EDUCATIONAL ACCESS AND EQUITY IN THE INTEGRATION OF UKRAINIAN REFUGEES IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: In the context of the humanitarian crisis caused by the armed conflict in Ukraine, this research aims to examine the complex challenges associated with the educational integration of Ukrainian refugees in Romania. The study explores language barriers, curricular discrepancies, limited access to educational resources, and the socio-cultural integration difficulties faced by refugee students. Based on an extensive analysis of the existing literature, educational policies, and empirical data, the research investigates the strategies implemented to ensure equity and access to education in this crisis context. At the same time, it highlights the ethical and institutional challenges inherent in managing this process, emphasizing the need for flexible and inclusive approaches. The study also proposes future directions for improving educational integration, focusing on the importance of cooperation between authorities, educational institutions, and civil society organizations. In this way, the research not only addresses immediate challenges but also contributes to a broader theoretical and practical framework regarding the educational integration of refugees, underscoring the role of education as a crucial factor in the process of recovery and social reconstruction in times of crisis.

Keywords: educational integration, Romania, language barriers, curricular disparities, socio-cultural integration, educational equity, crisis context, Ukrainian refugees.

Résumé : Dans le contexte de la crise humanitaire générée par le conflit armé en Ukraine, cette recherche vise à examiner les défis complexes liés à l'intégration éducative des réfugiés ukrainiens en Roumanie. L'étude explore les barrières linguistiques, les disparités curriculaires, l'accès limité aux ressources éducatives et les difficultés d'intégration socio-culturelle rencontrées par les élèves réfugiés. Basée sur une analyse approfondie de la littérature existante, des politiques éducatives et des données empiriques, la recherche examine les stratégies mises en place pour garantir l'équité et l'accès à l'éducation dans ce contexte de crise. Parallèlement, elle met en lumière les défis éthiques et institutionnels inhérents à la gestion de ce processus, soulignant la nécessité d'approches flexibles et inclusives. L'étude propose également des pistes futures pour améliorer l'intégration éducative, en insistant sur l'importance de la coopération entre les autorités, les institutions éducatives et les organisations de la société civile. Ainsi, la recherche ne répond pas seulement aux défis immédiats, mais contribue également à un cadre théorique et pratique plus large concernant l'intégration éducative des réfugiés, mettant en évidence le rôle de l'éducation comme facteur essentiel dans le processus de récupération et de reconstruction sociale en période de crise.

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Rezumat: În contextul crizei umanitare generate de conflictul armat din Ucraina, această cercetare își propune să examineze provocările complexe asociate integrării educaționale a refugiaților ucraineni în România. Studiul explorează barierele lingvistice, discrepanțele curriculare, accesul limitat la resurse educaționale și dificultățile de integrare socio-culturală cu care se confruntă elevii refugiați. Fundamentată pe o analiză amplă a literaturii de specialitate, a politicilor educaționale și a datelor empirice, cercetarea investighează strategiile implementate pentru a asigura echitatea și accesul la educație în acest context de criză. În același timp, sunt evidențiate provocările etice și instituționale inerente în gestionarea acestui proces, subliniind necesitatea unor abordări flexibile și incluzive. Studiul propune, de asemenea, direcții viitoare pentru îmbunătățirea integrării educaționale, punând accent pe importanța cooperării dintre autorități, instituțiile de învățământ și organizațiile societății civile. În acest mod, cercetarea nu doar că răspunde provocărilor imediate, ci contribuie și la un cadru teoretic și practic mai larg privind integrarea educațională a refugiaților, subliniind rolul educației ca factor esențial în procesul de recuperare și reconstrucție socială într-un context de criză.

1. Introduction

The ongoing armed conflict in Ukraine has triggered one of the largest humanitarian crises in recent history, displacing millions of people and forcing many to seek refuge in neighboring countries, including Romania. Among the most vulnerable groups are the children and youth who, in addition to fleeing violence and instability, face significant challenges in accessing education. The integration of Ukrainian refugee students into the Romanian educational system is not only a matter of humanitarian aid but also a critical issue for the future of these young individuals, as education plays a central role in their long-term well-being and societal integration.

From the perspective of this research, socio-cultural integration refers to the dynamic process through which refugee students gradually acquire the knowledge, skills, values, and behavioral patterns necessary to function effectively in the host society while preserving their own cultural identity. It encompasses not only linguistic adaptation, but also the development of intercultural competencies, participation in school and community life, the ability to form social relationships with peers, and the internalization of shared norms and values within the educational environment. Socio-cultural integration is thus understood as a bidirectional and inclusive process, requiring both the adjustment of refugees and the openness of host institutions to cultural diversity. This multidimensional perspective underscores the importance of addressing social, emotional, and cultural factors in tandem with academic inclusion efforts.

This article explores the complex challenges associated with the educational integration of Ukrainian refugees in Romania, with a particular focus

on the barriers they face in accessing and benefiting from the educational system. These challenges include language differences, curricular gaps, and the socio-cultural integration of students in new educational environments. Furthermore, the article examines the strategies implemented by Romanian authorities, educational institutions, and civil society organizations to ensure equitable access to education for Ukrainian refugee students. In this context, the research underscores the importance of a flexible and inclusive approach to education that not only accommodates the immediate needs of displaced students but also fosters their long-term integration into Romanian society.

Through an extensive review of the existing literature, educational policies, and empirical data, this study provides an in-depth analysis of the current situation, identifies key challenges, and proposes solutions to enhance the educational experiences of Ukrainian refugee students. The findings aim to contribute to the ongoing discourse on refugee education, offering insights into the role of education as a fundamental tool for social recovery and reconstruction in times of crisis.

According to official data provided by the General Inspectorate for Immigration (IGI), as of December 31, 2024, a total of 177,914 Ukrainian citizens have been granted temporary protection in Romania due to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. As shown in Figure 1, the age distribution of beneficiaries highlights the significant scale of the displacement caused by the war, particularly among children and youth. In addition, 4,507 Ukrainian citizens have applied for asylum in Romania during the same period, reflecting the continued need for international protection. These numbers underscore the urgency of addressing the challenges faced by Ukrainian refugees, particularly in the field of education, as integrating displaced students into the Romanian educational system is essential for their long-term social and economic inclusion. The large influx of refugees necessitates coordinated efforts between national authorities, educational institutions, and civil society organizations to ensure that the rights of these refugees, including access to quality education, are upheld. (General Inspectorate for Immigration, 2024).

According to the "Report on the Integration of Ukrainian Refugees in Romania" (2024), published by the Romanian Government, the age distribution of Ukrainian refugees granted temporary protection reveals several significant demographic trends. Between February 24, 2022, and October 31, 2024, the most represented groups were minors aged 7–18 and adults within the broad 19–64 range. While the adult category encompasses multiple life stages – from young adults to individuals nearing retirement age – the report does not provide further disaggregation of this group. In contrast, the 7–18 age group stands out due to its substantial size, largely influenced by recent conscription regulations in Ukraine, which require individuals aged 16 and above to register with military authorities. As a result, many adolescents and young adults fled the country to avoid enlistment, contributing to the increased number of youth refugees. This demographic trend reflects not only the ongoing humanitarian and legal challenges but also emphasizes the urgent need to address the specific educational and

psychosocial needs of displaced children and teenagers. Ultimately, the data highlights the complexity of the refugee crisis and underlines the importance of age-sensitive integration policies tailored to diverse life stages.
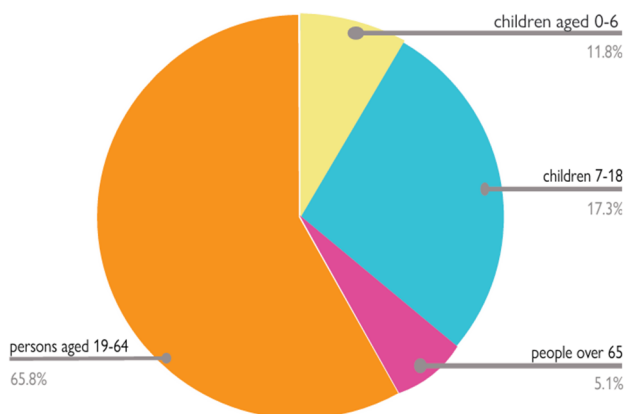

Figure 1. Distribution of beneficiaries of temporary protection registered in Romania in the period 24.02.2022 – 31.10.2024 according to age.
Source: Report on the Integration of Ukrainian Refugees in Romania, 2024

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has resulted in a massive influx of refugees, particularly children and adolescents, whose integration into the Romanian educational system faces multiple challenges. Among the primary obstacles are language barriers, curricular differences, the psychological impact of displacement, and limited access to educational resources.

The language barrier is a major challenge, as many Ukrainian children face difficulties in adapting to the language of instruction, which affects both their academic progress and social integration. According to a report by UNHCR, between 30 percent and 50 percent of the approximately 5.9 million Ukrainian refugees in Europe are children. However, only about half of these children have been enrolled in schools in host countries for the 2022-2023 school year (UNHCR, 2023). This highlights the significant educational challenges that refugee children face in host countries, where language and curriculum differences are compounded by limited support and resources.

According to an article published by Edupedu.ro (2023), Romania has implemented significant measures to facilitate the integration of Ukrainian refugee children into the national education system. These measures include offering Romanian language courses for both students and teachers, adapting curricula, and enrolling refugee children in schools across various regions of the country. Additionally, training sessions were organized for teachers to help them support the integration of Ukrainian students and understand the cultural and educational barriers these children face. The authorities also collaborated with international organizations and NGOs to provide additional support, including psychological counseling, considering the trauma caused by the ongoing armed conflict in Ukraine.

However, the article highlights that, despite these efforts, the support provided to Ukrainian children in overcoming educational and language barriers has been generally limited. The language barrier remains one of the greatest obstacles to integration, and many children have struggled to adapt to a new educational system, facing challenges in both academic performance and social integration. Additionally, the lack of adequate educational resources, such as materials and accessible technologies, has further hindered the integration process. While around 60 percent of Ukrainian children have been enrolled in schools, many continue to lack consistent support in their educational journey, particularly in terms of language acquisition, academic guidance, and psychological assistance (Edupedu.ro, 2023).

The educational integration of refugee children must be approached not only as a logistical challenge but as a multidimensional process involving language acquisition, socio-cultural adaptation, emotional recovery, and institutional responsiveness. Recent research underscores the importance of combining academic access with holistic support strategies. For instance, studies from Poland—one of the primary host countries for Ukrainian refugees—reveal that schools have employed both systemic and community-based responses, including transitional language programs, spiritual counseling, and partial curriculum alignment to facilitate adaptation (Herbst, 2023; Nazaruk et al., 2023; CEO, 2024). These findings provide valuable comparative insight and highlight the relevance of context-sensitive integration strategies, which can inform Romania's own efforts in aligning educational equity with the realities of forced displacement.

1.1. Research Objective and Methodology

This study aims to investigate the educational integration of Ukrainian refugee children in Romania, with an emphasis on access to education, equity, and the socio-cultural dimensions of inclusion. The research explores both the structural and psychological challenges faced by displaced students, as well as the institutional strategies developed to address these needs in the context of an ongoing humanitarian crisis.

The methodology adopted combines a qualitative document analysis with an applied, practice-informed observational component. The first phase of the research consisted of a structured review of relevant literature, official reports, legislative frameworks, and statistical data published between 2022 and 2024. Sources were selected based on their thematic relevance, institutional authority, and timeliness. Priority was given to documents issued by national authorities (e.g., Ministry of Education, General Inspectorate for Immigration), international organizations (e.g., UNHCR, UNICEF, WHO), and major civil society actors involved in refugee assistance (e.g., Save the Children Romania, World Vision). Access to these materials was ensured through public databases, institutional portals, and partnerships with non-governmental organizations. The analysis focused on identifying systemic barriers, policy responses, and models of educational support for refugee students.

In addition, a practice-based component was developed in collaboration with social workers and field practitioners from Save the Children Romania, in the municipality of Iaşi. This involved informal observation, peer consultations, and the analysis of non-public institutional data related to the enrollment and support of Ukrainian students in local schools. Although not a formal field study, this embedded perspective offered valuable empirical insights into the everyday dynamics of school-based integration, including the implementation of language support programs, student participation, and community engagement. The combined methodology thus allows for a comprehensive, multilevel understanding of how refugee integration is approached both at policy and practice level.

2. Key Challenges in the Educational Integration of Ukrainian Refugee Children

Ukrainian refugee students in Romania encounter a range of interconnected obstacles that complicate their educational integration. One of the most significant is the linguistic barrier, which extends beyond the mere absence of Romanian language proficiency. In the specific case of forced displacement caused by war, language acquisition is not preceded by a period of preparation or gradual immersion, as might be the case in voluntary migration scenarios. Ukrainian children often enter the Romanian school system abruptly, in the context of trauma, instability, and administrative uncertainty, without any prior exposure to the language of instruction. This sudden immersion amplifies the challenges of adaptation, as students are expected to navigate academic requirements, establish social relationships, and engage with unfamiliar institutional cultures simultaneously. Therefore, in this context, the language barrier becomes not only a pedagogical limitation but also a structural impediment to social inclusion, emotional resilience, and educational continuity.

According to a report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2019), limited proficiency in the host country's language is a significant barrier to the academic success and well-being of refugee and immigrant students. Research indicates that language fluency is closely linked to student performance across all academic subjects, including those with minimal language content, such as mathematics. Students who do not speak the language of instruction at home are, on average, less academically resilient compared to their peers who are native speakers of the host country's language.

Furthermore, the OECD (2019) highlights that language barriers not only hinder academic achievement but also impede the development of a sense of belonging within the school environment. This lack of integration can lead to social isolation and emotional challenges for refugee students.

The absence of comprehensive language support programs and qualified language instructors exacerbates these difficulties, making it more challenging for refugee students to catch up academically and socially integrate into their new educational settings. Therefore, addressing language proficiency is essential for promoting inclusion and well-being within the educational system.

A further challenge that refugee students face is the curricular disparity between the Ukrainian and Romanian education systems. The differences in subject content, teaching methodologies, and assessment standards necessitate that students quickly adapt to a new academic environment, often without adequate transitional support or orientation. These discrepancies can lead to delays in education and a decline in academic performance (UNHCR, 2023).

Additionally, the psychological trauma resulting from displacement, war-related stress, and the loss of familial and community support networks further impedes cognitive development and learning capacity. The World Health Organization (WHO) underscores that refugee children exposed to conflict are at an increased risk for conditions such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These mental health challenges can significantly hinder their ability to focus, engage socially, and perform well academically (WHO, 2023).

Lastly, access to educational resources remains uneven. Many schools lack sufficient materials tailored for non-native speakers, as well as trained personnel such as school psychologists, intercultural mediators, or special education staff. Infrastructural constraints and limited digital access further exacerbate these issues, especially in rural or underserved areas.

3. Legal and Institutional Framework

The integration of Ukrainian refugee children into the Romanian educational system is governed by a structured legal and institutional framework, developed in response to both international obligations and national priorities. Following the activation of the European Union's Temporary Protection Directive (Council Directive 2001/55/EC), Romania promptly adopted measures to ensure access to essential services, including education, for displaced persons from Ukraine. According to the European Commission (2022), the Temporary Protection Directive mandates that Member States provide immediate access to the education system under conditions similar to those available to nationals. In this context, Romania adapted its national legislation, primarily through Government Emergency Ordinance No. 20/2022, which regulates the rights of persons benefiting from temporary protection, emphasizing the right of minors to education in public institutions without discrimination (Government of Romania, 2022).

At the institutional level, the Romanian Ministry of Education coordinated the educational response by issuing specific methodological guidelines aimed at facilitating the enrollment and support of refugee students (Ministry of Education Romania, 2023). County School Inspectorates *(Inspectoratele Școlare Județene)* were tasked with implementing these measures at the local level, ensuring that schools were adequately prepared to accommodate Ukrainian students by organizing special language support classes, providing psychosocial support, and establishing remedial programs. Moreover, coordination among several ministries – including the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Health – was strengthened to ensure that the integration of displaced Ukrainians into the education system was

complemented by access to healthcare services and social protection measures (UNHCR Romania, 2023).

In parallel, partnerships with international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have significantly bolstered Romania's capacity to respond to the educational and social needs of Ukrainian refugees. Key organizations, including UNICEF, Save the Children Romania, and the Romanian Red Cross, have played a vital role by providing essential support, such as distributing educational materials, organizing language learning programs, offering psychosocial support, and facilitating extracurricular activities designed to promote social inclusion (UNICEF Romania, 2024; Save the Children Romania, 2023).

Furthermore, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has actively collaborated with Romanian authorities to strengthen institutional responses and advocate for the protection of refugee children's rights within the education system.

Despite these coordinated efforts, significant challenges remain. Recent reports indicate that many schools continue to struggle with shortages of trained personnel, inadequate funding for specialized programs, and insufficient infrastructure, particularly in rural areas (Edupedu.ro, 2023). These challenges highlight the urgent need for sustained investment in teacher training, the development of culturally responsive curricula, and the creation of long-term integration strategies that ensure sustainable educational outcomes for refugee students.

The integration of Ukrainian refugee children into the Romanian educational system involves two primary pathways: enrollment as **auditors** (*audienți*) or as **regular students** (*elevi/studenți*). According to Romanian legislation, refugee children who do not have the necessary documentation to prove their educational background are initially registered in schools as *auditors*. This status allows them to participate in educational integration activities, such as Romanian language courses and psychological counseling, but does not involve participation in official assessments or the receipt of grades and diplomas (Ministry of Education, 2022).

In order to transition to *student status,* which provides full rights to participate in evaluations, national exams, and receive diplomas, Ukrainian refugees must present their official educational documents or, if unavailable, undergo a *study equivalency process.* This process may involve assessing the student's level of education and conducting tests to determine their academic proficiency (Ministry of Education, 2022).

Rights/Obligations	Audient	Student
Right to Participate in Classes	Yes	Yes

Right to Exams and Assessments	No	Yes
Right to Academic Credits	No	Yes
Access to School Resources	Limited (e.g., library access, but no official support)	Full access (e.g., academic support, library, extracurricular activities)
Obligations (attendance, coursework)	Minimal (no formal obligations)	Full obligations (attendance, homework, assessments)
Social Integration in School Community	Limited (audients are typically not part of school events)	Full (participation in school events, peer interaction)
Legal Recognition	None (no diploma or official qualification)	Full (diploma or certificate upon completion)

Figure 2. Comparative Table: Rights and Obligations of Students vs. Audients
(author's own elaboration based on comparative educational frameworks)

This table (Fig. 2) illustrates the asymmetry between the two statuses with respect to rights, responsibilities, and access to educational capital. The student status grants access to structured learning processes, social integration, and formal validation, while the audient remains peripheral, both administratively and socially.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that auditors do benefit from the right to attend classes. Although this form of participation does not equate to full academic inclusion, it provides a valuable opportunity for exposure to the host educational system, peer interaction, and language immersion. In many cases, this access functions as a preliminary phase that may facilitate the transition toward full student status, especially when accompanied by institutional support.

4. Critical Perspective: Social and Educational Implications of Extended Audient Status

The persistence of an individual in an audient status, especially during formative educational stages, raises significant concerns. While it allows for exposure to educational content, it does not enable full inclusion in institutional processes. The lack of formal recognition, coupled with minimal social integration, may lead to educational marginalization and reduce the likelihood of academic continuity and future employability.

Sociologically, this phenomenon can reinforce existing inequalities, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds who may be forced into audient roles due to bureaucratic, legal, or socioeconomic barriers (e.g., migration status, poverty, lack of documentation). Prolonged exclusion from certification pathways may hinder not only academic development but also the individual's integration into society.

Thus, from both a pedagogical and policy perspective, audient status should be considered a temporary, exceptional measure, and interventions should aim to facilitate the transition into full student status as swiftly as possible. Institutional strategies should also address the root causes that lead to audient situations in order to uphold the principle of equitable access to education.

5. Statistical Data on the Integration of Ukrainian Refugee Children in Romanian Schools

An analysis of the enrollment dynamics of Ukrainian refugee children in the Romanian educational system between September 2023 and October 2024 reveals a marked upward trend, particularly following the commencement of the 2023–2024 academic year. This increase is attributable both to the continued influx of refugees and to the integration measures adopted by Romanian authorities to facilitate access to education (Monthly Report, 2024). The enrollment data suggest that targeted support initiatives, such as Romanian language courses and preparatory programs, have been instrumental in promoting the educational inclusion of displaced Ukrainian students.

According to the Monthly Report (2024), data collected between September 1 and October 31, 2024, reveal that a significant proportion of Ukrainian children have enrolled in primary and secondary education, reflecting the successful integration of younger age groups into the Romanian school system. A considerable number of adolescents have also been registered in high schools, illustrating a strong commitment to educational continuity among refugee youth. These developments highlight the effectiveness of Romania's educational and linguistic support measures in fostering the integration of refugee children. The stabilization of enrollment figures observed in October 2024 may further suggest a process of ongoing adaptation and a gradual consolidation of Ukrainian students within the Romanian educational framework.

In order to investigate the educational integration of Ukrainian refugee children within the local context of Iaşi, I engaged in an empirical sociological study utilizing official documents and reports provided by local educational authorities. The research was carried out in collaboration with Save the Children Romania, whose expertise and access to relevant institutional data were pivotal in ensuring the comprehensive scope of the study. Employing a mixed-methods approach, I systematically collected and analyzed enrollment data across various educational institutions in Iaşi, focusing on the social dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that characterize the integration of displaced children into the Romanian educational system.
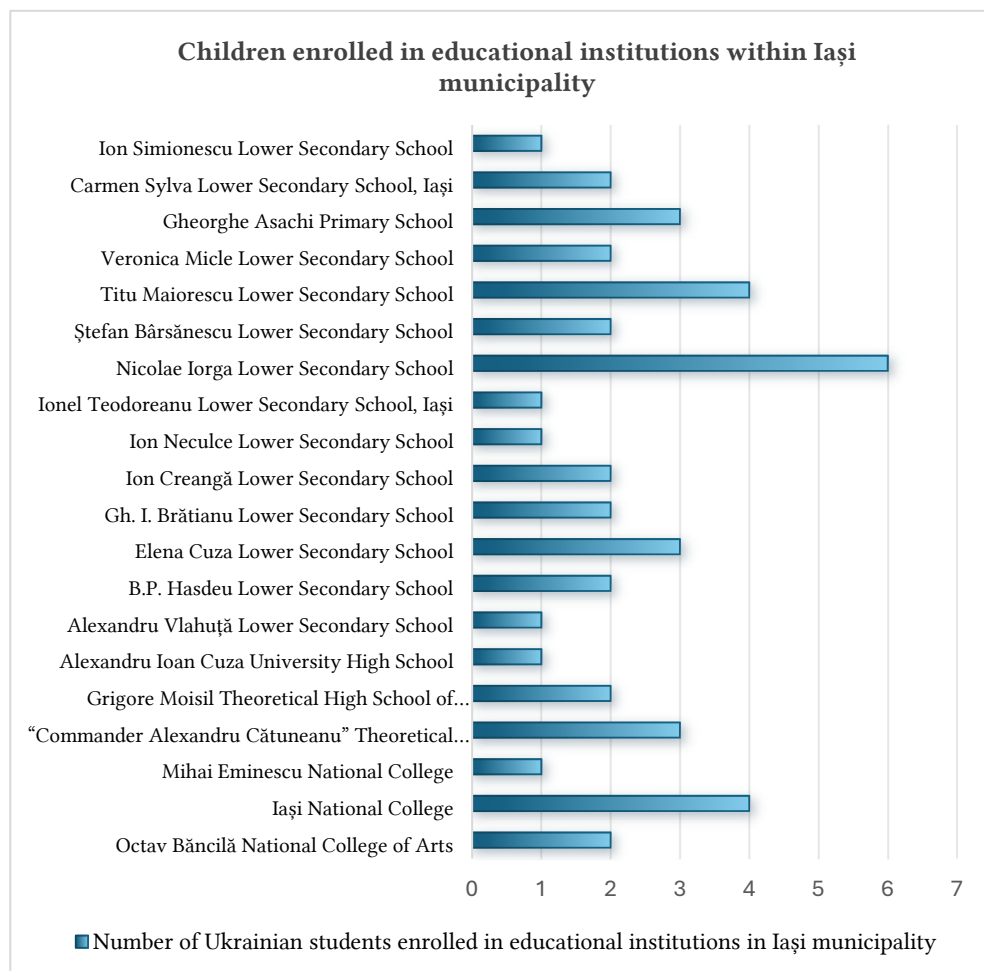
Figure 3. Ukrainian children enrolled in educational institutions within Iași Municipality
Own elaboration based on preliminary data collected by social workers in collaboration with Save the Children Romania (Iași, November 2024)

The results indicate that a significant number of Ukrainian children have been enrolled in various educational institutions, including primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary schools. Several schools, such as "Ştefan Bârsănescu" Lower Secondary School, "Titu Maiorescu" Lower Secondary School, and Iași National College, have recorded comparable enrollment figures, reflecting localized efforts by school administrations and non-governmental organizations to facilitate educational access for refugee minors. While these figures demonstrate institutional responsiveness, it is important to note that the numbers remain relatively low—ranging between 1 and 6 students per school—and therefore do not suggest statistically significant differences between institutions. The data presented in Figure 3 should be interpreted as illustrative rather than inferential,

offering contextual insight into school-level integration practices rather than allowing for generalizable conclusions. Nevertheless, the observed trend reflects both the resilience of refugee families and the adaptability of host institutions in addressing emerging educational needs. Although the data remains preliminary and has not been formally incorporated into government reports, the analysis provides valuable sociological insight into how educational institutions and local policies mediate the socio-educational integration process. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on refugee education by offering a localized perspective on how educational systems respond to the needs of displaced populations in post-conflict contexts.

6. Solutions Implemented for the Integration of Ukrainian Refugee Children into the Romanian Educational System

In response to the integration of Ukrainian refugee children into the Romanian education system, several specific measures have been implemented to address the challenges related to language barriers, psychological trauma, and educational adaptation. These interventions include intensive Romanian language courses, specialized preparatory classes, teacher training, and psychological support services, each designed to facilitate a smooth and effective transition.

First, intensive Romanian language courses represent a fundamental component of the integration strategy for refugee children. These courses are organized in accordance with the guidelines established by the Romanian Ministry of Education, aiming to enhance the language proficiency of displaced students. In line with the Ministry's policies, these courses typically offer up to 6 hours of instruction per week, tailored to the students' age and proficiency levels. The focus is on improving vocabulary, grammar, and basic conversational skills, which allows students to communicate more effectively within the classroom and engage in academic activities. According to official reports from the Ministry of Education, such measures are crucial for overcoming the language barriers that often impede academic success and social integration for refugee children (Ministry of Education, 2023).

The DEC2B project, implemented by World Vision Romania, addresses key challenges faced by Ukrainian refugee children in the integration process into the Romanian educational system. In the context of this initiative, over 1,600 children received vital support, including Romanian language courses essential for overcoming linguistic barriers. The project established nine "Happy Bubble" centers, which serve as socio-educational hubs offering not only educational assistance but also psychological support, helping refugee children adapt to their new environment. These centers provide early childhood education, after-school care, hot meals, and school supplies, ensuring that the children's basic needs are met. Furthermore, the project fosters social cohesion by organizing joint activities with over 2,000 Romanian children, promoting cultural exchange and mutual understanding. The involvement of local authorities and civil society organizations

strengthens the implementation of these solutions, ensuring that refugee children have access to inclusive educational opportunities (World Vision Romania, 2024).

In addition to the educational measures aimed at linguistic and academic integration, Romania has incorporated psychological support services within its educational system to address the significant psychological challenges faced by many refugee children. Recognizing the trauma resulting from displacement, including issues such as anxiety, grief, and post-traumatic stress, schools have integrated specialized psychological support through the deployment of trained counselors and psychologists. These professionals provide individualized and group therapy sessions to help students manage emotional difficulties, ensuring that psychological barriers do not impede their academic performance or social adaptation. The provision of mental health services is considered a critical component of the holistic approach to refugee integration, as it directly contributes to the overall well-being of children and enhances their capacity to engage meaningfully in the educational process and wider community (UNHCR, 2023).

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are integral to the integration of Ukrainian refugee children into Romania's educational system, offering targeted support services. These organizations provide psychological assistance to help children manage trauma from displacement, while also delivering social counseling and material aid to ease the immediate challenges of resettlement. A critical component of their work is the provision of **Romanian language courses**, which enable both children and adults to overcome linguistic barriers and engage meaningfully within the educational environment and broader community. Through these efforts, NGOs not only address immediate integration challenges but also play a significant role in long-term adaptation. Furthermore, NGOs engage in **advocacy**, influencing national policies to ensure the educational and social rights of refugees are upheld, contributing to a more inclusive system that recognizes and responds to the specific needs of displaced populations (UNHCR, 2023).

7. Conclusions

In conclusion, this study has examined the multifaceted process of integrating Ukrainian refugee children into the Romanian educational system, with a focus on access, equity, and socio-cultural adaptation. Based on the analysis of institutional documents and empirical data, the main conclusion that emerges is that Romania has achieved a moderate level of educational access and equity for Ukrainian refugees. While significant measures have been adopted – such as emergency legislative provisions, Romanian language support programs, and NGO partnerships – these remain unevenly implemented and insufficiently coordinated across regions.

A defining feature of the Romanian integration model is its reliance on rapid assimilation into the national educational framework, often without transitional structures or bilingual alternatives. In contrast, neighboring countries such as Poland or Slovakia have developed more flexible approaches, including

temporary Ukrainian-language support or adapted bridging curricula. Despite these differences, Romania's efforts have enabled thousands of children to enter formal schooling, a fact that should not be overlooked.

When compared to neighboring Poland, where refugee integration has benefited from broader language proximity, temporary curriculum flexibility, and faith-based psychosocial support mechanisms (Nazaruk et al., 2023; CEO, 2024), Romania's approach appears more centralized and structurally uniform, relying heavily on assimilation into the national education system. While both models present strengths and constraints, the Polish case illustrates the value of diversified tools – particularly at local and school level – for fostering meaningful educational inclusion.

One of the key empirical insights of this study is that even partial inclusion – such as auditor status – can serve as a stepping stone toward full educational integration, provided that institutional support is in place. However, persistent structural barriers, such as the lack of specialized staff, underdeveloped intercultural programs, and limited psychological assistance, continue to affect both the quality and sustainability of inclusion.

Future efforts should prioritize long-term strategies that move beyond emergency response. These include: expanding second-language instruction programs; enhancing teacher training in intercultural pedagogy; streamlining the recognition of prior learning from Ukraine; and fostering institutional partnerships across regions. Such improvements would not only enhance educational outcomes for refugee students but also strengthen the resilience and inclusiveness of the Romanian education system as a whole.

Ultimately, the integration of refugee children must be understood not only as a logistical challenge, but as a long-term investment in social cohesion and democratic stability within a rapidly changing European context.

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