feel isolated due to language and cultural differences.

"Our teachers are very good, they help and support us. Sometimes they translate when we don't understand. And the children here are very good"- 13 year old female Ukrainian refugee in Bucharest, Romania

When reflecting on participation in virtual school, the flexibility of virtual schooling is something older children and adolescents appreciate, as it allows them to better manage their schedules and allocate time for other activities or responsibilities. Yet, this age group is also more likely to be concerned about how online schooling aligns with their future educational and career goals. For children in host countries such as Georgia, Romania, and Moldova, additional challenges arise due to timings of classes and the need to balance integration activities in their host community with their online schooling schedule. Conversely, children attending virtual school within Ukraine face challenges related directly to the ongoing conflict, including frequent disruptions due to air raid alerts or power outages.

However, attending virtual school is not without its challenges. Technical difficulties such as unstable internet connections, lack of access to appropriate devices, and power outages can significantly impact the effectiveness of online learning. Students, particularly adolescents, feel the lack of face-to-face interaction with teachers and peers, affects their levels of motivation and engagement. The home environment, with its potential for distractions, poses another challenge, especially for younger children who may struggle to concentrate on their studies without the structured environment of a physical classroom.

Children's perceptions of their current educational setups are influenced by various factors, including language proficiency, cultural adaptation, and the quality of education. While some children have successfully integrated into their new schools, others continue to face significant barriers. Addressing these challenges through language support, cultural sensitivity training for educators, and curriculum alignment can help improve children's experiences in their new educational environments.



Source: World Vision Romania - PCC Hub in Suceava, Romania

4. Emotional Wellbeing of Displaced Ukrainian Children: Coping and Support Dynamics

The coping mechanisms and support networks of children in Ukraine and those displaced to neighbouring countries present a nuanced picture, highlighting the varied ways in which children adapt to the challenges of displacement and conflict. Based on these focus groups, children's strategies for coping with stress, depression, or negative emotions vary significantly by age, gender, and location.

Younger children, particularly those aged 10-13 years, tend to rely on immediate, tangible forms of coping, such as engaging in play or spending time with family. This age group often mentioned playing games, participating in sports, and enjoying outdoor activities as ways to feel better. For instance, a boy from Georgia mentioned playing tanks with his father as a way to lift his spirits. Younger girls often talked about watching shows, listening to music, and spending time with siblings to cope with negative feelings. They also mentioned seeking solace in hobbies like drawing or gymnastics.

Older children, aged 14-17 years, displayed a more varied set of coping mechanisms. They often spoke about needing personal space or time alone to process their emotions. For example, a Ukrainian girl in Tbilisi mentioned that she feels better when she is able to do what she wants, highlighting the importance of autonomy in her coping process. Boys in this age group frequently mentioned engaging in physical activities, such as playing soccer or basketball, as a means to cope with stress. They also spoke about the importance of social interactions with friends as a way to distract themselves from negative emotions.

Girls across all age groups tended to emphasize the importance of emotional support from friends and family. They frequently mentioned talking to close friends or family members when they felt down or needed advice. For instance, a Ukrainian girl in Moldova shared that she finds comfort in talking to her brother when she's feeling upset. This emphasis on emotional support and

communication is a key aspect of how girls in the focus groups described coping with challenges. Boys, on the other hand, often mentioned engaging in activities or hobbies as their primary coping mechanism. While their responses show they also value social interactions, their focus is more on doing something physical, moving out of the home boundaries rather than talking. Boys are more likely to engage in sports or physical activities as a means to deal with stress or negative emotions.

When it comes to seeking support, children across all locations mentioned turning to family members, particularly parents and siblings, as their primary source of support. Friends also play a crucial role in providing emotional support, especially for older children. Some children mentioned teachers or school counsellors as sources of support, but this was less common.

The analysis of coping strategies and support networks for displaced children reveals the importance of age-appropriate and gender-sensitive interventions. Understanding the specific needs and preferences of different age groups and genders is crucial in providing effective support and creating environments where children feel safe and able to express and manage their emotions. For younger children, creating opportunities for play and interaction with peers is essential, while for older children, ensuring access to emotional support and activities that allow for autonomy and self-expression is key.

"I'm used to not plan for the distant future, because after the war situation started, you cannot plan something else. And we left at once, all here [to] Georgia. Everything was ruined for me. And it was very upsetting. Now I don't plan such big moments, you have to be right now. Don't think about tomorrow. Because it's gonna be hard for you later." - 15 year old female Ukrainian refugee in Tbilisi, Georgia

CONCLUSIONS

The comparative analysis of focus group discussions reveals that displaced children from Ukraine exhibit resilience and adaptability in various environments. However, distinct challenges and needs are present based on age, gender, and location. It is crucial to address these factors in providing support and interventions to ensure the well-being and successful integration of displaced children. Some initial conclusions are:

- Safety, family support, education, and recreational opportunities are crucial for children's well-being in displacement. However, there is no one-size-fits all and these approaches need to be tailored interventions to address identified language barriers and cultural adaptation challenges by age group.
- Emotional and psychological support, particularly for older children and adolescents, is essential.
- Recreational and educational programs need to be accessible, affordable, and sensitive to the cultural backgrounds of displaced children.
- Specific attention is required to address the safety concerns of adolescent girls, especially in public spaces. This could involve targeted information provision and/or awareness raising about their rights, what to do in case of an incident, safe communication channels to access information, etc.
- This report underscores the diverse experiences and needs of children affected by conflict and displacement. A nuanced understanding of these experiences is key to developing effective humanitarian programs that support the well-being of children in such challenging circumstances.



Source: World Vision Moldova - Child Friendly Space

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop and implement language support programs that are tailored to different age groups, helping children overcome language barriers in their new environments. Include cultural orientation sessions that facilitate understanding and integration into the host community, while also honoring and preserving children's cultural identity. This is most relevant in Romania (Bucharest and Constanta) due to significant language barriers highlighted by children in these areas. Cultural orientation sessions can also be beneficial in Moldova (Chisinau, Balti, Anenii Noi) and Georgia (Batumi, Tbilisi) to help children integrate and preserve their cultural identity.
2. Establish emotional and psychological support systems for children and adolescents, including counselling services, support groups, and mental health workshops. Ensure these services are age-appropriate and accessible, with a focus on addressing the specific emotional challenges faced by older children and teenagers. This could be particularly important in Georgia (Tbilisi and Batumi) and Romania (Bucharest and Constanta), where many children reported feelings of isolation and challenges in adaptation.
3. Create recreational and educational programs that are not only affordable but also culturally sensitive. Programs should be designed to include activities that are familiar and enjoyable to displaced children, promoting a sense of normalcy and community. In Georgia (Batumi and Tbilisi), programs can address the lack of recreational activities. In Moldova and Romania, they can facilitate better social integration and provide a sense of normalcy.
4. Conduct targeted awareness campaigns focusing on the safety and rights of adolescent girls. Include information on how to identify and respond to unsafe situations, legal rights, and available support services. Establish safe communication channels for girls to seek help and report incidents. This is especially relevant in Georgia to address the concerns raised by adolescent girls.
5. Strengthen community-based child protection mechanisms by training local volunteers and staff in child protection principles and practices. While the specifics will depend on the context and community preferences/willingness, there is potential to establish community watch groups to monitor and respond to safety concerns, particularly in refugee shelters and schools across locations.

6. Collaborate with local schools to facilitate the integration of displaced children. This can include teacher training on cultural sensitivity, peer buddy systems for new students, and potentially modifications to the curriculum to accommodate different learning backgrounds and languages. This is more crucial in Romania (Bucharest, Constanta) and Moldova (Chisinau, Balti, Anenii Noi) to address the challenges faced by children in adapting to new educational systems and language barriers.

7. Encourage and facilitate parental involvement in children's education and well-being. Offer family support programs that provide parents with the tools and knowledge to help their children adapt to new environments. This can include parenting workshops, family counselling, and community networking events. Family support programs can be particularly beneficial in areas where children expressed a strong desire to return to Ukraine, such as Moldova (Chisinau, Balti, Anenii Noi) and Georgia (Tbilisi and Batumi).

8. Implement robust monitoring and evaluation systems in all areas of intervention to assess the effectiveness of programs and interventions. Regularly collect feedback from children, their families, and community members to continuously improve program design and implementation, ensuring they meet the evolving needs of displaced children and adolescents.

9. Incorporate feedback loops back to displaced communities to promote a dynamic, responsive, and collaborative approach to programming, ultimately leading to more impactful and sustainable outcomes.

Source: World Vision Romania - PCC Hub in Bucharest, Romania





For more information regarding World Vision's Ukraine Crisis Response, please go to:

<https://www.wvi.org/emergencies/ukraine>

For more information please contact: paul_kiggwe@wvi.org



It takes a world
to end violence against children

World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. Inspired by our Christian values, we are dedicated to working with the world's most vulnerable people. We serve all people regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender.

We believe a world without violence against children is possible, and World Vision's global campaign It takes a world to end violence against children is igniting movements of people committed to making this happen. No one person, group or organisation can solve this problem alone, it will take the world to end violence against children.