

# Ukraine

## Country Overview

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## Country name

Ukraine

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## Introduction

In the last 5 years, Ukraine has focused on integrating social and emotional skills into the national school programme. At the national level, there was a recognition for the need to improve the educational system from an early stage, where social and emotional skills were recognized as the foundation. Since 2018, all schools in Ukraine adopted the new programme, based on 10 basic competences. Three of them are related to social skills: sense of entrepreneurship, social and civic competencies, and cultural awareness. Ukraine has gained a high awareness of how important these skills are. UNICEF is also supporting Ukraine by analysing the best practices from other countries. Non-governmental organisations contribute to social and emotional skills research and development.

## Development

In 2019, Ukraine spent approximately 6.4% of the GDP, including 0.9% on preschool education, for education as a whole (National Statistical Bureau of Ukraine 2019). The Law on Preschool Education, 2001 (Zakon star doshkil'nu osvitu), ensures admittance to state-funded preschool institutions for all young children. It laid out the basis for the country's present framework. Ukraine is among other countries with a high enrolment rate in preschools. In 2020, Ukraine's pre-primary gross enrolment ratio was 86%, contrasted with 75% in other European countries and Central Asia areas (The World Bank, World Development Indicators (2020). Pre-primary gross enrollment ratio).

Ukraine's schooling system faces long standing difficulties, such as the lack of educators. The fundamental reasons young professionals are not attracted to the workforce are the low compensation and the perceived low social status (Putcha et al., 2018). Therefore, the public confidence in education is diminishing.

Ukraine is currently carrying out a significant instruction change, the so-called New Ukrainian School. UNICEF upholds the Ministry of Education and Science's (MoES) endeavours to increase preschoolers' admittance to early education by establishing comprehensive quality conditions in preschools in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Efforts incorporate ways to structure educators' skills, to raise parental awareness, to foster children's social and emotional skills, and to provide up-to-date instruments for support (Litichenko et al, 2021).

Moreover, UNICEF and the MoES have implemented an asynchronous e-learning programme for teachers that teaches life skills. It has spread to 21,000 educators across the country and would thus impact up to 240,000 children.

Additionally, the new Law on Education, 2017 (Zakon star osvity, 2017), implemented changes to the required qualification and professional development of teachers. For example, linking an increased salary to increased qualifications and providing further options for ongoing professional development.

Recent studies based on the best possible practice implementation from countries in the European Union (Melnik et al., 2019) have identified several areas needing improvement for the higher education of preschool teachers. This includes aspects such as expanding the curriculum to include topics about preschoolers socio-emotional development, general psychological wellbeing

and supporting children from a multicultural environment.

In Ukraine, instruction is mostly teacher-directed, often because teachers lack the knowledge and training in child-centred practices (Ognevyuk, 2016), hence the necessary changes needed for higher education that aims to support future teachers in new child-centred practices. These changes will contribute to the improvement of social and emotional skills (SES) in preschoolers.

The issues with preschool education in the European Union and in Ukraine are consistent with one another. They centre around the personality of the child, considering physical, mental, and social-emotional development (Pantiuk et al., 2019). Thus, the new state-funded programme focuses on sustainable changes to the pre-school curriculum across various areas: family, education, state, and NGOs.

As stated by Diekstra et al. (2008): "Given the present state of knowledge regarding the effectiveness of Social Emotional and Life Skills Learning, countries can no longer be excused for not providing the means and support to schools to offer such programmes".

The practices in the New Ukrainian School reform are developed to "change the educational tradition, to raise an innovator and citizen who can make responsible decisions and respects human rights" (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2016). The Reform was created in September 2017, describing the pillars of the new approach to education to be rolled out as part of a nationwide programme.

Since 2018, all schools in Ukraine adopted the new programme, which is based on 10 basic competences. Three of them are related to social skills:

- 1) Sense of entrepreneurship. (Builds on skills for innovation and being a self-starter and implementing a logical and balanced approach in business endeavours);
- 2) Social and civic competencies. (Social competences such as the ability to work with others to achieve results, to prevent and resolve conflicts and reach compromises, support for social and cultural diversity), and;
- 3) Cultural awareness. (A set of skills related to art appreciation, cultural responsiveness and "respect for diversity").

There are a few more Lifelong learning skills, like the way children perceive themselves and the world around them, the ability to work with others, to achieve results, to prevent and resolve conflicts and reach compromises, support for social and cultural diversity, etc., in which children are trained.

There are various local developments and non-government organisations (NGO), that work on different aspects of SES. Smart Education (Smart Osvita, 2019) NGO is a New Ukrainian School partner who supported the official web-page of the reform and the training of teachers to implement the new knowledge. The mission of Smart Education is to raise an innovator and citizen who can make responsible decisions and respects human rights. Each teacher or educational specialist has access to the platform. The eLearning tool hosts different techniques and instruments for developing the new skills at school. This is a result of a long-term active national campaign of collaboration and sharing good practices.

UNICEF is also supporting Ukraine with analysis and best practices from other countries. Other NGOs contributing to SES research and development:

Krok za Krok (Крок за Кроком, 2022) – offers early diagnostics and prevention to children at risk of developmental delays. This includes support of gross and fine motor skills development, social-emotional skills, behaviour issues, and speech therapy;

Institute for Education Development (IED) (Institute for Education Development, 2014) – The main mission of the 2013 founded NGO is to "promote innovation and reform in education. The IED aims to provide high quality research and expertise in the fields of education, education policy, humanities and social sciences";

International Step-by-Step Association (International Step-by-Step Association, n.d.) – "The mission of the Ukrainian Step by Step Foundation is to promote the reforms in the system of education towards quality, inclusive education for children aged from birth till 8 years old, with active engagement of families and local communities". They place special focus on disadvantaged and

underrepresented groups, such as Roma children and children with disabilities, and;

Results for development (Results for development, 2022) – is an international organisation that aims to promote programmes for early childhood development. They provide research services, awareness campaigns and funding.

## Assessment

The new national programme is implemented on a nationwide level. Hence, it is mandatory across all pre-school age groups. The evaluation is also carried out centrally, by the government.

Evaluation is done every six months. It is based on a centralised monitoring and reporting system. As stated in the New Ukrainian School reform (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine): "... a new system for the measurement and evaluation of educational outcomes will be created. In particular, the content of the External Independent Assessment will be changed."

This is achieved by observation through specifically developed checklists. Data is gathered and analysed centrally and is compared and ranked across the geographical areas and cities in the country.

## Intervention

The evaluation practices are across all domains of preschool education. The programme distinguishes between 3 main domains: cross-cutting skills (3 Rs: reading, writing and arithmetic); emotional motivation (being able to express oneself, understanding emotions); and pedagogy or partnership (teachers and children build skills to work together). According to the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine:

Cross-cutting skills: reading comprehension, expressing one's "opinion orally and in writing, critical and systemic thinking, ability to logically substantiate one's position, creativity, proactivity, ability to manage emotions constructively, assess risks, make decisions, resolve problems, ability to cooperate with others". The teaching curriculum is focused on play-based activities and creative practices that aim to provoke and hence - observe those behaviours daily;

Emotional motivation: Morning circle time includes a daily practice to let children "learn to express their opinions and feelings and listen to others". Thus, children become aware of others' emotions and their expression, and;

Pedagogy of partnership – involving teachers in actively building relations with children. This domain is using social and emotional elements. For example, a play-based approach has been developed to include the teacher as part of the team. Thus, adults get to see things from a child's perspective. According to the programme developers, the following skills are developed: "respect for others personality; Benevolence and a positive attitude; Confidence in relationships; Dialogue, interaction, mutual respect; Distributed leadership (proactive behaviours, the right of choice and taking responsibility for it, horizontality of connections); Principles of social partnership (equality of parties, in being keen to accept responsibilities, obligation to fulfil agreements)".

All activities and checklists are uploaded on the Online Platform. This platform was rolled out across all preschools as part of the program implementation.

While moving from a teacher-centred to a child-centred classroom model and to improve the SES curriculum, there is a need to either locally develop, or to adapt and implement, an existing assessment tool for classroom education (von Suchodoletz et al., 2019). Such a potential tool is TEACH, developed by The World Bank and aiming to capture the teacher-child interactions, thus providing a means to assess those children who are at risk. "Teach differs from other classroom observation tools in that it captures (i) the time teachers spend on learning and the extent to which students are on task, and (ii) the quality of teaching practices that help develop students' socio-emotional and cognitive skills" (The World Bank, 2020).

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