UNICEF Refugee response programme results (2022 – to date)

Since the onset of the war in Ukraine, UNICEF has been working closely with national, regional and local authorities to expand services in child protection, education, health and nutrition, WASH, and social protection. UNICEF integrates into its work the principles of social cohesion, accountability to affected populations, and gender equality in addition to non-discrimination and inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Health

- 23,362 Children and women received primary health care services through UNICEF supported mechanisms

Education

- 27,662 Children accessed formal or non-formal education, including early learning
- 27,663 Children received individual learning materials

Social and Behavior Change

- 2,217,681 People reached through messaging on prevention and access to services

WASH

- 38,635 People accessing a sufficient quantity of potable water for domestic needs
- 21,985 People reached with critical WASH supplies

Child Protection

- 25,703 Children and caregivers accessed mental health and psychosocial support
- 181,080 People had access to safe spaces, protection and support hubs

In the spotlight

As the new schoolyear is on the doorstep – UNICEF and partners are working tirelessly to support and sustain the critical efforts to provide uninterrupted access to education to children and adolescents from Ukraine. From very low figures initially – the enrolment of Ukraine children and adolescents in the education system of Romania multiplied following a reform of the governmental cash assistance programme for Ukraine refugees (‘50/20’) in May 2023 that made school enrolment a condition for the assistance receipt. Supported by UNICEF and partners, children from Ukraine like Lisa can now return to school and reclaim some of their childhood and adolescence.

Overall, 63 learning hubs operate with the support of UNICEF – including 28 play, learning and parenting hubs, 24 education hubs, and 11 youth hubs – extending access to non-formal learning opportunities to over 10 thousand additional children from Ukraine.

Lisa (12) is happy with her new laptop which she can use to continue her online classes. In collaboration with HP and the Global Business Coalition for Education, UNICEF and partners delivered nearly 3,000 laptops across Romania alongside textbooks and learning materials, multilingual conversation guides and stationary supplies.
UNICEF’s partnerships with the Government of Romania, national and local authorities, UNHCR and other United Nations agencies, local and international NGOs, donors, and supra-national entities (cross-border initiatives, European Union support) have been vital to the provision of services and support to people fleeing the war in Ukraine.

Coordinated efforts of all partners enabled uninterrupted day-to-day running of an extensive network of all-encompassing services including direct assistance, protection, and referral to legal aid, medical assistance, and mental health and psychosocial support. An estimated 350 thousand people have had access to services in Blue Dots, safe spaces and service hubs. Blue Dots were established by UNICEF with UNHCR and other partners to provide safe spaces and essential services to Ukraine refugees - initially along the borders and later also in urban areas inside the country. Blue Dots integrate a minimum set of protection and other social services and referrals for children, families and all other vulnerable populations. Over 180 thousand people benefited from at least one service in UNICEF-supported safe spaces, protection, education and health hubs.

Looking ahead

Volodymyr (15) – known to his friends as Vova – is participating in Romanian language classes in a classroom at the UNICEF-supported ‘Lacul Tei’ refugee transit centre in Bucharest, Romania. Vova fled the war from his home in Mykolaiv, Ukraine, and lives together with his mother in the transit refugee centre where he studies online and takes part in activities offered by local NGOs.

Ukraine refugee response in Romania has transitioned from a primarily emergency one to a wider framework for the protection of all vulnerable populations through integrated service models run by the local communities and authorities. Lessons learnt, experience and knowledge built as part of the response to Ukraine refugee crisis transcend the boundaries of Romania and can be a starting point for cross-border system strengthening as part of long-term emergency preparedness and response. At the same time, all phases of the response remain critical to the ongoing efforts to respond to the changing needs of the refugee populations.

Cross-cutting, transversal, approaches (gender, adolescents, etc) remain integral to the UNICEF response.

For additional information on UNICEF’s 2023 Humanitarian response for children outside of Ukraine please visit UNICEF Ukraine 2023 Humanitarian Action for Children.

Funding requirements for 2023

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Area</th>
<th>Funding Requirement</th>
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<td>Health &amp; Nutrition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child Protection</td>
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<td>Social Policy</td>
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<td>WASH</td>
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500 days of the response: from immediate needs to inclusion

The 24 February 2022 full-scale military invasion launched by Russian Federation against Ukraine caused the largest displacement within Europe since the Second World War and inflicted irreparable harm and suffering on millions of people and children forced to flee their homes and seek refuge all over Europe from air raids, atrocities, and war traumas. As a neighbouring country of Ukraine, Romania has had a dual role of both a transit and a destination country for Ukraine refugees. Among them are highly vulnerable individuals and groups in need of different types of services, protection, and support.

Ukraine refugee crisis response in Romania is organized under the auspices of several regional and supra-national response frameworks – starting with the EU Temporary Protection Directive. As part of the UNICEF Humanitarian Appeal for Children (HAC) for Ukraine, the UNICEF response in Romania is aligned with the UNHCR-led Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) and the National Response Plan of the Government of Romania.

**Delivery through the national systems** is a core aspect – and concurrently a lens and a cornerstone of the vision, conceptualization, and evolution – of the UNICEF response. UNICEF has been actively supporting the government and national systems of Romania in responding to the needs of Ukraine refugees and ensuring their access to guaranteed rights and protection.

In response to Ukraine refugee crisis, UNICEF swiftly adjusted its programming and engaged in the response at its onset. As a UN agency with a longstanding presence in Romania since the 1990s with a specific mandate and unrivalled expertise related to the protection and promotion of the best interest and rights of the child, UNICEF has had a critical role in responding to, although not limited to, the needs of child and adolescent refugees from Ukraine. UNICEF and partners established the first Blue Dot for refugees in Ukraine’s neighbouring counties in Sighet, Romania on 1 March 2022.

In conceptualizing and delivering the Ukraine refugee crisis response in Romania UNICEF has been following – within wider response frameworks – the journeys and needs of Ukraine refugees. At the onset of the refugee crisis, UNICEF quickly proved an indispensable actor able to mobilize, convene, and guide partners to sustain and adjust the response to the ever-evolving needs of children and families in their journey from war to safety, and from immediate needs to social inclusion.

**Transition from Blue Dots to the ‘Blue Grid’** approach involving a progressive handover of key response activities to the local authorities remained the focus of UNICEF work with municipalities and county councils. UNICEF field presence has become one of the most valuable aspects of our engagement in Ukraine refugee response as it created opportunities to mobilize local networks and work directly with decentralized authorities and other local actors.

Throughout Ukraine refugee crisis, UNICEF has been working around the clock with governmental, non-governmental and other partners to sustain the response despite a multitude of challenges great and small – from the weather elements in the mountainous areas of Romania through the insufficient number of frontline workers and volunteers to respond to the critical needs of refugees at the borders to the elephantine task of registering incoming refugees and ensuring monitoring and protection of populations at risk.

By joining forces with the local actors, an outstanding potential has been unfolded to – through Ukraine refugee response – continue addressing deep systemic issues of wider social inclusion, provision of community-based services, and social cohesion. Efforts to ensure the sustainability of response with all its value and potential created in terms of knowledge, networks, human capacity, mechanisms, and processes are integral to the UNICEF vision and ongoing journey in and beyond Romania.

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**Response highlights by sector**

**Child Protection** is at the core of the UNICEF response – from protection standard-setting to providing extensive support to the Government. UNICEF is particularly invested in identifying and protecting unaccompanied and separated children as one of the most vulnerable populations fleeing the war in Ukraine. The UNICEF-supported digital tool PRIMERO has helped the National Authority for Child Protection and Adoption in identifying and providing individual case management to Ukraine children at risk. PRIMERO registered a total of 30,000 children since the onset of Ukraine refugee crisis.

Children and other populations at risk are particularly vulnerable and therefore at the core of the UNICEF response. Prevention of and response to gender-based violence, prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), and anti-trafficking are integral to Protection. Core protection standards are embedded into all aspects of the UNICEF response. Internalization of the core standards of protection by the partners is a critically important part of the UNICEF response. In 2023, over 80 individuals received training on PSEA including training of staff to appropriately handle and refer SEA allegations in accordance with established procedures.

**Education** remains one of the most critical and challenging areas of the response. Prior to Ukraine refugee crisis, COVID-19 demonstrated the importance of uninterrupted access to education – particularly to structurally disadvantaged communities and regions. As learning gaps caused by crises are extremely challenging to bridge, addressing and overcoming structural barriers to the education of children and adolescents from Ukraine has been at the core of the UNICEF education response.

Systemic barriers in education are increasingly prominent in the context of reforms of the governmental cash assistance programme for Ukraine refugees (‘50/20’) that now makes school enrolment a condition for the assistance receipt. UNICEF remains an essential partner to the Government of Romania in identifying and delivering solutions to support all education pathways of Ukraine children and adolescents.

As part of the education response, 63 education hubs, 28 play, learning and parenting hubs, and 11 youth hubs have been established to provide safe learning spaces to over 10,000 children and adolescents from Ukraine, including delivery of 3,000 laptops and over 10,000 textbooks and learning materials, multilingual conversation guides and stationary supplies.

**Health** has also been characterized by delivery of the response through the national systems. As education and protection, health is a pillar of the response through which UNICEF strives to create a wider integration and inclusion net to progressively absorb Ukraine refugees and all other vulnerable populations. Access to primary healthcare, including referrals and immunization, have been the main areas of the UNICEF health response. Approximately 9,000 pieces of medical supplies have been delivered to healthcare institutions and partners engaged in the response since its onset.

UNICEF and partners supported Ukraine refugees in accessing healthcare system in the context of language and other systemic barriers in Romania. Communication and trust building between Ukraine refugees and the receiving communities including service providers overwhelmed by the scale and effect of Ukraine refugee crisis has generally been one of the most powerful and meaningful aspects of the response.

As part of the health response – the ‘Caring for Mothers’ network, launched in 2022 by the Association of Independent Midwives with the support of UNICEF, improved the capacities of 250 medical staff in primary care and maternity wards to better communicate with vulnerable patients such as Ukraine refugees.

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Fedor (1) and his brother Platon (6 months) are playing and having fun at a child friendly space supported by UNICEF in the Blue Dot hub in Galați. In October 2022, Fedir and his mother Sasha (24) fled Zaporizhzhia and found refuge in Romania.
As Ukraine refugee crisis began in wintertime, UNICEF actively sought effective solutions to operationalize the response in low, often sub-zero, temperatures and provide the necessary assistance to Ukraine refugees. As one of the areas of response, UNICEF engaged in covering the basic needs of refugees by, for instance, purchasing and delivering nearly 28,000 sets of winter clothes and blankets. Ensuring access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) to Ukraine refugee populations was another aspect of the UNICEF response. Through the WASH component, inter alia, toilets for people with disabilities were installed at the RomExpo site in the capital Bucharest.

Accountability to the affected populations (AAP) is integral to the UNICEF response. In line with our vision, UNICEF works on strengthening shock responsiveness of the national social protection system and building its capacity to include all vulnerable populations. In the light of recent reforms of the governmental cash assistance programme for Ukraine refugees (‘50/20’), UNICEF sought feedback from the affected populations on the potential impact of reforms on their lives in Romania and shared the findings with the Government and other actors. In conceptualizing and delivering the response, UNICEF strives to integrate rights-based approaches inclusive of the needs of vulnerable populations and integrate human rights protection and gender considerations into the response and wider work of partners.

By way of conclusion

While looking ahead how to best apply the legacy of response, it is important to remember that Ukraine refugee crisis is not over and thousands of people and children – each with their own vulnerabilities, needs, and coming from different backgrounds – still require support and assistance. Amid high uncertainty surrounding the war in Ukraine, sustaining the response is of critical importance.

Concurrently, integration and social inclusion of Ukraine refugees are growing in importance by the day. Social cohesion as a goal in itself and a tool towards progressive integration of Ukraine refugees in the host country is increasingly necessary. In that sense, continued co-operation and institutional capacity building efforts are needed to integrate the lessons learnt and value created of the response into pre-existing efforts of supporting and strengthening the national systems to re-include and ensure access to fundamental rights and protection to all vulnerable populations.

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