



ETUCE Solidarity Mission 2023

Report

In its series of solidarity missions focused on the collaboration with its member organisations, ministries, schools, and other stakeholders in the neighbouring countries that are working on the frontline to help Ukrainian refugees, from 16 to 19 January 2022 ETUCE under the lead of its President, Larry Flanagan, and the European Director, Susan Flocken, visited education institutions and met with government representatives in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

The mission further showed tremendous efforts, creativity and commitment of teachers and other education personnel in their support to Ukrainian refugees.

Mission to Tallinn, 16-17 January 2023

General information

Based on the information provided by Mr. Tõnis Lukas, the Minister of Education and Research of the Republic of Estonia, 180 teachers from Ukraine are currently employed as teaching assistants in Estonia and are paid by the state. Among other things, language as well as methodological courses have been offered to teachers from Ukraine.

There is an important ongoing work in cooperation with other neighbouring countries of the EU and the Ministry of Education of Ukraine on the recognition and graduation processes of Ukrainian refugees studying in the EU education institutions, presuming to provide Ukrainian families with a sense of stability and security regardless of when they can return to Ukraine.

On a different note, on 12 December 2022, the Estonian Parliament passed a bill under which the Estonian language became the language of instruction in all schools and kindergartens across the country, and a transition to Estonian-language schooling by Russian-language schools is to begin as of 2024-2025 school year. Thus, local governments responsible for the distribution of Ukrainian children into schools, which is based on school capacities and availability, are encouraging the enrolment of Ukrainian children into the national language schools for better inclusion into society.

Against that background, the communication flow in the visited schools that enrolls Ukrainian students at general education level has been multilingual, switching from Estonian to English, Russian and Ukrainian.

School visits



Riho Uulma, Director of the **Tallinna Nõmme Gümnaasium** (secondary education level) together with Karin Klemmer, the head teacher at the Tallinna Nõmme Gümnaasium and the Vice-President of the EEPU, explained that at the present time, Tallinna Nõmme Gümnaasium enrolls 900 students out of whom 20 students are Ukrainian civilians. The first Ukrainian students arrived last spring and have remained in the same school since then. In January 2023, a new group of Ukrainian students arrived at the school through a distribution system organised by the local government. The distribution of refugee children in schools is not based on their place of residence, as mentioned above, but is rather linked to the availability of places in schools in Estonia. Thus, while some families live far away from Tallinna Nõmme Gümnaasium, Ukrainian children get access to free public transport and free meals at school.

There are no separate classes for Ukrainian students in Tallinna Nõmme Gümnaasium. Ukrainian children study along with Estonian children and follow the Estonian curriculum. Ukrainian refugees including both students and teacher assistants are put in one group only to study the Estonian language as a separate subject. As most Ukrainian students speak and/or understand Russian, some of the schoolteachers speak to them in Russian to facilitate the learning process along with the support of Ukrainian teaching assistants. More specifically, the role of a teacher assistant in the school is to work with newcomers and help them adapt to the new environment. A teacher assistant is to also teach Ukrainian students about the online education system in Estonia. In addition, individual work is provided to Ukrainian students to help them integrate into the school community. A psychologist (social pedagogue) provides psychosocial support to both students and teachers.

According to the staff of the Tallinna Nõmme Gümnaasium, some students follow both Estonian education programme in the day and the Ukrainian education online when they get home after school.

During the meeting with Alo Savi, Director at Tallinna Tõnismäe State High School (**Vabaduse Kool**), and representatives of the Vabaduse Kool student council, it was explained that the school - a new state funded school - enrolls Ukrainian students exclusively. At present, Vabaduse Kool provides education to nearly 600 Ukrainian students. Education is focused on the Estonian curriculum with 60 % of teaching in the Estonian language and 40% in the Ukrainian language. It was also noted that the Russian language is a common ground for those teachers who cannot speak English. Speaking about the recognition of Ukrainian students' studies under Ukrainian education system, it was mentioned that while in Ukraine the 11th grade is the last year of upper secondary education, in

Estonia it is the 12th grade. Therefore, the Ukrainian students of the current 11th grade will be enrolled to the 12th grade as of next academic year and thus adding one additional year of schooling.



While the school provides both psychosocial and individual based support to Ukrainian students, it also offers meeting sessions for parents once every month.

Finally, it was reported that around 30 % of the Ukrainian students of the Vabaduse Kool are following the Ukrainian curriculum online back at their home on top of the Estonian curriculum.

When it comes to the integration process of the Ukrainian students at higher education level, Professor and Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs, Hendrik Voll, at **TalTech University** explained that the Estonian government has spent almost 600 000 EUR to support Ukrainian students at TalTech University.

Currently, TalTech University enrolls 108 active Ukrainian students with 62 of students having been admitted for this academic year. Ukrainian students can study for free likewise those Ukrainian students who had been studying in the higher education institution before the war. Given that in Ukraine students finish high school at the age of 17 years, entering tertiary education one year younger than Estonian student, had not caused problems at the university. However, students reported that they had encountered administrative difficulties in the preparation phase, e.g., with setting up a bank account, as legally people become of age at 18 years in Estonia. The TalTech staff noted that the most significant threshold to university admission had been the level of English language of the Ukrainian students. Many Ukrainian applicants had failed to pass the test and not used the opportunity of the free of charge preparation lessons offered by the university. For Ukrainian students who applied to the education institution and failed the English language test, TalTech offered the free of charges language course for one year allowing students from Ukraine to apply again next year. Besides scholarships, the university provides Ukrainian students with dormitories as well as a 50% coverage of students' accommodation costs. Courses are taught in Estonian and English at TalTech.

TalTech staff also reported that, there are 1 or 2 Ukrainian scientists, who are mainly working on research at the university. It was mentioned that most of Ukrainian academic staff remained in Poland due to the language affinity.

Meeting with the Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Estonia and the Estonian Parliament



It is important to mention that tremendous efforts have been undertaken by teachers and education communities at all education levels to support the integration of Ukrainian civilians in education institutions, applying an individual approach also outside of schools through the implementation of extracurricular activities.

The meetings with the member of the Estonian Parliament, Mr. Mihhail Lotman and Mr. Tõnis Lukas, the Minister of Education and Research of the Republic of Estonia, further underlined the crucial role and efforts made by teachers in Estonia daily.

In the framework of the multiple crises the serious issues teachers and other education personnel face constitute yet another layer of complexity. While referring to teachers as the most important part of the intellectual resources of Estonia, Mr. Tõnis Lukas mentioned the issue of teachers' recruitment and retention in Estonia linked with the unattractiveness of the profession that results into the eventual teacher shortage. Currently, the Estonian government allocates 6.5% of GDP to the education sector, however not all funds are re-distributed to teachers' salaries. The GDP share covers school constructions and maintenance, as well salaries and additional funds for assistance in schools, e.g., psychosocial support.



Meeting with ETUCE member organisations in Estonia



On a final note, the joint meeting with EEPU and UNIVERSITAS representatives led by Reemo Voltri, EEPU Chairman, and Ants Koel, UNIVERSITAS Chairman, further unveiled critical issues around the lack of attractiveness of the teaching profession resulting in a high average age of the teacher population and teacher shortage. Although EEPU managed to get a 24% increase for teachers' salaries as of January 2023, teacher's minimum salary (1749 EUR) still will not be equal to the predicted national average salary in 2023 amounting to 1845 EUR. The absence of a career progression model offering different opportunities to grow in the career was also underlined as a key issue as teachers remain at the same salary level throughout their career. There is no salary differentiation due to the absence of experience/qualification differentiation in teaching staff.

In addition, the education trade unions reported that while employment contracts officially encompass a 35h/week for a full-time teacher position, in reality, the working hours represent 45-55 h per week. The lack of mentoring programmes for incoming teachers, although some programmes exist at individual school levels, was mentioned as well. UNIVERSITAS further underlined the issues of financing and independence of higher education institutions. Finally, while both organisations are fearing that an important amount of state funding will be allocated to the military sector, teacher training to handle the refugee integration process was also cited as another critical need.

Mission to Riga, 18 January 2023

General information

Important to note that the Latvian government approved amendments to the Law on Education and the Law on General Education in the fall of 2022, paving the way for the transition to education conducted entirely in the Latvian language within three years.

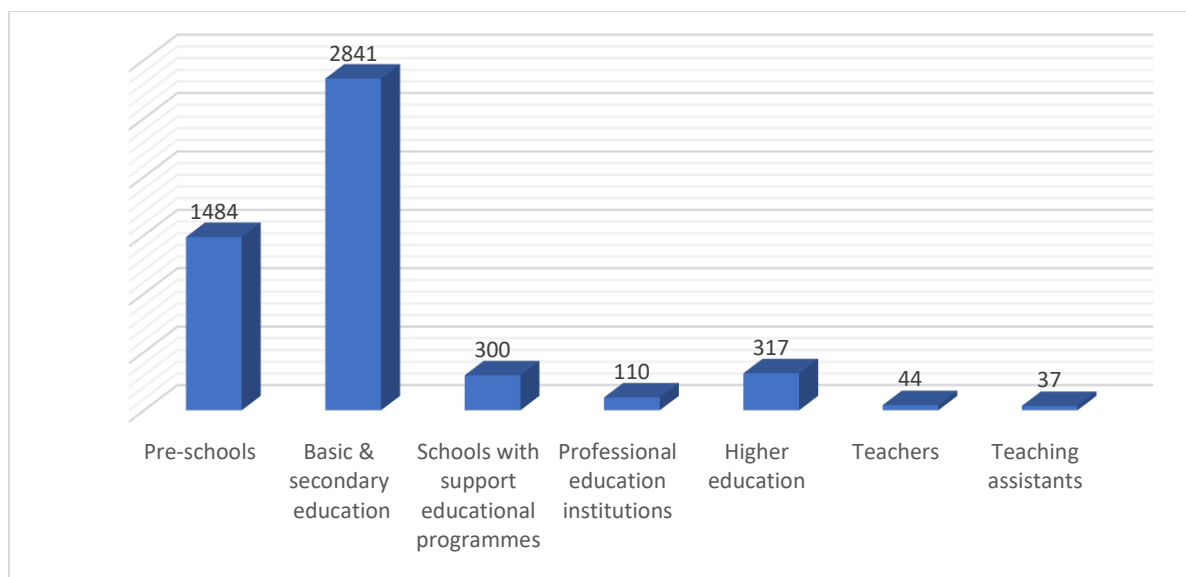
As per the amendments, starting from 1st September 2023, only the Latvian language will be used in the educational process for preschool education and in grades 1st, 4th, and 7th of basic education. From 1st September 2024, students in grades 2nd, 5th, and 8th will also switch to Latvian-only instruction, followed by students in grades 3rd, 6th, and 9th on 1st September 2025. It is worth noting that secondary school students already receive education in the Latvian language, while students in grades 1st -6th learn at least 50% of their curriculum in Latvian, and those in grades 7th - 9th learn at least 80% in the Latvian language.

Minority students in primary education can study their language and cultural history through an interest education programme, which will be funded by both the state through grants to municipalities and the municipalities themselves.

Meeting with the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia



According to the data provided by Ms. Līga Lejiņa, State Secretary at the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia, the number of persons registered with a status “Ukrainian civilian” in the State Education Information System is as following (by 18.01.2023):



At the end of the academic year 2021/2022 139 Ukrainian students received a certificate in primary education; 64 Ukrainian students received certificate in secondary education. Ukrainian students were enrolled in 301 schools (48,2%) of general education in Latvia (across all regions). The representatives of the Latvian Ministry of Education further revealed that the underage Ukrainian civilians have access to education on the same basis and standard as the underage asylum seekers according to the regulations established for the asylum seekers' rights to education. Ukrainian minors are offered education either in Latvian or in the minority (Ukrainian) language at the pre-school and basic education levels according to the provision on the minority language curriculum.

As reported by the National Centre for Education of the Republic of Latvia, teachers from Ukraine in Latvian general education institutions can be employed as teaching assistants, currently 36 Ukrainian teachers have been registered as teaching assistants. The European Social Fund (ESF) project "Support for the development of individual competencies" currently encompasses 26 education institutions. It was noted that both those general education institutions that are already implementing the project and those that are not involved in it can receive funding. The programme covers salary expenses for teaching assistants – assistance in learning the content of subjects as well as learning groups (grade 1-12) for providing Latvian language lessons at A1 level.

During the school year 2022/2023, the National Centre for Education will continue to provide methodological and informational support to education institutions where students from Ukraine are learning, both by answering questions and by organising informative meetings once a month for education authorities and school representatives.

Speaking about state examination of Ukrainian students – at the end of the 9th grade and in high school at the end of the 12th grade, the possibility of allowing students not to take state exams has been granted, taking into account that there are students who plan to return to Ukraine. In cases of insufficient marks to reach a grade in general secondary education or failed state exams students from Ukraine have the right to continue education in the same class level for another academic year.

Generally speaking, about support provided to both students and teachers from Ukraine, the State supports the implementation of individual learning plans for students as well as non-formal education programmes (leisure camps, creative workshops). On the other hand, Ukrainian teachers are provided with a light recognition procedure, pedagogical materials, free of charge multilingual education and priority Latvian language courses. The state budget allocates funding for the salary of teachers for the delivery of the general education program. This is linked to the

implementation of each student's individual learning plan and amounts to 257 EUR per month during the school year and during any additional learning activities, including the preschool education program. Additionally, 50 EUR per academic year is provided for the procurement of teaching materials.

As for support provided to Ukrainian students at higher education institutions, Ms Dace Jansone, Deputy Director of Higher Education, Science, Innovation department of Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia, reported that scholarships amounting to 140 EUR per month are granted to Ukrainian civilians who do not qualify for Erasmus+ (Erasmus + scholarships amount to 1050 EUR per month). Additionally, Erasmus+ scholarships are granted to Ukrainian civilians who started their studies in Ukraine before 24 February 2022 and continued them in EU countries, including Latvia. Further to this, higher education institutions offer self-funded study places or tuition fee reductions. There is also a research fellowship for Ukrainian researchers, 900 EUR per month is provided to those researchers who are not employed by scientific institutions. Currently 35 researchers have been registered in the country.

The Ministry has also informed that approximately 50 % of Ukrainian children are following the Ukrainian curriculum online.

School visits and talks with LIZDA representatives



The visit to **Riga 15th secondary school** (Russian language minority school) - the second one in Latvia in terms of number of enrolled Ukrainian students - explained that in September 2022, 154 Ukrainian students had been accepted to the school. Currently, the number of Ukrainian students represents 148 persons. However, Natalja Kubasova, Director of Riga 15th secondary school, explained that the school with most Ukrainian students registered is the Ukrainian language minority school.

The Riga 15th secondary school has been also employing 6 teachers from Ukraine in the capacity of teaching assistants since spring 2022.

Upon enrolment, the Ukrainian students were divided into different classes. At present, there is only one separate Ukrainian class in the 8th grade. Emphasis is given to providing an individual approach for each student, including psychosocial support, as well as allowing for an adaption period and extracurricular activities when it comes to the integration and inclusion of Ukrainian students.

However, challenges that occurred upon an instant increased number of new students resulted in, among other things the lack of teaching material, e.g., textbooks.

The main problems highlighted by the Ukrainian teachers was the lack of Ukrainian physical teaching material although teachers have had the access to online teaching material made available by the Ministry of Education of Ukraine, as well as the lack of paid working hours. There is also a lack of education support staff and Latvian language teachers who could teach the national language to Ukrainian students.

The workload of teachers and teaching assistants has been important too given that on top of the Latvian education programme, teaching assistants have now been also supporting Ukrainian teaching process.

That is also linked to the energy cuts in many Ukrainian regions often interrupting Ukrainian students' online education.

Ināra Boka, Deputy Director for Education of the **Riga Ukrainian Secondary School** - one of the few state education institutions where the language of instruction is Latvian and Ukrainian - explained that it is a municipal general education institution. The teaching and upbringing process at school takes place in accordance with the Latvian state education policy and ensures equal rights to education for all students, including children of Ukrainian civilians. School work is organised with the aim of integrating into the Latvian environment and at the same time studying, preserving, and developing the Ukrainian language, culture, and traditions.

At present the teaching staff consists of 61 teachers out of whom 22 are Ukrainian civilians. Currently the school has been enrolling 402 students out of whom 178 are Ukrainian civilians.

The school representatives explained that basic subjects e.g., mathematics and sports, are delivered in both Latvian and Ukrainian as part of the integration process. Given that the Ukrainian school is the only one in Latvia the demand was high.

Important to note that the whole school community dedicates much of its time to individual work with Ukrainian students as well as extracurricular activities to support their inclusion into the society and cope with psychological traumas.

LIZDA leadership, Inga Vanaga and Irina Avdejeva, further unveiled persisting and critical issues around teachers' workload, critical shortage of teachers, low status of the profession and barriers to re-qualification of teachers wishing to change their teaching subject as well as a poor social dialogue culture in the country.

Mission to Vilnius, 19 January 2023

Meeting with the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania



Jurgita Šiugždinienė, Minister of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania, explained that since the beginning of the war, a total of 25.421 minors have come to Lithuania from Ukraine. This accounts for 35.11 % of all the Ukrainian war refugees in Lithuania. A total of 11.943 Ukrainian war refugees have registered at education institutions in Lithuania, including 2.934 at pre-school education institutions and 9.009 at general education institutions. It has been also noted that around 50 % of the registered Ukrainian minors are following exclusively Ukrainian curriculum online. It has been a critical challenge to monitor/trace the attendance of Ukrainian minors at Lithuanian schools due to the absence of a national specific mechanism that registers when Ukrainian civilians leave Lithuania.

People who have come from Ukraine choose early childhood education and schools according to their place of residence and their needs. They can contact the school or the municipality for admission to Lithuanian public schools or a national minority language school teaching according to the Lithuanian curriculum. Where possible, Lithuanian schools provide opportunities to learn the Ukrainian language and history. 62% of refugees are being taught in Lithuanian public schools. Among other subjects, Ukrainians can study in Ukrainian in private schools or schools that have obtained licences to offer the Ukrainian general education curriculum, of which there are 5 in Lithuania. When they first arrive, children are given an adaptation period. They receive emotional support, get acquainted with the school and their classmates, get used to the new environment, and have an individual education plan drawn up for them.

All children are given opportunities to participate in non-formal education and cultural activities. Education in the state language and additional lessons to learn the state language are guaranteed for all new arrivals. Vilniaus Lietuvių Namai and regional methodical centres are providing subject (methodological) support and consultations to municipalities, schools, and teachers on how to work with foreign (Ukrainian) students.

It was also reported that a total of 2.348 teachers have come to Lithuania from Ukraine. 617 teachers are already employed in the Lithuanian education system.

At Lithuanian higher education institutions, there are 1058 Ukrainians pursuing bachelor's degrees and 231 pursuing master's degrees. To the students who came after the beginning of the Russian invasion, the state is providing a

scholarship and is partially covering the tuition fee for them. 64 Ukrainian researchers (employed at 12 Lithuanian institutions) have been allocated a total of nearly 0.8 million EUR in support. Also, Lithuanian courses for adults are organised, financial support for sports federations to compensate for the training of Ukrainian high-level athletes in Lithuania. Children's summer camps, where more than 2.000 children from Ukraine participated together with children from Lithuania in summer 2022.

School visits and talks with ETUCE member organisations in Lithuania



Vilnius Simono Staneviciaus progymnasium is a public school that currently enrolls 875 students out of whom 17 are Ukrainian civilians. Daiva Briedienė, Director of the Vilnius Simono Staneviciaus progymnasium, explained that the Lithuanian language is the primary language of instruction, however due to the war, the school has started providing teaching in Ukrainian too. The municipality has provided support for this change, and there are plans to possibly introduce Ukrainian as a foreign language in the future. Currently, the school employs 2 teachers from Ukraine.

Regarding the education of Ukrainian students, they are provided with ICT tools due to the absence of physical teaching material for the Ukrainian curriculum. The school has a two-stage approach for teaching Ukrainian students, which includes having them study the Ukrainian curriculum in the Ukrainian language and integrating them into Lithuanian lessons which is an important aspect for their social integration. They also had a summer camp and intensive language courses in August to help with the integration and adaptation process. The school follows the Ministry's recommendations for working with refugees and has a formalised process for inclusion, with teachers meeting with specialists and sharing professional experiences.

In addition, the school takes care of a specific methodology on how to teach Lithuanian as a foreign language and how to work with refugees.

High workload as well as work-related stress of the teaching staff were noted by the staff.

The private school **Gravitas** which is a non-profit, free of charge, and open school for children fleeing war, regimes and adversity is split into three levels. Currently it enrolls up to 460 Ukrainian students exclusively. It is funded by private donations from individuals, foundations, businesses, and embassies. The school staff further explained that the different school levels are disseminated in three buildings, which comes on the one hand with the conveniences,

such as greater integration and exchange with the environment for the higher secondary students with the university students, but also showing its inconveniences, on the other hand, - the school for early childhood and primary education is looking for a building to move into for next year.

Irena Blaževičė, the founder and school leader of the Gravititas school explained that the concept and vision behind this school was born from the idea of schooling in refugee camps, except that it is not in a foreign country but provides education to refugee students in the country. The school has no fixed pedagogical programme; the programme is continuously developed by teachers together with the school leader, responding to the most pressing needs first. This so-called experimental project is also focused entirely on responding to the need of providing education in reply to the refugee crisis.

Gravititas school focuses on the integration and inclusion of Ukrainian students while providing Lithuanian language lessons. Thus, education is based on the Lithuanian curriculum while the school is working on the accreditation for Ukrainian schooling. Most teachers are Ukrainian, and the school community works together to address and develop education policy on many different issues including addressing psychologic trauma. Gravititas is the first education institution in Lithuania aiming to adapt to the trauma of foreign students. Teachers help to build a new identity for the students while also maintaining their roots. The school also provides non-formal education to help students integrate. The school community is also involved in fundraising activities for Ukraine to further maintain solidarity amongst Ukrainian people. Although psychological support has been provided to both students and teachers, financial support is much needed for research on overall support for families by professional psychologists. Finally, the school is also in need of Lithuanian language teachers, as well as teaching assistants given that it also has students with special needs.

The talks with leaders of ETUCE member organisations in Lithuania, Egidijus Milešinas (LESTU) and Andrius Navickas (LEETU) on the existing challenges that teachers and other education personnel have to deal with further showed a high degree of overlapping issues not only with the neighbouring countries but with many other countries in Europe. The critical situation around teacher shortage, unattractive working conditions, lack of support and recognition of teachers' work further negatively impact on the status of the teaching profession.



Conclusion

Despite the different national contexts of the visited countries, some similarities in the nature of the challenges (not an inclusive list of challenges) faced by the education communities in the Baltic states can be clearly identified.

Language and cultural barriers:

In recent years, all the three Baltic states have been promoting national languages as the primary languages of instructions in public schools with the goals to preserve the countries' cultural heritages, promote integration and participation in societies. While Ukrainian refugees are given language classes to help them learn foreign languages and integrate into societies, both Ukrainian teachers and students may often struggle to learn the language of the country they have relocated to, which can make it difficult for them to communicate with their peers, students, and colleagues in a foreign language, hindering their ability to integrate into the education system and wider societies as a whole. In addition, teachers and other education personnel in the Baltic states may also face challenges in communicating with refugee students who come from different language backgrounds.

Finally, while on the one hand, the cultural differences between Ukraine and the Baltic States can be significant, and Ukrainian refugees may face difficulties in adjusting to new customs, on the other hand, teachers and other education personnel in Baltic states may also struggle to understand and address the diverse cultural needs of Ukrainian refugees, leading to difficulties in promoting inclusive education.

Employment and education challenges:

Despite Ukrainian teachers being well qualified and governments and education authorities having put in place the necessary policies and measures to respond to the needs of Ukrainian civilians, Ukrainian teachers may still struggle to find employment in their field or advance in their careers due to language barriers in the countries they have relocated to.

Another critical moment is centred around a complex issue of Ukrainian students following their national education programme online, often, after a long day of learning according to a new curriculum, followed by additional foreign language courses, etc. This goes hand in hand with many refugee children who exclusively follow the Ukrainian online curriculum in an absolute digital remoteness as a constraining factor for their socialisation.

In spite of the ongoing talks among Ministries of Education in the neighbouring countries of the EU and the Ministry of Education of Ukraine on the recognition and graduation processes of Ukrainian refugees studying in the EU education institutions, Ukrainian refugees may experience feelings of insecurity/uncertainty, loneliness and isolation, especially if they are unable to connect with others.

Further to this, both teachers and teaching assistants may face challenges in accessing adequate resources, such as textbooks and educational materials, to support the education of Ukrainian refugees. In parallel, there is a lack of adequate training that teachers may need to acquire to effectively teach diverse student populations.

Finally, the concern around overcrowding classes should be considered as schools may experience large size classes as a result of the refugee influx, leading to challenges in providing adequate education and support for all students.

This goes in parallel with individual work with both Ukrainian students and their families provided by teachers and teaching assistants in the Baltic states; extra hours along with the work outside of official working hours, elaboration, and implementation of creative and inclusive curricular and extracurricular activities to support the integration and education processes of vulnerable and highly traumatised Ukrainian children that must be considered as well.

Psychosocial issues:

The trauma of war, displacement and resettlement can have a significant impact on the mental health of Ukrainian civilians, leading to anxiety, and other mental health issues. At the same time, the Baltic states are facing a shortage of qualified teachers, leading to an increase in workload for existing teachers; in fact, many teachers in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are overworked, thus, it is critical to take into account their mental health and well-being too.

Finally, the visit to the Baltic States further reiterated a continuous need to further support education communities in Ukraine as well as in the EU countries. It is critical to maintain the commitment to further support our colleagues as a long-standing pledge to a continuous promotion of quality educational to all, democracy, inclusion, and social justice in the European region and beyond.