



Advocacy Messages on Access to Education for Refugees from Ukraine in Hungary

June 15, 2023

*These advocacy messages were drafted with members and partners of the Inter-Agency Education Sub-Working Group of Hungary¹, with particularly valuable input from **Menedék Hungarian Association for Migrants, Romaversitas Foundation**, and the **EDUA Project**. The document was drafted between December 2022 and March 2023.*

The escalation of the conflict in Ukraine has resulted in an unprecedented and large-scale humanitarian crisis in Europe, displacing over six million people to neighbouring countries since 24 February 2022, the majority women and children, as well as older people and people with disabilities.

Hungary is both a country of transit and a destination for people fleeing hostilities in Ukraine. 4.2 million Ukrainian nationals have crossed into the country². While the vast majority chose to move onward, 36,313 Ukrainian nationals have applied for temporary protection in Hungary as of 3 March 2023, and 32,632 people were granted positive decisions as of 22 April 2023³. Ukrainians also reside in Hungary through other schemes, including residency permits and working visas.

There are 4,965 Ukrainian citizen children enrolled in Hungarian public education institutions as of 31 January 2023, including

3,573 children in primary education and 319 children in secondary education⁴.

While the Hungarian education system prescribes mandatory education for children between 3-16 years⁵, including for refugee children in Hungary, active policy and practical measures are still important to enable refugee children to participate meaningfully in the Hungarian education system.

Inclusion of Ukrainian refugee children into the Hungarian education system is key to ensure **quality education**, enhances children's **social skills** through interaction with peers, supports their **integration process** into society, and opens **future perspectives**.

Based on observations since the outbreak of the war, the Education Working Group in Hungary identified challenges that prevent refugee children from accessing education, and calls for action on these key areas:

1. Informing and Involving Parents in their Children's Education
2. Supporting Schools in Daily Work with Refugee Children
3. Advocating for and Promoting Inclusive Schools
4. Schools as a Safe Environment for All
5. Supporting Children with Diverse Needs
6. Providing Multiple Pathways for Learning and into the Job Market

¹ The *Inter-Agency Education Sub-Working Group* (Education Working Group for short) is part of the Interagency Coordination Structure in Hungary and is operating under the umbrella of the [Refugee Response Plan](#).

² [UNHCR data](#), as of 6 February 2023

³ [UNHCR](#); [OIF](#)

⁴ UNHCR data request from the Ministry of Interior

⁵ Temporary protection holders are entitled to the right to use day-care, nursery care, education, care and the services of "Biztos Kezdet" children's homes under the same conditions as Hungarian citizens, as per 106/2022. (III. 12.) Korm. r. 3.§. The decree also grants TP holders free school meals below certain income conditions.



1. Informing and Involving Parents in their Children's Education

The Education Working Group observed several factors influencing parents' willingness to enroll their children in the Hungarian education system. Some parents would prefer their children remain enrolled in online Ukrainian education but are concerned about the legal requirement on school enrolment in Hungary. Others struggle with the uncertainty of the length of their stay in Hungary.

- **Parents should be informed on the Hungarian education system**, the enrolment process, entitlements and obligations, and available educational pathways, enabling informed decisions and tackling potential fears and insecurities towards enrolment^{6 7 8}.
- **Parental involvement should be actively encouraged** in the learning and school life of all children, especially refugees.

2. Supporting Schools in Daily Work with Refugee Children

The Education Working Group observed that children integrate easier into schools that value diversity and actively foster inclusivity among students from various backgrounds.

- **(Mandatory) trainings should be provided for teachers and school principals** on fostering diversity within the classroom, and on specific aspects of working with refugee children and students from different backgrounds. Training opportunities should be circulated among schools that work with refugee children⁹.
- **Staff should be hired or contracted to support work with refugee children:** e.g., teacher assistants, cultural mediators, special educators, social workers, etc.
- A clear and easy process should be set up to hire or contract **refugee teachers and psycho-social support staff**¹⁰, covering accreditation of teachers from Ukraine and recognition of their certificates.
- **Interpreters** should be provided to schools on a need basis¹¹.

3. Advocating for and Promoting Inclusive Schools

- **Teachers should be supported as the key allies** for improving teaching and learning practices¹².
- **Multiculturalism and respect for diversity in schools** should be promoted as a general practice^{13 14}.
- **Mainstreaming anti-racist principles** should be part of all education and humanitarian work. Comprehensive support systems are needed to address Roma children's needs.
- **Schools should promote gender equality in education**, through awareness, mentorship, and equal opportunities for girls to excel in academics, sports, and leadership.

⁶ The *The Inter-Agency Refugee Coordination Forum (RCF)* echoes this call for Romani refugees, with the need to **rely on community members** in addressing potential parent concerns in school enrollment.

⁷ The *EDUA Project* highlights the need to give Hungarian, Ukrainian, and Russian-language information to parents **as soon as they arrive in Hungary**, along with **public access to key education data allowing for service planning**. It also calls for sharing a **public list of institutions providing additional support** to refugees, and for **assigning focal points** at local school districts and municipalities for schooling questions.

⁸ *Menedék Hungarian Association for Migrants* highlights the **more holistic need for schools to create a welcoming environment** for foreign families (through e.g., language support, preparation of the school community, and intercultural community events). Moreover, the cause of school enrolment and integration should **push state, municipal, civilian, and religious actors to actively partner with schools, families, and each other**.

⁹ This should include a **comprehensive methodological program for kindergartens**, as recommended by *EDUA*.

¹⁰ This need is reinforced by *EDUA*, including naturalization and developing a validation system.

¹¹ A need also highlighted by *EDUA*, suggesting the inclusion of professionals with various training backgrounds arriving from Ukraine. Moreover, **professional services (e.g., for special needs) have a particularly crucial need for interpretation support**.

¹² Going further, *Menedék* calls for **an integration policy encompassing the entire public education system** (legislation, direction of education, methodology, tools, funding).

¹³ The *RCF* highlights education, **positive examples, and awareness-raising campaigns** to create welcoming environments, in addition to institutions and humanitarian organizations incorporating anti-discrimination principles.

¹⁴ The *RCF* adds the importance of **immediately identifying and addressing discrimination, bullying, and hate speech** against refugee children and children of diverse backgrounds, including Roma refugees.



4. Schools as a Safe, Enabling Environment for All¹⁵

- Schools should be supported in their work with children to identify **root causes of violent behaviour** and addressing them (through expertise and available referrals).
- Proactive measures are needed in daily classroom practice and school policies to create a **feeling of safety**. A feeling of safety is more than the absence of violence¹⁶.
- **Basic needs of vulnerable families** (such as daily meals through school and outside of it, school supplies, gym clothes, shoes, etc.) should be proactively identified and provided for. Learning can only happen when basic needs are met.

5. Supporting Children with Diverse Needs

- Flexible policy arrangements are needed for refugee children who do not speak Hungarian or need to catch up on learning loss, to **allow for certification and accreditation**¹⁷.
- **Quality Hungarian-as-a-foreign language (HFL) classes** should be provided **within schools** at least 5 times a week, to students who do not speak Hungarian as their native language¹⁸.
- **More Hungarian-as-a-foreign language classes**, free and accessible, need to be provided as **extracurricular** opportunities.
- Affordable and accessible trainings should be provided to **gain certification as a HFL teacher**¹⁹.
- Children that are long-term out of school have different needs. **Literacy and numeracy programs** need to be in place to allow them to progress with their education and growth^{20 21}.
- **Children with special needs need adequate support** to access the Hungarian education system and relevant support services, including assistive technologies, curriculum adjustments, and individualized support plans. Clear information about the processes should be provided to the parents.

6. Providing Multiple Pathways for Learning and into the Job Market

- Adolescents above the mandatory school age of 16, if they choose to continue with their online Ukrainian education, should be supported with an **adequate learning environment as well as youth programs and psychosocial support services**^{22 23}.
- Special skill training and vocational training opportunities need to be provided to **allow adolescents to enter the job market**. Learning-to-earning programs and multiple pathways are needed and important.

¹⁵ *Menedék* reinforces that school is ideally a safe environment for refugee children, which **gives structure to everyday life** and allows growth, social connections and adoption of values.

¹⁶ The *RCF* calls for measures to counter segregation, bullying, and harassment by way of **cultural mediation and sensitization for school staff**.

¹⁷ Specific recommendations by *EDUA* include providing **alternatives to the central secondary admission exam** for children who have spent less than 2 years in the Hungarian system, and codifying the *Oktatási Hivatal (Education Authority)* resolution about individual considerations for students lacking Hungarian knowledge.

¹⁸ In addition, *EDUA* recommends collection and availability of **learning tools that help learning Hungarian during other subject classes**, and actively building on the **existing expertise of schools already doing HFL teaching**.

¹⁹ This call is also shared by *EDUA*, adding the need for a **public list of available HFL teachers** nationally.

²⁰ The *RCF* recommends catch-up and after-school programs, as well as extracurricular and cultural events at schools, specifically for Romani refugee children, in order to reduce their educational and social gaps. In addition, it advocates for **literacy initiatives focusing on Romani mothers** to ensure they can support their children's schooling.

²¹ *EDUA* adds the need for a **comprehensive testing of literacy, language, and other key competencies** to inform service provision to refugee students.

²² *EDUA* echoes this call, adding further **flexible arrangements for the testing or grading** of students who attend Ukrainian school in parallel with Hungarian school.

²³ Special attention is needed for **14-18 year-olds to access secondary education** according to their needs, as highlighted by *Menedék* as well.