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EDUCATION OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED CHILDREN IN UKRAINE: REGIONAL ANALYSIS AND WARTIME CHALLENGES

ОСВІТА ВНУТРІШНЬО ПЕРЕМІЩЕНИХ ДІТЕЙ В УКРАЇНІ: РЕГІОНАЛЬНИЙ АНАЛІЗ І
ВИКЛИКИ ВОЄННОГО ЧАСУ

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Abstract. Ukraine's education sector has undergone profound transformations as a result of the full-scale aggression of the Russian Federation, which has led, in particular, to the mass displacement of learners in search of safer conditions for living and studying. In this context, the analysis of the integration of internally displaced children into the education system has become especially relevant. The aim of the study is to examine the regional distribution of IDP children in preschool, general secondary and out-of-school education. Based on operational data from the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (as of early September 2025), the analysis shows that the largest group of internally displaced children are enrolled in secondary schools (71.9%), followed by preschool (15.7%) and out-of-school programmes (12.3%). Comparative analysis indicates that IDP children are concentrated mainly in frontline regions as well as in large urban agglomerations, particularly Kyiv. The application of the Pareto principle confirms the asymmetry in the burden on educational infrastructure. At the same time, the findings demonstrate that, despite severe wartime challenges, the education system has retained stability and adaptability thanks to well-balanced policy decisions, coordinated actions at regional and local levels, and sustained support from international partners.

Keywords: internally displaced children, education in wartime, regional analysis, educational infrastructure, resilience of the education system.

Introduction

The full-scale war unleashed by the Russian Federation against Ukraine in 2022 has resulted in the worst humanitarian crisis in Europe in the XXI century. Children have become one of the most vulnerable groups. As of June 2025, data from the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine indicate that 631 children had been killed and more than 1,975 injured to varying degrees of severity. As a result, a significant number of children and their parents have been forced to seek refuge. According to international organisations, millions of Ukrainian children have become internally or externally displaced in search of a safe environment for living and learning [1].

The issue of ensuring the right to education for children has become a matter of critical importance. As highlighted by UNICEF [2], approximately 4.6 million children



in Ukraine have been facing barriers to education for the fourth school year in a row since the start of the full-scale war. In addition to the challenges posed by security concerns, a significant contributing factor is the destruction of educational infrastructure. As of September 2025, 4,296 educational institutions had been damaged, 399 of which were completely destroyed [3]. This has placed an additional burden on the education system in regions hosting the largest numbers of displaced children.

According to the International Organization for Migration [4], as of April 2025, approximately 3.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) remained in Ukraine, a considerable proportion of them families with children. At the same time, staffing shortages in the education sector have become acute. As of September 2025, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine reported that 4,360 teachers had left the country due to the war, while the number of vacant teaching positions in general secondary education institutions exceeded 5,600.

Despite these challenges, Ukraine's education system has demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability [5]. Thanks to the efforts of state institutions, local authorities and international partners, most educational institutions have continued to operate, with the introduction of distance and blended learning, as well as the creation of conditions for the integration of IDP children.

For more than three and a half years, the war has shaped the circumstances in which the Ukrainian education system operates. In this context, research into the regional distribution of internally displaced learners is therefore crucial for monitoring the situation and for making evidence-based management decisions. Therefore, this article is devoted to analysing the integration of IDP children into preschool, general secondary and out-of-school education at the regional level, with particular attention to the disparities observed.

Literature Review

Children's access to education in contexts of war and mass displacement has been widely examined in recent scholarly and analytical research. This phenomenon affects not only individual states but also the global community. Studies consistently document



educational barriers for IDPs across different countries, including unequal access to resources and heightened risks of social isolation [6]. In this context, the Ukrainian case reflects a broader trend; however, the scale of child displacement since 2022 is unprecedented in Europe.

The historical background of the problem is highlighted in the work of Hnatyuk [7], one of the first to systematically examine the phenomenon of IDPs in Ukraine after 2014. The author identified displaced groups from Crimea and eastern Ukraine, emphasising the difficulties they faced in securing housing, social assistance and access to education. This analysis is important for understanding that the integration of IDPs into the education system is not a new challenge, but since 2022 it has reached an entirely new scale.

Tertychna et al. [8] posit that the educational environment is pivotal in the stabilisation of the emotional well-being of displaced children. Integration into local schools, provision of language support, and individual learning trajectories have been demonstrated to reduce psychological barriers and foster a sense of safety.

Skrypchenko's research [9] shows that disruption to the learning process exacerbates children's trauma, particularly in frontline regions where many pupils are unable to attend school due to closures. The author argues that online learning cannot adequately compensate for these losses as it leads to declining academic performance and limited access to digital devices, resulting in a deterioration in pupils' psycho-emotional state.

Other research [10] highlights shifts in learning formats and the deepening of educational inequalities. It underscores the role of digital solutions, such as the All-Ukrainian Online School, together with international assistance and psychosocial support programmes, as key stabilising factors.

Reports by international organisations, including UNICEF, UNESCO and the World Bank, emphasise the need to maintain educational provision, promote inclusion and ensure psychosocial support for children in crisis. International assistance has played a key role in sustaining the continuity of education since the onset of the full-scale invasion, with donor and partner contributions to rebuilding infrastructure,



equipping shelters and supporting educational programmes remaining essential to guarantee children stable access to quality education [11].

In a wider context, Salha [12] synthesises international experience by proposing 14 strategies for maintaining education during armed conflicts, including digital platforms, mobile schools and teacher support. Similarly, Almazroui and Awad [13] examine scalable interventions to promote literacy among children in conflict zones, stressing the adaptability of such solutions to different contexts. The Syrian case is also instructive: Hatahet [14] describes the development of a tailored educational strategy in primary schools for IDPs, illustrating the potential of combining individualised programmes with adaptive approaches in crisis conditions.

Taken together, scholarly and analytical sources show that children's access to education during wartime is a multidimensional problem, encompassing psychosocial consequences, widening educational inequality, the integration of IDPs into schools, and the search for adaptive learning models. Kinash [15] argues that educational integration of IDPs is impossible without broader social adaptation and adequate support at both state and community levels. Similarly, Danylenko et al. [16] demonstrate that the psycho-emotional difficulties of internally displaced schoolchildren significantly affect their learning capacity and require comprehensive psychological and educational support programmes. These challenges are particularly acute in the context of a protracted war, when millions of children must continue their education away from their permanent homes. This underscores the need to analyse the regional distribution of IDP children to assess the scale and spatial disparities in meeting their educational needs.

Results and Discussion

Based on operational data from the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (as of 1 September 2025) [17], an analysis was conducted of IDP children enrolled in preschool, general secondary, and out-of-school education. In total, these three segments account for 314,165 children: 71.9% in general secondary, 15.7% in preschool, and 12.3% in out-of-school education. This distribution underscores the structural predominance of school education as the compulsory and most widespread



component of the system, while also reflecting the comparatively smaller scale of preschool and out-of-school sectors, consistent with their lower enrolment rates.

IDP children in preschool education institutions

A total of 49,424 IDP children are enrolled in preschool education. The largest numbers are concentrated in Kyiv city (7,200), Dnipropetrovsk region (4,700) and Kyiv region (3,200), which together account for more than one-third of the national total. Donetsk (3,100) and Zaporizhzhia (2,600) regions also show substantial figures. By contrast, the number of IDP children is minimal in a number of regions: Luhansk (140), Rivne (633) and Volyn (669).

Applying the Pareto principle reveals that the four leading regions account for around 37% of all IDP preschoolers, while the seven leading regions together account for more than half (Figure 1). These figures indicate a marked spatial concentration of IDP preschool education in the largest urban agglomerations and in regions bordering areas of active hostilities.

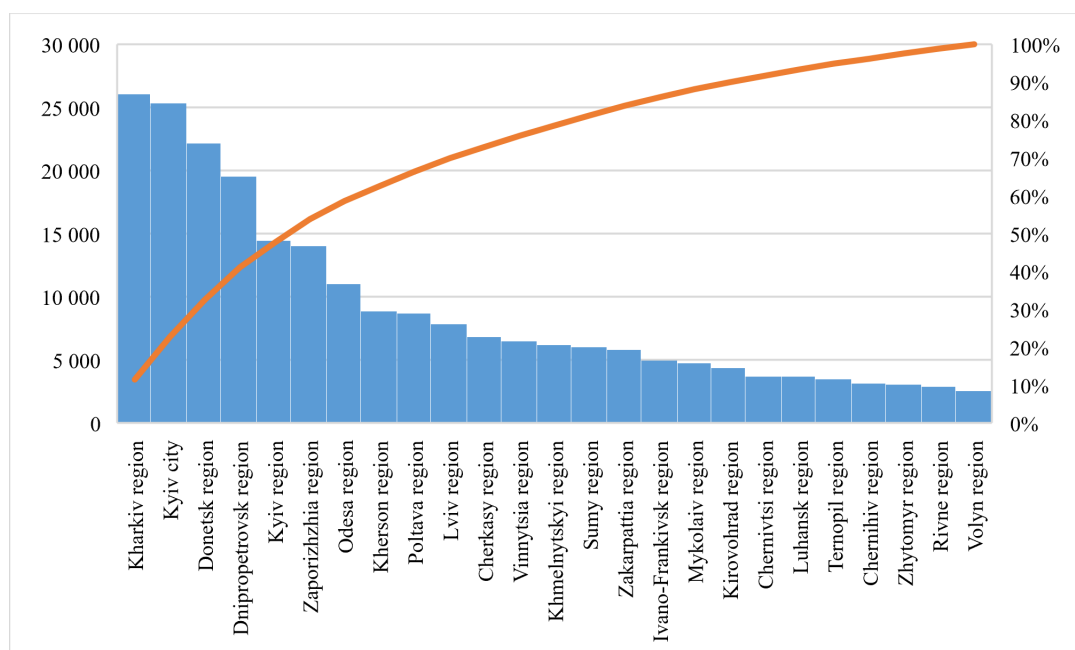


Figure 1. Regional distribution of IDP children in preschool education institutions (as of 1 September 2025)

Compiled by the author based on [17].

IDP children in general secondary education institutions



The greatest burden falls on the school network, where 226,010 IDP children are enrolled. The leading positions are held by Kharkiv region (26,000), Kyiv city (25,300), Donetsk region (22,200) and Dnipropetrovsk region (19,600). High enrolment is also observed in Kyiv region (14,500) and Zaporizhzhia region (14,100). At the opposite end of the spectrum are regions with minimal coverage, such as Volyn (2,600) and Rivne (2,900).

Pareto analysis confirms that the five leading regions account for almost half of all IDP pupils, and the inclusion of two more regions (Zaporizhzhia and Odesa) increases this share to approximately 60% (Figure 2). Furthermore, there is a strong positive correlation between the number of children in preschool and general secondary institutions, indicating that displacement typically occurs in family groups with children of different ages, which creates a parallel burden on both preschool and school networks.

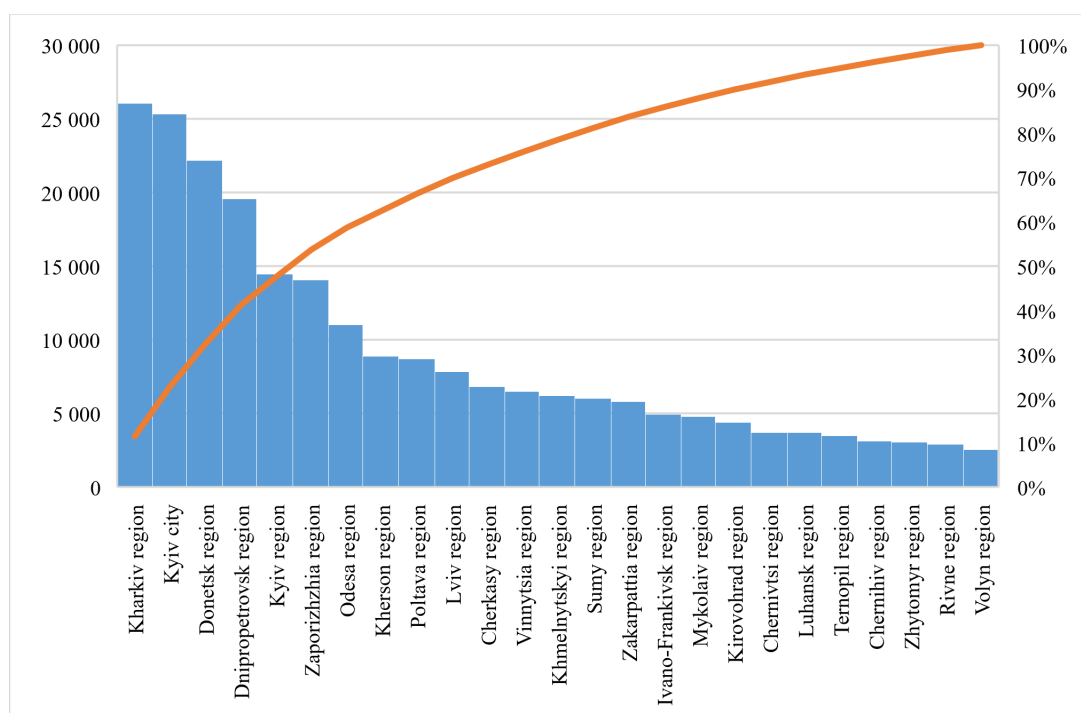


Figure 2. Regional distribution of IDP children in general secondary education institutions (as of 1 September 2025)

Compiled by the author based on [17].

IDP Children in Out-of-School Education Institutions



The smallest contingent is observed in out-of-school education, with 38,731 IDP children enrolled nationwide. The Donetsk region is the absolute leader (8,135), accounting for just over one-fifth of the national total. High numbers are also recorded in Dnipropetrovsk (3,630), Kyiv region (2,921) and Zaporizhzhia (2,895). Substantial enrolment is further observed in Sumy (2,585), Kirovohrad (2,477) and Kharkiv (2,469) regions. By contrast, in most regions the number of IDP children in out-of-school programmes does not exceed one thousand – for example, Volyn (141), Rivne (165) and Chernihiv (244).

According to the Pareto method, the four leading regions (Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, Kyiv region and Zaporizhzhia) account for about 45% of all IDP pupils in out-of-school education, while the top six regions (adding Sumy and Kirovohrad) together account for almost 60% (Figure 3). In the context of war, out-of-school education plays a particularly important role by helping IDP children not only to develop their abilities and talents, but also to relieve stress and support their socialisation within host communities. Therefore, greater attention should be paid to expanding children's participation in out-of-school programmes, with regional and local authorities playing a key role in this process.

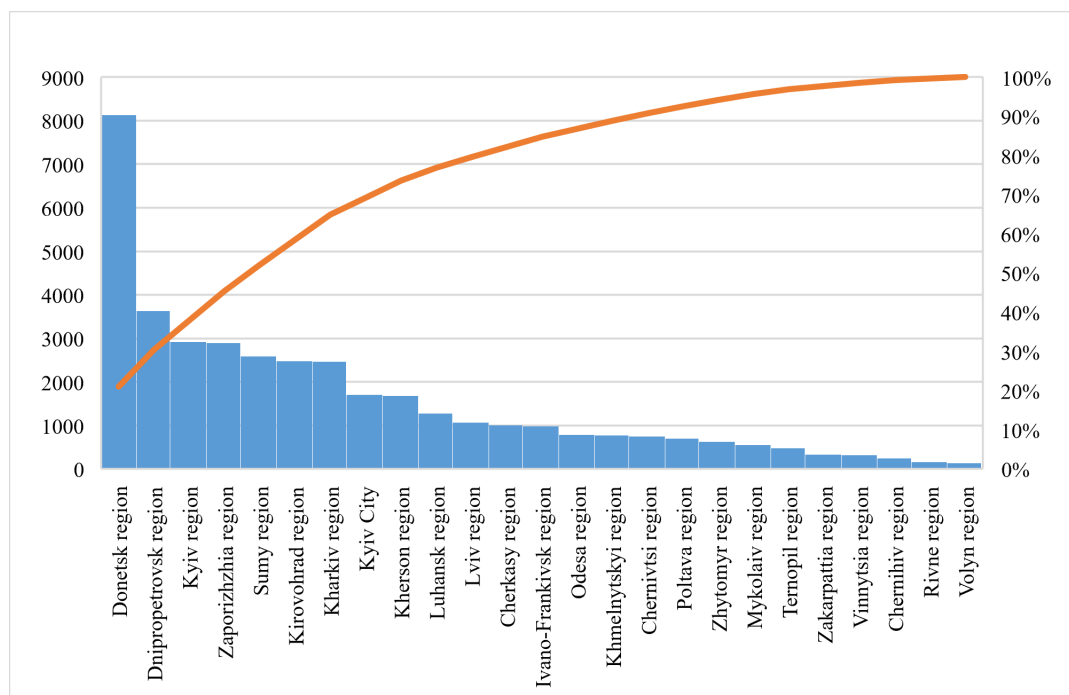


Figure 3. Regional distribution of IDP children in out-of-school education institutions (as of 1 September 2025)

Compiled by the author based on [17].



In sum, the data demonstrate that the largest numbers of IDP children across all three segments of education are concentrated in Kharkiv, Kyiv city, Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, Kyiv region and Zaporizhzhia, which together account for a significant share of the national total. By contrast, consistently low enrolment is observed in Volyn, Rivne, Chernihiv and Luhansk regions. This polarisation reflects broader socio-political and demographic dynamics.

The concentration of displaced learners in a limited number of regions can be explained by two main factors: relocation to areas bordering temporarily occupied territories, i.e. close to the families' previous place of residence, and the movement of households to large urban centres, primarily Kyiv, which offer wider educational and social opportunities. The application of the Pareto principle further illustrates this spatial asymmetry, showing that a relatively small number of host regions bear the greatest burden of integrating IDP children.

From a scientific perspective, these findings highlight the structural vulnerability of the education system under conditions of protracted war. From a practical standpoint, they point to the dual challenge of ensuring adequate infrastructure and addressing critical shortages of teaching staff. In policy terms, the results underline the need for targeted support from state, regional and donor institutions, the allocation of educational resources in line with current demands, and the development of adaptive regional strategies to safeguard IDP children's access to quality education.

Conclusions

In the context of the ongoing war, strengthening the capacity of the education system at both national and regional levels is essential to ensure that it remains sustainable, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of all learners, particularly those who are displaced. This requires well-balanced policy decisions, coordinated action at regional and local levels, and sustained support from international partners.

At the same time, our findings demonstrate that, despite severe wartime challenges, Ukraine's education system continues to show remarkable resilience. Our future research is envisaged to focus on a deeper analysis of the psycho-emotional adaptation of IDP children and on how educational tools can contribute to overcoming



stress factors and facilitating their integration into new learning and social environments.

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Анотація. Освітній сектор України зазнав глибоких трансформацій унаслідок повномасштабної агресії Російської Федерації, що призвела, зокрема, до масового переміщення здобувачів освіти у пошуках безпечніших умов для життя та навчання. У цьому контексті особливої актуальності набуває аналіз інтеграції внутрішньо переміщених дітей у систему освіти. Метою дослідження є вивчення регіонального розподілу дітей-ВПО у дошкільній, загальній середній та позашкільній освіті. За результатами аналізу, проведеного на основі оперативних даних Міністерства освіти і науки України (станом на початок вересня 2025 року), встановлено, що найбільша частка дітей-ВПО – 71,9 % – навчається у закладах загальної середньої освіти, 15,7 % – у закладах дошкільної освіти, а 12,3 % залучені до позашкільних програм. Порівняльний аналіз засвідчив концентрацію дітей-ВПО насамперед у прифронтових регіонах, а також у великих міських агломераціях, зокрема у м. Києві. Застосування принципу Парето підтвердило асиметрію у навантаженні на освітню інфраструктуру. Водночас результати дослідження свідчать, що, попри серйозні воєнні виклики, система освіти зберігає стійкість та здатність до адаптації завдяки виваженим політичним рішенням, узгодженим діям на регіональному й місцевому рівнях та стабільній підтримці міжнародних партнерів.

Ключові слова: внутрішньо переміщені діти, освіта в умовах війни, регіональний аналіз, освітня інфраструктура, стійкість системи освіти.

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