# ENSURING HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION: THE CASE OF THE UKRAINE REFUGEES' CHILDREN IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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***Abstract:*** *A large number of Ukrainians are now refugees due to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The Republic of Moldova was and still is the main transit for Ukrainian refugees as well as it hosts a considerable number of Ukrainian refugees. UNHCR claims that, since the full-scale invasion, 118,750 Ukrainian refugees have chosen to remain in Moldova of whom 58% are females, 44% are children, and an estimated 19% are older persons (UNHCR 2024a). One of the most important demands of refugees´ children is education. Although Moldovan authorities set up some measures to foster Ukrainian children's access to local schools, only 2,314 were enrolled in schools, out of the approximately 37,000 school-age refugees living in the Republic of Moldova, according to the data from the Ministry of Education (MEC 2024a). In addition to ministry measures to foster access and quality education for Ukrainian refugee children, several local NGOs came together to assist in response to the rise in the number of child refugees. However, there are significant difficulties that refugee children in Moldova face in accessing education and benefiting from high-quality education, due to which the current master's thesis is proposed. Therefore, this study intends to advance knowledge of the variables affecting the effective delivery of high-quality education to children who are refugees. For this reason, the qualitative methodology was used, involving field notes, and interviews serving as the main data sources. Although the study's findings showed difficulties in obtaining a high-quality education, the research held significance as it illuminates the elements that may serve as a foundation for finding solutions to tackle the issues. The curriculum that was put in place at the school helped the Ukrainian refugee children adjust to life in Moldova and*

*gave them a sense of cultural significance. This study provides a distinct viewpoint on the current circumstances surrounding Ukrainian refugee children studying in Moldova, which will help to advance information on the issue of excellent education for these children.*

***Key words:*** *curriculum, high-quality education, Republic of Moldova, Ukrainian Refugees Children, Variables.*

## Introduction

According to UNHCR data, nearly 6.5 million Ukrainians fled their country and live in other countries as refugees (UNHCR 2024b). The same report argues that more than 1 million Ukrainians crossed the Moldovan border since the beginning of the Russian full-scale invasion on 24th of February, 2022. Currently, more than 118,750 are living in Moldova, waiting for the end of the war, and trying to navigate the hardships of displacement[37]. According to UNDP, the Republic of Moldova has faced one of the largest waves of refugees per capita in Europe since the start of the war in Ukraine in February 2022[38]. To address this, the Moldovan government has made a huge effort to host the refugees from Ukraine and offered to Ukrainian refugees' temporary protection. The goal of the policy is to give refugees access to fundamental rights and services as well as a more solid legal status within the nation. The temporary protection status entitles refugees to: Remain on the territory of the Republic of Moldova for a limited period of time; Work; Accommodation in the Temporary placement centers for persons in need; Primary and emergency healthcare; Education for children; and social assistance services (UNHCR 2024b). Since February 2024, 2,314 were enrolled in schools out of the approximately 37,000 school-age refugees were living in the Republic of Moldova according to data from Ministry of Education[39].

Data from the General Inspectorate for Migration show that a total of 41,328 Ukrainian citizens are granted temporary protection status in the Republic of Moldova. The highest number of beneficiaries of temporary protection is in Chisinau Municipality - 21,992 persons[40].

Since Ukrainian refugees arrived in Moldova, issues with housing, income, health, safety, and above all education have arisen. Many children of Ukrainian refugees struggled to have access to local schools and education. The government has made a major effort to develop long-term

[37] (UNHCR 2024b)
[38] (UNDP 2024)
[39] (MEC 2024b)
[40] (PMC 2024)

solutions for education, considering the increasing arrivals of Ukrainian refugees' children. The Moldovan government fostered the integration of refugee children in schools as one of its emergency measures[41]. However, there are significant difficulties that refugee children in Moldova face in accessing education and benefiting from high-quality education, due to which the current master's thesis is proposed. Therefore, this study intends to advance knowledge of the variables affecting the effective delivery of high-quality education to children who are refugees.

**Research Context**

Education is crucial for refugee children's future, and the UNHCR and Moldova government have developed policies to ensure access. However, issues like lack of school places, insufficient teachers, and language barriers hinder their education. A study investigates the main variables affecting the quality of education in Moldova.

Republic of Moldova is a landlocked country between Romania and Ukraine and it is seen as one of the most peaceful countries in the world with its economy heavily relying on agriculture and remittances sent by Moldovan migrants abroad. The major ethnic groups that coexist in Moldova are: Moldovan 75.1%, Romanian 7%, Ukrainian 6.6%, Gagauz 4.6%, Russian 4.1%, Bulgarian 1.9%, other 0.8%[42]. According to the language spoken: Moldovan/Romanian 80.2% (official) (56.7% identify their mother tongue as Moldovan, which is virtually the same as Romanian; 23.5% identify Romanian as their mother tongue), Russian 9.7%, Gagauz 4.2% (a Turkish language), Ukrainian 3.9%, Bulgarian 1.5%, Romani 0.3%, other 0.2%; as of March 2023, Romanian replaced Moldovan as the name of Moldova's official language[43]

The researcher chose Moldova as a case study for the research due to its involvement in managing refugees' crises and its proximity to Ukraine, one of Europe's largest waves of refugees, its potential EU membership, and its multiple political, economic, and security crises.

Another factor was the common soviet past of the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine (soviet educational system) as well as the knowledge of Russian language, that is widely spoken and understood by the most post-soviet countries. The instruction language in schools in the Republic of Moldova is Romanian but there are also Russian schools.

[41] (MEC 2024a)
[42] (CIA 2024)
[43] (CIA 2024)

**Research aim**

The aim of this study is to investigates how Republic of Moldova government responded to the challenges of integrating the Ukraine refugees' children into the education system since their arrival in Moldova from 2022 to 2024. Their stay in Moldova can bring both short and long-term effects on the education system.

**Research Objectives**

To analyze the main factors that influence the quality of education provided to Ukrainian refugee children in the Republic of Moldova.

To identify the main difficulties encountered by the Refugee Children in the Moldovan education system.

**Research Questions**

The focus of this research is on the need to comprehend the requirements of the right to education for the Ukrainian refugees' children as well as the responsibilities owed by the Republic of Moldova at the national, regional, and international levels. It is the responsibility of the Moldovan government to ensure that it is fully operational so that every child who is a refugee from Ukraine can fully enjoy their right to education. Additionally, there is a basic question about what can be done better to safeguard and empower the refugees' children when the right to education is not respected, protected, and fulfilled. As a result, the following research questions were formulated:

1. To what extent the Ukrainian refugees' children can access quality education?

2. Which are the main challenges that Refugee Children face in the Moldovan education system?

**Methodology**

This study investigates the quality of education for Ukrainian refugees in Moldova, using a qualitative research methodology. The study examines the experiences of teachers in the educational program, using data from teachers' opinions, observations, and interviews with refugee parents. The aim is to understand the connection between the refugees' experiences and their world.

The researcher used observation, field notes, and interviews to study the experiences of Ukrainian refugees in Moldova. The researcher used semi-structured interviews to collect information, focusing on action lines and conducting a thorough investigation of respondents, as per Merriam's 2002 theory. This is in line with Jamshed, that considers that interview guidelines aid researchers in conducting comprehensive and systematic interviews with respondents, with a focus on planned action lines[44].

[44] (Jamshed 2014)

**Results and Discussions**

This chapter discusses a study examining the factors affecting the quality of education provided to Ukrainian refugees at a Republic of Moldova refugee center. The research focuses on teaching language, educational materials, and learning type. Data was analyzed from two participant types: teachers, and parents. The findings provide insights into the educational system in Moldova. Participants' categories were assigned codes, for example: Teachers (for the focal group discussion) = T1, T2, etc.; P1 was the parents

**How teaching language affects the quality of education provided to children of Ukrainian refugees**

Responses differed on the language of education used with refugee children. Russian language was mentioned by the majority of interviewees (T8, T7, T3, T4, T2, P1). T1, one of the participants, mentioned Ukrainian. In this context, participant (T8) said**:**

**'**Language interpreters are available to refugee children who are unable to understand the spoken languages in the Republic of Moldova refugees center, where Russian and Romanian are the most commonly spoken languages'

Participants (P1, T3, T1) indicated that using Russian as the instruction language has made teaching and learning simpler. This has affected the way that education is provided for refugee children. In schools, it facilitates communication, according to certain participants (T8, P1). Participant (T3) specifically mentioned that:

'Ukraine refugees' children comprehension of classroom material and their ability to interact with peers have both been successful due to language assistance provision and frequent use of Russian language. Due to the classroom aides' provision, writing of examination has become successful'.

**The role educational material played in the provision of high-quality education to the refugee children**

The majority of interviewees (T1, P1, T2,) indicated that the school has obtain instructional resources in order to provide education for refugee children. Participant (T3) expressed the following viewpoint**:**

**'**That schools receive a large number of instructional materials and all the refugee children benefits from educational materials provided, which has a positive impact on the teaching and learning process**.'**

Regarding the source of support, the majority of participants (T1, P1, T4, and T7) mentioned Education Cannot Wait. Other participants T1 said UNICEF and UNHCR. Participant T1 mentioned that**:**

Even though UNICEF provides the majority of the funding to the schools, which has assisted in providing education for refugee children, it is incredibly insufficient to meet all of the needs of the schools.

The majority of participants (T1,T2,T3,T4,T5,P1,P2,,) said that they would support integrating refugee children into regular schools.

Since education in Moldova is centered on technology, the majority of refugee children use online learning environments. As a result, (T1) said:

children who are not proficient users of technology have additional challenges when it comes to attending classes; even prior to the present refugee crisis, Moldova had limited access to specialized assistive technologies and gadgets, which put young students who lacked IT literacy at danger of being kept out of school. The flood of refugee children, many of whom lack basic IT skills, makes it even more necessary to provide them with specialized instruction in using technology and gadgets, as well as qualified educators and curricula tailored to their needs.

**The kind of teaching and learning style used for provision of quality education to the refugee children**

When asked what type of learning method to utilize for instruction (P1, T2, T1).

According to participant (T3):

teaching children of refugees poses special teaching strategies for educators, as does teaching refugees from different linguistic backgrounds requires more energy, skills and efforts.

Teachers implemented innovative teaching methods that encouraged active participation from the refugees, maintained their interest in the material, improved their understanding of the lessons, and increased their sense of accomplishment. According to T3, T1, and other participants. The need for teacher trainings to increase their knowledge was brought up by other participants (P1). According to participant (T5):

UNICEF provides resource facilitators to the Republic of Moldova with assistance in teaching the refugee children enrolled there. The responsibility of assisting all the refugee children depend on the Ministry of education because there aren't enough facilitators to handle them.

**Discussion Findings**

**How teaching language affects the quality of education provided to children of Ukrainian refugees**

Russian is the most common language used in schools to train refugee children, facilitating communication and test performance, but can be challenging for lower graders.

Refugee children in Moldova experienced minimal language barriers during lessons, with Russian language enhancing their comprehension and communication with teachers. This lack of linguistic barriers led to increased interest in education and a love for school lessons. Despite language barriers, most educators, including Ukrainians, provided assistance, ensuring refugees had access to high-quality education.

**The role educational material played in the provision of high-quality education to the refugee children**

A further result describes how Education Cannot Wait and UNICEF provided educational materials to the Moldova refugee children, which are then utilized in the teaching and learning process. Reference resources, textbooks, teachers' manuals, pens and pencils are progressively being made available in effort to aid in the education of refugee children.

**The kind of teaching and learning style used for provision of quality education to the refugee children**

The refugee accommodation center use of modern learning methods makes learning more dynamic and interactive for students, benefiting all learning types for the children of refugees. Modern teaching method make refugee children active and auditory[45]. The cognitive thinking skills of refugee children are developed through innovative educational approaches. These methods of instruction improve in-depth learning. The children of refugees likewise analyze the subject in great detail and consistently. The innovative teaching strategy has allowed the refugee children to excel academically.

## Conclusion

The Moldovan government faces challenges in integrating refugee children into the school system due to its first experience accommodating refugees. Schools are crucial for socializing children across cultural boundaries, developing national identity, and imparting values. Refugee children often witness the collapse of their home country's school system during resettlement**.** The new school community often overlooks the separation caused by refugee developments, which can negatively impact a child's development. Some argue that adopting the refugee child's culture, such as introducing their native country, can help foster healthy development.

This research showed that children of Ukrainian refugees benefit greatly from a high-quality education in terms of both their academic

[45] (Jones and Harris 2012)

and personal success in school. The research showed that learners who attend lessons with highly qualified teachers, sufficient resources, and a nurturing learning atmosphere regularly achieve academic success and acquire critical life skills. These results highlight the necessity of quality-over-quantity educational policies. Encouraging educational success on a larger scale requires funding for learner support programs and teacher training. Despite the study's narrow emphasis (Ukrainian refugees' children in Moldova), the consistency of the findings points to the general applicability of the high-quality education concepts; however, more research in a variety of settings may yield new insights.

**Recommendation**

The Republic of Moldova and its development partners, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), must ensure that policies established to provide Ukrainian refugee children with high-quality education are successfully implemented.

The effects of psychological trauma on refugee children's academic performance must be considered for further research.

More professional training and workshops for educators must be arranged by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture to move away from ineffective teaching strategies that waste learners' time and cause boredom

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