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UKRAINE'S EDUCATION POLICY AS A PILLAR FOR SOCIETAL RESILIENCE AND SUCCESSFUL REBUILDING

PREVAILING THROUGH THE PRESENT, SHAPING TOMORROW

ABSTRACT

Education is a fundamental right guaranteed by Ukraine's constitution, encompassing stages from preschool to higher education. In 2017, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine launched the New Ukrainian School (NUS), a pivotal reform aimed at modernizing the educational system. Key changes included student-centred learning, competency-based education, integrated learning, active learning methods, and updated curriculum content to meet modern needs. Despite these advancements, Ukraine faces unique challenges due to ongoing conflict. The war has disrupted education, particularly in occupied regions, where policies have been forcibly aligned with Russian curricula to undermine Ukrainian identity. In this context, educational policy serves not only as a tool for learning but also as a means to preserve national identity, foster resilience, and support war recovery efforts. This policy brief highlights the critical role of education in addressing immediate wartime needs while laying the foundation for sustainable growth, modernization, and post-war reconstruction.

AUTHOR

YULIIA NAZARENKO
Research and Evaluation Consultant, Teach For Ukraine & Senior Analyst, Veteran Hub

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

RI RennerInstitut

FRIEDRICH EBERT STIFTUNG

Fondation Jean Jaurès

Kalevi Sorsa Foundation

FMS Foundation Max van der Stoel

ÆE AMICUS EUROPAE FUNDACJA ALEKSANDRA KWAŚNIEWSKIEGO

Ukraine's Education Policy as a Pillar for Societal Resilience and Successful Rebuilding

FOUNDATION MAX VAN DER STOEL

Leeghwaterplein 45, 5e verdieping
2521 DB Den Haag (Netherlands)
www.foundationmaxvanderstoel.nl
@FMS_Foundation

FOUNDATION AMICUS EUROPAE

Al. Przyjaciół 8/5
00-565 Warszawa (Poland)
www.fae.pl
@FAE_pl

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Introduction: The role of education in shaping a resilient society

Ukraine's constitution and laws guarantee education as a fundamental right for all citizens, regardless of age. The traditional educational pathway seamlessly progresses from kindergarten to workforce entry. The education system includes the following stages:[1]

- preschool education;
- general secondary education;
- professional education;
- professional pre-higher education; and
- higher education.

A detailed overview of all reforms pertaining to Ukraine's educational system since it gained independence remains outside the scope of the analysis due to its concise nature. Having said that, it is important to emphasise that, in 2017, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (MES) launched the New Ukrainian School (NUS),[2] arguably the most important and pivotal reform initiative aimed at transforming Ukraine's educational system. This effort was formalised with the adoption of the new law "on education" in September 2017, which set the foundational principles for the reformed education system. Following this, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the new State Standard of Primary Education in February 2018.

The NUS introduced several significant changes aimed at modernising the education system:

- **Student-centred learning**: emphasis on personalised and student-centred learning approaches to better cater to individual student needs and learning styles.
- **Competency-based education**: focus on developing key competencies, such as critical thinking, creativity, communication and collaboration, in addition to traditional academic knowledge.
- **Integrated learning**: encourage interdisciplinary learning by integrating subjects and themes to provide a more holistic understanding of concepts.
- **Active learning methods**: incorporate active learning methods, such as project-based learning, experiential activities and collaborative group work, to engage students more effectively.
- **Updated educational content**: revise the curriculum content to be more relevant to the modern world, including the integration of technology and contemporary issues.

While the educational system has been undergoing much needed reform, Ukraine has been waging a war of defence against a brutal aggressor, which does not shy away from using diverse methods of hybrid warfare. Against this very challenging background, establishing a robust educational policy is not just about maintaining the continuity of the learning process that corresponds the latest trends and learners' needs, but it is also about preserving national identity; fostering resilience; and preparing the human capital necessary for ongoing war efforts, (post)war recovery and Ukraine's reconstruction. The importance of these efforts can't go unnoticed. Since 2014, the occupation of parts of the Ukrainian territory have led to immediate and profound changes in the education system of the occupied regions. The aggressor has continuously altered educational policy to align its content with Russian curricula and to change the primary language of instruction from Ukrainian to Russian to "merge" the occupied territory and people with Putin's imperial project of the Russian world-making. This intentional and violent shift underscores the importance of education as a tool for individual and collective cultural and national identity and social cohesion. This is why for over a decade educational policy has served as a battleground in its own right.

The ability to adapt educational policy in times of existential crisis is a testament to a nation's resilience and commitment to its future. Investment in education and commitment to its reform will strengthen Ukraine's future capabilities to recover, reconstruct, modernise and thrive. Educational policy, therefore, should not only respond to immediate wartime needs and challenges, but

also lay the foundation for long-term, sustainable recovery. The following policy brief provides an overview of Ukraine's educational policy against its most urgent, existential threats with a vision for changes needed to make the system fit the needs of (post)war reconstruction. Moreover, a critical reflection is given on government's attempts to reform the nature of education against a growing number of challenges and opportunities facing Ukraine.

Main challenges for the Ukrainian educational system

While numerous **shortcomings** can hinder the development of educational policy, in this analysis, I chose to focus on two overarching issues of an existential nature for Ukraine – repercussions and the aftermath of the global COVID-19 pandemic and an ongoing, unprecedentedly brutal war on its territory.

1. COVID-19 pandemic

Even before the full-scale invasion, the whole world, including Ukraine, was gripped by the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools were closed, and distance learning was introduced; the 2019/2020 academic year was completed remotely. MES did not have time to respond to new challenges. Recommendations on distance learning were issued in October of the new 2020/2021 academic year. Accordingly, the entire education system faced problems that then existed throughout the pandemic and partially the beginning of the full-scale invasion:[3]

- Lack of distance-learning skills among teachers. According to the data provided by the State Service of Education Quality,[4] distance learning was a problem in 55.53% of schools, as the teachers had no previous experience with this form of learning and were, thus, not prepared for teaching during quarantine. 47.5% of teachers (20,590 people) indicated that they had not previously used distance-learning technologies in their teaching activities.

- Lack of universal access to the Internet and equipment necessary for learning. This problem was widespread among both teachers and students.

- Inconsistency of television lessons and the school curriculum. "All-Ukrainian School Online" is a television project broadcast on television and on the MES YouTube channel for students in grades 5-11 in 11 subjects. It was launched on 28 April 2020, in the Ukrainian language. However, according to the data provided by the State Service of Education Quality of heads of secondary education institutions,[5] only in 29.3% of schools did the schedule of distance-learning classes coincide with the schedule of television lessons.

- A significant part of the educational material was left for independent study. In many educational institutions, distance learning looked like sending material for independent study from the textbook; written tasks for testing knowledge; and evaluating results without discussion, feedback and explanations, or supervision.

- Lack of additional teacher compensation. During quarantine, no additional payments were made to teachers, despite the different formats of training and the presence of an excessive workload.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the wellbeing of both teachers and students. The transition to distance learning, high levels of stress, lack of sleep, concentration problems, anxiety and depression are all consequences of the pandemic. The pandemic has also significantly impacted the quality of education and student learning outcomes.

2. War with Russia

After the occupation of parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, as well as the annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea in 2014, the occupying authorities began to introduce their own education systems.

In the occupied territories of the Donetsk region, education followed Ukrainian curricula until the end of 2014. However, in 2015, educational institutions shifted to new curricula and textbooks, with the language of instruction almost entirely shifting to Russian. According to a study by the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union (UHHRU) titled "The educational field in the temporarily occupied territories",[6] teaching of the Ukrainian language and literature was drastically reduced, even though it remained a formal part of the school curricula. Additionally, the subject "History of Ukraine" was replaced by "History of the Fatherland", a course that emphasises the history of the Russian Empire and the Donbas region. This shift reflects broader efforts to reorient the educational system to align with the values and narratives of the occupying powers.

In occupied Crimea, the education system was intended to align with Russian standards, starting in 2014. This shift led to the removal of Ukrainian literature and Ukrainian history from the curriculum. Additionally, the grading system was changed from a 12-point scale to a five-point scale. Ukrainian textbooks were withdrawn and replaced with Russian versions. Instead of studying Ukrainian history, students in Crimea now learn Russian history, based on textbooks approved by the Russian authorities, which are the only ones permitted for use on the peninsula. This change reflects broader efforts to integrate Crimea into the Russian educational framework and to mould the worldview of the population, thus integrating them into the Russian World imperialist project of Putin's regime.

A 2015 report by MES stated that the main challenges were the evacuation of higher education institutions from the occupied territories and the provision of a legal mechanism for applicants who want to enter Ukrainian educational institutions from the occupied territories.[7]
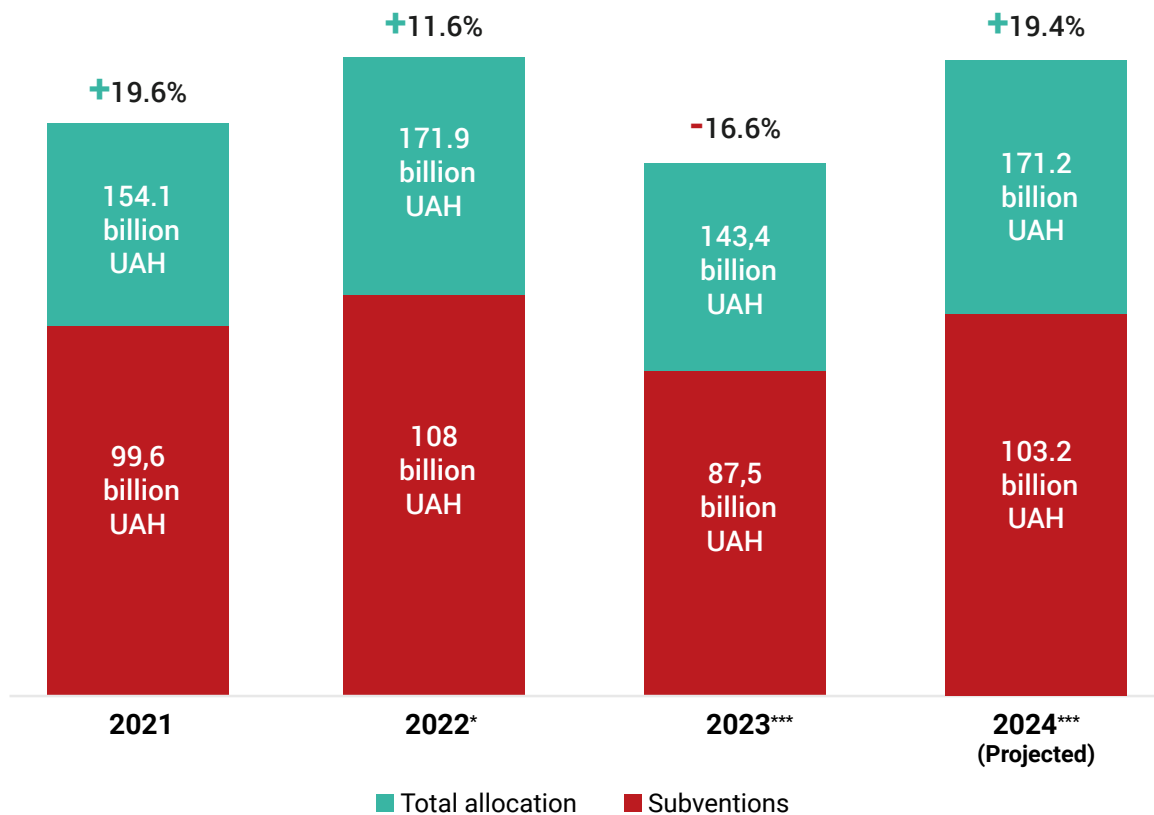
One has to remember that, while the Ukrainian educational system was still recovering from the negative impact of the pandemic, Russia launched a renewed, this time full-scale, attack on its territory in early 2022. The day after the full-scale invasion of Russian forces into Ukraine on 24 February 2022, MES recommended suspending educational activities at all levels and giving students and teachers a two-week break.[8] During this period, parts of Ukraine fell under temporary occupation, and several cities and towns, including Mariupol, Chernihiv, Sumy and Kharkiv, became sites of intense fighting. As a result, over 10 million people were displaced, with 6.5 million fleeing within Ukraine and 3.9 million seeking refuge abroad.[9] The majority of those displaced were women and children. According to UNICEF,[10] more than half of Ukraine's children – 4.3 million out of 7.5 million – were forced to leave their homes due to the war. Other consequences of this invasion are presented herein.

In 2023, MES announced new reforms in higher education: the consolidation of universities; and a new approach to funding, part of which is the introduction of grants for studies.[11] The government proposes introducing grants for obtaining an education, preferential loans and creating conditions for universities to compete for applicants. On 20 March, the parliament adopted it as a basis, and the document is being prepared for the second reading.

Last, but not least, as shown in Table 1, the available figures illustrate the fluctuations in the education budget due to the combined pressures of war and economic constraints. Despite these challenges, the 2024 budget indicates a renewed commitment to investing in education at pre-invasion levels. In 2025, education expenditures will amount to over 190 billion Ukrainian hryvnias (UAH),[12] which is 20 billion UAH more than in 2024 (171.2 billion UAH). Thus, funding will increase by 11%. The educational subvention for teacher salaries in 2025 remained at the 2024 level and amounted to 103.2 billion UAH.[13] In 2025, a separate item for additional payments to teachers of 12 billion UAH was provided for the first time. In 2024, this item was not allocated separately. These funds will be used for salary supplements for teachers.

Table 1: Education budget overview

Bar chart showing education budget overview:

- 2021: +19.6% — Total allocation 154.1 billion UAH; Subventions 99,6 billion UAH
- 2022*: +11.6% — Total allocation 171.9 billion UAH; Subventions 108 billion UAH
- 2023***: −16.6% — Total allocation 143,4 billion UAH; Subventions 87,5 billion UAH
- 2024*** (Projected): +19.4% — Total allocation 171.2 billion UAH; Subventions 103.2 billion UAH

Legend: ■ Total allocation ■ Subventions

*Context: Despite the full-scale invasion by the Russian Federation, the education budget increased.

**Context: This was the second instance during the ongoing conflict (the first being in 2016) where it was necessary to reduce spending on education.

***Context: The projected budget reflects a return to the 2022 allocation levels, aiming to bolster the education sector amidst ongoing challenges.

Source: Word and Deed.

2.1 The impact of the war on the educational infrastructure

According to the World Bank,[14] between February 2022 and 31 December 2023, 13% of Ukraine's education infrastructure was damaged or destroyed due to the war. This damage is estimated to represent a financial loss of $5.6 billion. 3,583 educational institutions were damaged, and 394 were completely destroyed.

In addition to the destruction of buildings, the war caused extensive damage to educational equipment, devices and furniture. This comprehensive damage means that even educational institutions with premises which can be restored relatively quickly are often unable to resume their pre-war functions. The loss of essential equipment and furniture further hampers the ability of these institutions to provide quality education.

The invasion is causing economic, learning and research losses in the sector, which are estimated to be $6.9 billion.[15]

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In the context of human capital losses, it is worth mentioning the deaths of pedagogical and scientific-pedagogical workers during shelling, as well as at the front. Unfortunately, there are no public statistics on the number of teachers killed. At the same time, 33 teachers have died from shelling in the Donetsk region since 2022.[16]

According to MES,[17] as of 15 September 2024, 341,220 children are abroad. This academic year (2024-2025), 5,410 Ukrainian teachers are abroad.[18] Unfortunately, we do not have publicly available data on the number of students from higher education institutions who have gone abroad, as this data is collected only by universities.

2.2 Ensuring safety of the learning process

Since July 2022, the condition for face-to-face and mixed learning was the availability of shelters in educational institutions or near them capable of accommodating all students. However, many educational institutions were not equipped with shelters, or they did not accommodate all the students, or they were not suitable for a long stay and conducting classes. Many internally displaced persons (IDPs), who had already been displaced in 2014, were forced to move again to safer areas, some of whom remained in their schools to study remotely. As for higher education, institutions were relocated to safer areas, some of which were displaced for the second time. Distance education began to be introduced after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, so teachers were somewhat prepared for it, but they faced other challenges.

During an air raid alert, learning has to pause and students and teachers are required to move to a safe place. Despite the fact that in some oblasts (mainly in the western and central regions), most of the schools are equipped with shelters, some of them, as well as professional, vocational and higher education institutions, do not have the opportunity to continue the education process in shelters during the alert. The learning time lost during the period of air raid alerts was recovered later, mostly remotely. According to the director of the Kyiv Department of Education and Science,[19] in the first quarter of the 2022-2023 academic year, primary school students lost 973 minutes of study time due to air raid alarms.

In 2023,[20] the state allocated 1.5 billion UAH of state subvention to arrange shelters. Foreign donors are also involved in financing. In 2024, the state subsidy for constructing and repairing shelters amounts to 2.5 billion UAH. Separately, 150 million UAH of the subvention will be directed to the completion of shelter construction projects, which began in 2023, but on the condition that such projects are already financed and completed by at least 40%.

By the beginning of 2024, it was reported that 88% of educational institutions were equipped with shelters.[21]

2.3 The repercussions of war hostilities on secondary education

The 2022-2023 academic year for schools began mainly in distance mode (41%) and mixed (distance and face-to-face learning combined) mode (34%), with a much smaller number in face-to-face mode (24%).

According to the Institute of Educational Analytics,[22] in 2023/2024, most students (81%) were enrolled in full-time education. The situation remains the most difficult in schools in the south (78%) and east (86%) – distance education was the most common there.

At the end of the third academic year, under the conditions of a full-scale war, according to official data, more than 800,000 children study remotely in online format (of which, more than 200,000 are abroad).

Learning losses

Two years of the pandemic and more than two years of the invasion have caused significant learning losses. There are a number of Ukrainian studies confirming that teachers, parents and children admit learning losses.[23]

The results of the PISA-2022 testing reveal that a significant proportion of 15-year-old students in Ukraine do not reach the basic level of literacy in mathematics, reading and science (level 2 on the PISA subject scales).[24]

Ukrainian 15 year olds have considerably lower average scores in all PISA domains compared to their peers in OECD countries.

Specifically, only 58% of Ukrainian 15 year olds have achieved the basic level of mathematical literacy, 59% have reached the basic level of reading literacy and 66% have attained the basic level of scientific literacy. These percentages are below the OECD average, where 69% of teenagers meet the basic level of mathematical literacy, 74% achieve it in reading and 76% in science.

According to studies,[25] teachers have identified several reasons for educational losses:

- Missed class hours due to air raid alarms or combat operations.
- The negative impact of children being educated abroad, which results from differences in education programs.
- The shift to distance learning, firstly due to the pandemic and then the war.
- A lack of motivation to study specific subjects.
- A game-based learning format that does not provide a sufficient theoretical foundation.
- Unsatisfactory behaviour of children.

Teachers

44% of teachers and 47% of administrative representatives reported an increase in workload compared to the period before 24 February 2022.[26] Conversely, 12% of teachers and 5% of administrative representatives reported a decrease in workload, while 44% and 48%, respectively, stated that nothing had changed.

According to the research,[27] the main reasons for the increase in workload reported by educators and teachers are as follows:

- More time is needed to prepare for lessons in mixed/remote formats.
- There is a necessity to provide psycho-emotional support to students.
- There are additional responsibilities due to security challenges.
- Personal productivity is decreased due to their own psycho-emotional state.

The absolute majority of pedagogues and representatives of the administration – 75% and 73%, respectively – claim that teachers primarily need support in the form of increased wages.[28]

Some teachers continued to work in uncomfortable or dangerous conditions, risking their lives and health.[29] In search of spaces with access to electricity and communication, teachers conducted distance lessons outside in cold weather and in unsuitable, unheated rooms, such as attics, basements and classrooms. Legislation mandates halting the educational process during air raids and moving to shelters, yet teachers in regions relying on distance learning – where most students temporarily reside elsewhere in Ukraine or abroad – often continued their lessons even during alarms.

Power outages were more frequent in regions closer to the frontlines due to intense shelling. Nearly all schools in these areas operated remotely, and the lack of electricity, communication and internet access severely impacted teachers' work. In contrast, regions where some in-person education was possible experienced less disruption.

Teachers forced to relocate faced additional financial and household challenges. Low wages limited their ability to rent adequate housing, and affordable options often lacked proper working conditions. This issue also affected teachers who lost their homes due to hostilities. Housing and living condition challenges are common among all IDPs and residents of regions near the frontlines. However, for teachers, these challenges are particularly significant because they perform a substantial part of their duties – such as planning, lesson preparation and grading – at home. In the

context of distance learning, where teachers work entirely from home, living conditions are crucial not only for comfort and quality of life, but also for their ability to work effectively.

Students abroad

Education Ombudsman Serhii Gorbachov on his social media channels reported that from 24 February 2022 to 12 December 2023, more than 830,000 Ukrainian students were integrated into EU schools. At the same time, this needs to consider the number of Ukrainian students outside Europe. According to experts, there may be more than a million students abroad, a quarter of the total.

With secondary education mandatory in most European countries, Ukrainian students have several pathways to continue their learning journey in Ukraine. They can study remotely at a Ukrainian school, switch to a family form of education or opt for an external form of education.

In European countries, education has returned to the face-to-face format. As a result, students enrolled in two schools simultaneously must attend classes in person in the host country while also connecting remotely to their lessons in Ukraine. These students can join classes according to the general schedule or follow a personalised timetable provided by their Ukrainian school.

Despite these efforts, the challenge of double workloads for students studying abroad remains unresolved. According to the Deputy Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine, as of 1 September 2024, 335,000 students simultaneously studied in Ukraine remotely and abroad.[30]

2.4 Adaption of vocational education to the reality of war

At the start of the 2022/2023 academic year, over half of vocational education and training (VET) institutions (326 or 56%) adopted a mixed format for their educational programs.[31] Meanwhile, 176 institutions (30%) transitioned to entirely online instruction, and 77 institutions (13%) maintained in-person teaching. However, by 1 January 2023, these proportions had shifted. The number of institutions offering mixed-format education decreased by 43, resulting in 283 institutions (49%). Those providing exclusively online education increased by three, totalling 179 institutions (31%). Institutions offering solely in-person instruction rose by 37, reaching 114 institutions (20%).

The main impacts of the war on VET, according to European monitoring,[32] include:

- **Reappropriation of resources**: VET machinery and equipment have been repurposed for defence purposes, and dormitories and other spaces have been converted into shelters for IDPs.
- **Diminished workforce**: VET institutions face a reduced workforce due to factors such as relocation (including migration abroad), conscription into the Armed Forces of Ukraine and residence in active conflict zones.
- **Inflexible training programs**: there has been a failure to adjust training programs and study durations to meet the needs of students, the principles of lifelong learning, and the state's requirements for economic and infrastructure reconstruction and recovery.
- **Disrupted relationships**: relationships between VET institutions and businesses have been disrupted due to the destruction, closure or relocation of enterprises to different regions.

In Ukraine, an all-Ukrainian platform for distance and mixed learning, "Online Vocational Education",[33] was created by order of MES, with support from the International Labour Organization. This platform, based on the "All-Ukrainian School Online", is specifically designed for students of VET institutions, teaching staff and independent acquirers of professional qualifications. The purpose of "Professional Education Online" is to ensure equal, free and open access for users to high-quality and up-to-date educational materials in the field of professional education.

2.5 Higher education in Ukraine in the context of Russia's full-scale invasion

According to the National Service of Education Quality,[34] within a month of the beginning of the full-scale invasion, educational institutions resumed the educational process as far as possible, mainly in a remote form (82%). At the start of the 2022/2023 academic year (September 2022), more than a third of the country's professional pre-higher and higher education institutions (38.5%) provided the educational process online, 42.2% in a mixed format and one fifth of educational institutions (19.3%) in classrooms (face to face). The 2023/2024 academic year began in classrooms (face to face) in almost a third (28.8%) of colleges and universities, and the use of the distance format has significantly decreased.

The shift to distance learning in colleges and universities has profoundly impacted education quality. According to a survey by the National Service of Education Quality,[35] students in pre-higher and higher education institutions participating in remote learning show less-active engagement compared to those in mixed or full-time formats. This means that distance education is more likely to impact future educational outcomes and economic activity.

Practical skills, essential in higher education, are significantly influenced by the ability to conduct hands-on training offline. This often depends on the security situation in the university's region. To overcome these challenges, some institutions in high-risk areas are exploring opportunities for practical training in safer cities or even abroad.

In a show of support, universities are actively encouraging students serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine to take academic leave during their service. Remarkably, some of these dedicated individuals are striving to balance their military duties with their education, demonstrating resilience and commitment.

According to the head of the Education Committee of the Verkhovna Rada,[36] Serhii Babak, 10-15% of Ukrainian students, up to 150,000 people, are abroad.

The road ahead: Addressing key educational challenges

1. Devices for distance learning

During the invasion, students and teachers, especially those from vulnerable groups and those in need, have faced limited access to distance learning. MES is collaborating with various international organisations to provide students and teachers across all education levels with electronic devices, gadgets and internet access (financial and physical). However, this support does not find all of those who need it. It is necessary to ensure 100% access to devices and the Internet, especially in distance education. According to a State Service for Education Quality study,[37] 22% of teachers are still not provided with working computers. At the same time, the gap between the provision of computers for teachers between cities (81%) and villages (68%) persists. According to the study, "War and education: How a year of full-scale invasion affected Ukrainian schools",[38] most respondents (90%) indicated that their child has at least one personal gadget that they use for learning. Another 9% of respondents said their child shares a gadget with other family members. Most often (for 46% of respondents), the main gadget for students' learning is a mobile phone. The phone is the most common learning tool for all learning and classes. According to a dashboard created by MES,[39] 68,881 teachers and 311,170 students in educational institutions need digital devices.

1.1 Shelters in educational institutions of all levels

In regions close to the zone of hostilities, shelters in educational institutions are a priority. Access to offline education is contingent upon the availability of shelters that meet specified standards. These shelters must have sufficient space to accommodate all students and teachers in the institution. In the southeastern and central regions, the availability of shelters is critically important due to the constant threat of shelling. There is a map created by MES with a number of damaged and destroyed educational institutions.[40]

2. Unloading of teachers in schools

The working conditions for teachers,[41] particularly female teachers, have become more challenging during the full-scale invasion due to increased workloads from distance and mixed learning, the need for additional psychological and pedagogical support for students, and working under difficult or dangerous circumstances, all without a corresponding increase in salary.

To alleviate this burden, the following measures could be implemented:

- **Reducing bureaucratic work**: transitioning to an electronic document flow and minimising reporting requirements on educational activities. One study showed that female teachers have a lot of bureaucratic work and are therefore overloaded.[42]
- **Focusing on core responsibilities**: ensuring that teachers are not required to perform tasks unrelated to the educational process, despite the promise of organisational and pedagogical autonomy.
- **Job creation**: the creation and funding of educational core and support roles, training of staff and incentivising with wage increases to attract and retain those in the profession, and unload school staff of extra responsibilities.

Clear communication and recommendations from MES are essential to effectively reduce the burden on teachers. This includes ensuring that schools and educational authorities do not informally demand teachers to undertake non-educational tasks and provide them with support via educational and non-educational additional job creation in the sector.

3. Assessment of learning losses during a full-scale invasion

The combined impact of several years of the COVID-19 pandemic and nearly three years of full-scale invasion has resulted in significant learning losses at all levels of education, affecting both theoretical and practical skills. These losses have not been, and cannot yet be, fully measured.

Numerous studies show that measuring learning losses is essential to implementing effective programs to compensate for them on a daily basis.[43] In Ukraine, the State Service for Quality Education has conducted only one study of educational losses in the sixth and eighth grades so far.[44] Many organisations implement approaches to compensate for educational losses in Ukraine, but they do so mainly in areas close to hostilities.

Efforts to assess and address these learning losses should include:

- **Comprehensive evaluations**: conduct detailed assessments to quantify the extent of learning losses in both theoretical knowledge and practical skills across different education levels.
- **Targeted interventions**: develop and implement targeted educational interventions and support programs to help students catch up on missed learning.
- **Resource allocation**: ensure that resources, including qualified personnel and educational materials, are allocated to the areas most affected by the invasion and the pandemic.
- **Mental health support**: provide psychological and emotional support to students and teachers to help them cope with the stresses of the ongoing conflict and its impact on education.
- **Monitoring and reporting**: establish a robust system for continuous monitoring and reporting on the progress of educational recovery efforts.

A coordinated approach involving educators, policymakers and international partners is essential to effectively address and mitigate the impact of these unprecedented challenges on education in Ukraine.

4. Optimisation in secondary education

In July 2024, MES launched the "Offline School" project.[45] Its goal is to return children to safe face-to-face education and, where this is not possible, to create conditions for high-quality and effective distance education. As part of this policy,[46] as of November 2024, the government allocated funds for the creation and arrangement of shelters for schools in frontline and border regions, which allowed 100,000 students to have access to education; 402 school buses were also purchased; as of September, 240,077 devices were delivered: 99,290 for teachers; 140,787 for children.

In secondary education, optimisation efforts are already yielding results, with schools merging based on educational needs and opportunities within communities. This process must consider the following:

- **Reassessment of educational content and the delivery needs of participants in the educational process**: due to the unprecedented internal and external displacement of populations, destruction of educational infrastructure, and ongoing hostilities, it's critical to reassess the educational requirements on from national to community levels.

- **Infrastructure and equipment**: address the destruction and loss of educational infrastructure and equipment to ensure that merged schools can function effectively. Secure provision of necessary learning materials, equipment and WiFi access for staff and students.

- **Reassessment of staff and student access needs**: tackle transport access needs of staff and students by the provision of school shuttle services, staffed post-class activities and extracurricular activity access (via direct funding or vouchers) to all students to facilitate students' learning support and childcare support for working parents.

5. Optimisation in vocational, professional and higher education

Optimisation in vocational, professional and higher education is in its early stages. Key steps include the following:

- **Development of optimisation plans**: these plans should account for factors such as a reduction in students due to forced migration abroad, declining birth rates and future shifts in labour market demands.

- **Increasing autonomy**: enhancing the autonomy of institutions, particularly in personnel policy and budgeting, is essential. This includes:

  - **decoupling funding from student numbers**; currently, the number of students directly influences the number of teaching staff, forcing universities to reduce staff as student numbers decline; and

  - **flexible salary policies**; implementing payment mechanisms that do not tie teacher salaries to a single tariff grid or the number of students. This flexibility would allow universities to better manage and retain their staff using additional funds as needed.

In secondary education, it is worth paying attention, firstly, to the educational losses provoked by COVID-19 and the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. Measuring and compensating for educational losses are critical factors in solving this problem. In addition, it is worth paying attention to financing programs to compensate for educational losses for vulnerable children.

The destruction of infrastructure and school equipment has become a significant challenge for the Ukrainian education system. Attracting funding for their restoration is very important.

Teachers' working conditions should be decent and correspond to the level of their workload. Reducing bureaucratic work, switching to an electronic

document management system, the absence of non-teaching obligations and fair remuneration for work will be signs of decent work.

Higher education lecturers should also have fair wages. Historically low wages and real wage depreciation over time, combined with reducing the number of teachers, can lead to a deterioration in the quality of education at Ukrainian universities. Chronic underfunding of research staff and facilities and low research time availability, as a result of high workloads, drives researchers – established and early career – abroad, which adds to the brain drain and undermines the economic and social potential of the country and its (post)war reconstruction efforts.

Concluding remarks

In this analysis, it has been argued that the resilience and adaptability of the education system are not only crucial for maintaining the continuity of the teaching and learning process, but also for preserving national identity and strengthening the social and economic fabric against disruptive factors. All of the above are currently of utmost importance for Ukraine in its existential struggle against the Russian aggressor; the country's ongoing nation-building process; (post)war reconstruction and, hopefully, its future membership in the EU.

During the last decade, the Ukrainian government has undertaken steps to reform the old educational system, with the introduction of the NUS being the highlight of the process. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing war with Russia have put immense pressure on the educational system, exposing the need for rapid adaptation, further modernisation, and an expansion of funding and wages.

The analysis showed the government's commitment to supporting educational policy, despite the (financial) strains imposed by the war. The introduction of reforms, such as grants for higher education and the prioritisation of constructing and equipping shelters in educational institutions, underscore the importance of addressing both

immediate and long-term needs in this policy realm. However, considerable challenges remain. Learning losses, the integration of (internally) displaced students and teachers, the restoration of damaged infrastructure, and the wellbeing of educators are pressing issues that require continued attention and innovative solutions, from both the authorities and Ukraine's international partners.

With an outlook toward (post)war recovery and rebuilding, concentrated efforts to measure and address educational losses, optimise the use of resources, and improve the working conditions for teachers will be paramount. With the support of international partners and a strategic approach to resource allocation and policy making, the Ukrainian education system can continue to pave the way for the country's recovery and even future prosperity. The resilience shown thus far bodes well for the nation's ability to emerge from these challenges with a stronger, more robust framework that serves as a cornerstone for strengthening the resilience of the society.

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About the author

YULIIA NAZARENKO

Yuliia Nazarenko worked at Cedos from 2018 to 2024, contributing to research in diverse fields such as sex education in Ukrainian schools and the collaboration between civil climate movements and government authorities. In 2020, she conducted studies on topics including climate justice and the impact of climate change on vulnerable social groups in Ukrainian cities. She also monitored the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on education.

Currently, Yuliia serves as a Research and Evaluation Consultant for Teach For Ukraine, a non-profit organization dedicated to improving education in the country. Additionally, she also works as a Senior Analyst at Veteran Hub, a Ukrainian non-profit that centralizes services for veterans, active military personnel, and their families, supporting their reintegration into civilian life.

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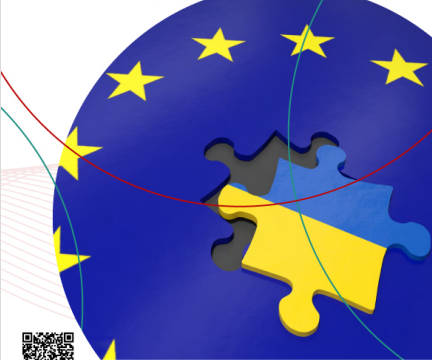
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TERRA INCOGNITA
EXPLORING THE LONG-TERM IMPLICATIONS OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE

SUMMARY

The war in Ukraine carries extensive implications that intersect with multiple long-term trends and variables shaping international affairs. What lies ahead is *terra incognita* – a strategic landscape that eludes ready historical analogies. Strategic foresight is essential to be able to explore this territory, make sense of potential developments, and guide action.

This policy brief argues that the war in Ukraine affects the future in different ways. For one, it has accelerated patterns of change that predated it, including great power competition, middle power activism, and the crisis of multilateralism. For another, Russia's aggression has introduced major discontinuities, such as triggering a global energy crisis, fracturing the European security order, and sparking nuclear threats by Russia. In addition, the war has diverted focus from critical challenges, such as sustainable development and climate change, while aggravating these challenges both directly and indirectly.

The war in Ukraine has compounded the drift towards a fragmenting and polarised international (dis)order, but the future is not preordained. Long-term developments will at least in part depend on the outcome of the conflict, which cannot be predicted. This policy brief outlines some of the factors that will drive change alongside the ongoing war. They include the evolution of the rivalry between the US and China and of the partnership between China and Russia, the risks facing the global economy, the prospects for the clean energy transition and its strategic implications, and the rising costs of failure to address shared challenges through cooperation. By tackling geopolitical challenges and managing multi-dimensional competition, while seeking to advance a rules-based international order, leadership can make a decisive difference in shaping distinct pathways to the future.

AUTHOR

Dr GIOVANNI GREVI
Senior Fellow at the Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy Governance (BSoG-VUB)

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