



LIFE FOR CHILDREN DURING THE WAR

Wave 3, September 2023

February 2024

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Overview

The humanitarian crisis stemming from the war in Ukraine, which escalated significantly on 24 February 2022, has deeply impacted children. It has resulted in a significant loss of life, mass population displacement and widespread destruction of critical civilian infrastructure, including schools, childcare facilities and healthcare establishments vital for the well-being of the nation's children and young people.

By the end of 2022, 17.7 million people were in urgent need of humanitarian aid, with a specific focus on safeguarding 3.4 million vulnerable children, as per a report from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, 2022).

In September 2023, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) began conducting research in Ukraine, incorporating a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. This involved telephone surveys and focus group discussions, aiming at better aligning UNICEF's programmes with the most pressing needs of Ukrainian parents and their children in different locations, including in the western and central regions of the country, the capital Kyiv, and in both newly accessible areas and frontline areas.

OVERVIEW

Some 40 per cent of respondents across Ukraine with children aged **3 to 17** cannot attend school or kindergarten due to closures.

Children were reported to be displaying mental and physical signs of stress **and increased anxiety** due to the war, which is seen as significant obstacle to their social and emotional development.

Some 38 per cent of households receive government cash benefits for a child. Approximately **59 per cent do not receive any assistance**

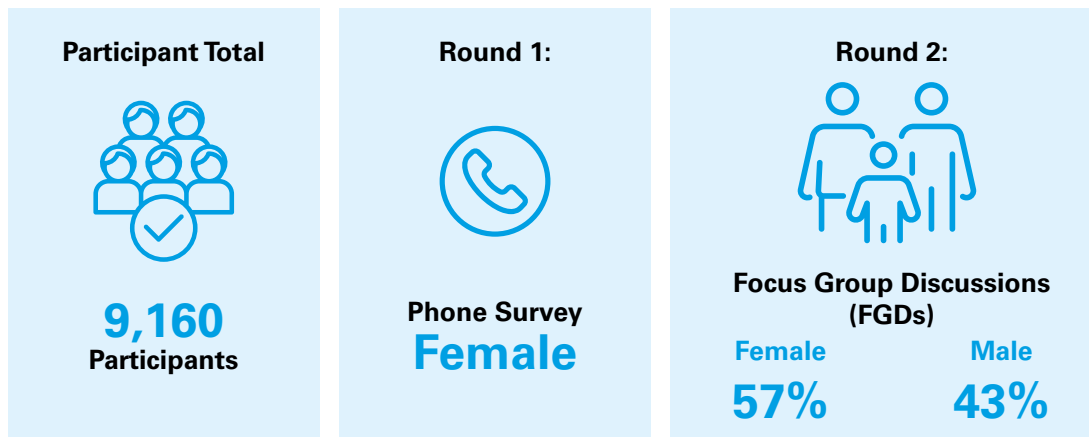
Anxiety and stress about the future and safety of children was **higher among displaced people** who had lost houses, livelihood and communities and were forced to start again in new locations.

36 per cent of children had suffered a traumatic experience in the war.

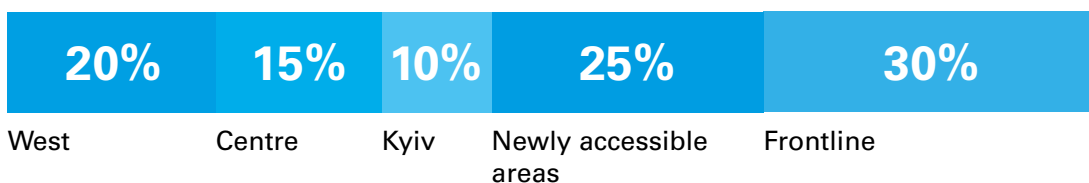
Many personal barriers exist for those accepting assistance or aid from organizations or authorities. Citizens are more inclined to reach out to their **families, friends and community for support.**

Methodology

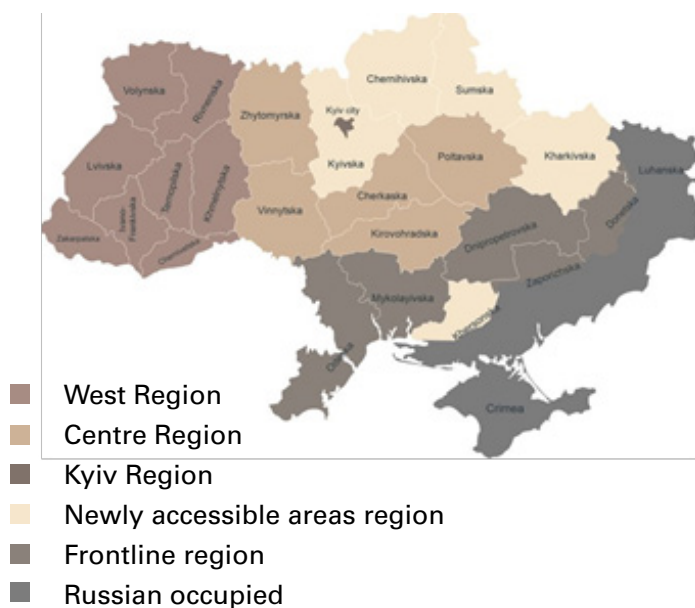
DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN



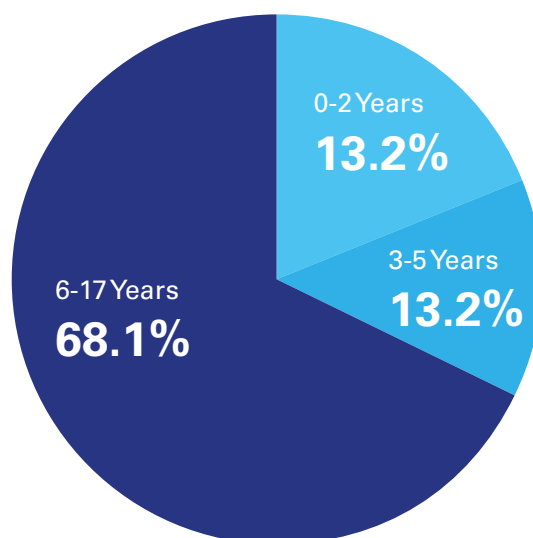
Participant Distribution



Regional Breakdown



Children Age Range (total 11,045 children)



Sampling Plan: We surveyed a total of 9,000 mothers with children up to 17 years old across Ukraine, employing the Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) method to gather quantitative data. This study focused exclusively on Ukrainian residents, with mobile phone numbers generated using specialized software that targets the customer bases of the three largest mobile operators: KYIVSTAR, VODAFONE Ukraine and LIFECELL. The software ensured equal representation of 12 distinct codes (050, 063, 066, 067, 068, 073, 093, 095, 096, 097, 098, 099) from these operators, aiming to address potential sampling errors and enhance the survey's representativeness and accuracy. The survey data was not weighted due to the dynamic nature of internal migration caused by the ongoing war and the absence of updated demographic data from the State Statistics Service of Ukraine. Ethical considerations were rigorously maintained, with all participants fully informed about the survey's purpose, their right to decline participation, and the measures in place to protect their privacy and data security. Participants were not compensated for their involvement.

OVERVIEW

A regional distribution approach was applied, taking into account the distance from frontline areas and the war's direct impact on particular regions. This approach is primarily driven by demographic and socio-economic changes resulting from the full-scale invasion. In total, five macro-regions were identified (west, centre, Kyiv-city, newly accessible areas and frontline macro-regions).

Conducted by: Jouri Research and Consulting and Rating Group.

Date of the survey: September 2023.

Sample population: 20 groups 9,000 respondents

Methodology	Qualitative	Quantitative
Survey method	Focus group discussion	Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI), based on a random sample of mobile phone numbers.
Audience	Parents of children under the age of 17 in all territories of Ukraine, except for the non-government-controlled territories of Crimea and Donbas.	Mothers of children under the age of 17 in all territories of Ukraine, except for the non-government-controlled areas of Crimea and Donbas, as well as the territories where the Ukrainian mobile network was not available at the time of the survey.

*The sample selection for the qualitative research considered the even distribution of respondents across regions and the need to cover settlements of different types and parents of children of different ages. With this in mind, the goal was to reach 4 groups with parents of children aged 0-2 years, 4 groups with parents of children attending kindergartens (3-6 years), and 12 groups with parents of school-age children (2nd-10th grade) – 6 groups for primary school and 6 groups for middle and high school.



Humanitarian

BASIC NEEDS AND WATER SUPPLY

The survey findings reveal a range of nationwide challenges caused by the war, encompassing issues with food supply, water access, hygiene products, medicine and financial assistance. Respondents initially faced difficulties securing essentials like food and water, with many urgent practical issues now resolved. However, some challenges, particularly in the case of water supply, persist countrywide.

Regional disparities are evident, with newly accessible areas, frontline areas and the central region experiencing more severe difficulties, notably in accessing medicines. Statistics indicate notable percentages of people facing shortages in drinking water (5 per cent), hygiene products (13 per cent), medicine (17 per cent) and food (13 per cent).

A focus on mothers with children under the age of three reveals further challenges. While 28 per cent breastfeed, 51 per cent of those who use baby formula lack stable access to necessary baby food, with this rising to 68 per cent for people who have been internally displaced (IDPs). These findings underscore heightened difficulties for displaced people.

“Every child should receive assistance, not only displaced people or people from a family with many children. God be with that mother and child, this is child assistance.”

(40, female, Kharkiv)

KEY FINDINGS



Families in frontline and newly accessible regions are at risk of food shortages.



Central, newly accessible areas and frontline regions have less access to critical medicines.

KEY: FGDs

	Access to tap water	Access to drinking water
West	Zakarpatska region – polluted wells Chernivetska region – limited supplies Halychyna region, Ternopil'ska and Lviv'ska regions – limited supplies.	2% do not have enough drinking water Western, Zakarpatska and Chernivetska regions – no access Halychyna region, Ternopil'ska and Lviv'ska regions – no access
Centre	Cherkaska region – drought, wells dried up	5% do not have enough drinking water Cherkaska region – drought, wells dried up
Kyiv	Kyiv city – limited supply	3% do not have enough drinking water Kyiv city – limited supply
Newly accessible areas	No problems noted	4% do not have enough drinking water
Frontline	Eastern, Zaporizhzh'ska and Dnipropetrov'ska regions – limited supply	11% do not have enough drinking water. Eastern, Zaporizhzh'ska and Dnipropetrov'ska regions – no access Southern, Mykolaiv'ska region – no access

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

The report outlines a concerning financial landscape, indicating that 57 per cent of households identify financial assistance as their most critical need, with the most significant strain observed in newly accessible areas and frontline regions, where the figure rises to 61-62 per cent.

The data further reveals variations in social assistance, with robust support for children aged 0-3 years (91 per cent) gradually diminishing to 45 per cent for children aged 3-5-years. This drops further to 33 per cent for 6 to 17-year-olds. Additionally, the survey shows that 59 per cent of parents report receiving no social assistance for their children, highlighting existing disparities in support.

KEY FINDINGS



59%

Parents receiving **no form of social assistance** for their children.



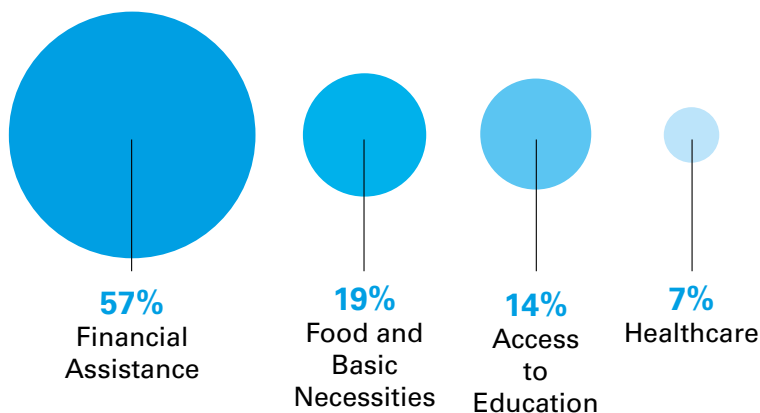
57%

Parents who rank **financial assistance** as their most critical need.

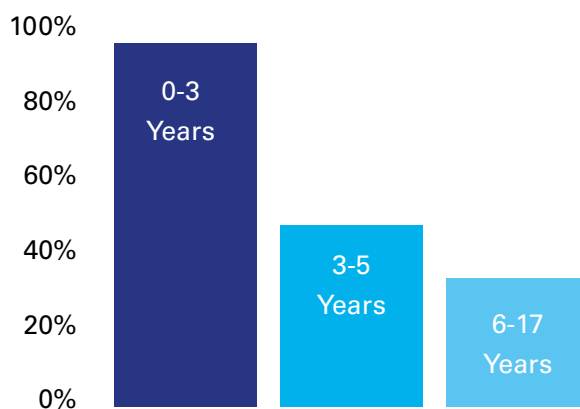


KEY: Phone Survey

Parental critical needs



Parents receiving support for their children (%)



Financial assistance

Centre	Neither local residents or IDPs noted any further need for assistance and had received support when they needed it.
Kyiv	Locals and IDPs received assistance from various international and local organisations. IDPs continue to receive support from the Mariupol and Kherson hubs in particular.
Nearly accessible areas	In Kharkiv, participants feel excluded from required financial or food assistance and are trying to find organisations to support them as they rebuild. In the North, respondents noted their resilience and insistence on self-sustaining with assistance from their local communities and businesses.
Frontline	Parents in the South noted their needs had been mostly met but those in the East, in Dnipropetrovska and Zaporizhzhska, felt unable to access any assistance due to being located in hard-to-reach areas and close to hostilities.

Education

EDUCATIONAL INSTRUCTION

Parents in focus group discussions in the western region reported the highest level of children studying fully in-person (87 per cent). Respondents expressed a willingness to engage with mixed methods but were hopeful of continued social and mental development. Some 60 per cent of children engage in hybrid forms of education, with 30 per cent of students accessing education solely online.

Parents expressed concerns regarding the current hybrid educational model, underscoring the importance of creating opportunities for socio-emotional development. They believe that their children require access to platforms to engage with their peers, fostering social and emotional growth. There were notable differences in access by region, with 53 per cent of frontline resident children aged 6-17 having to work solely online.

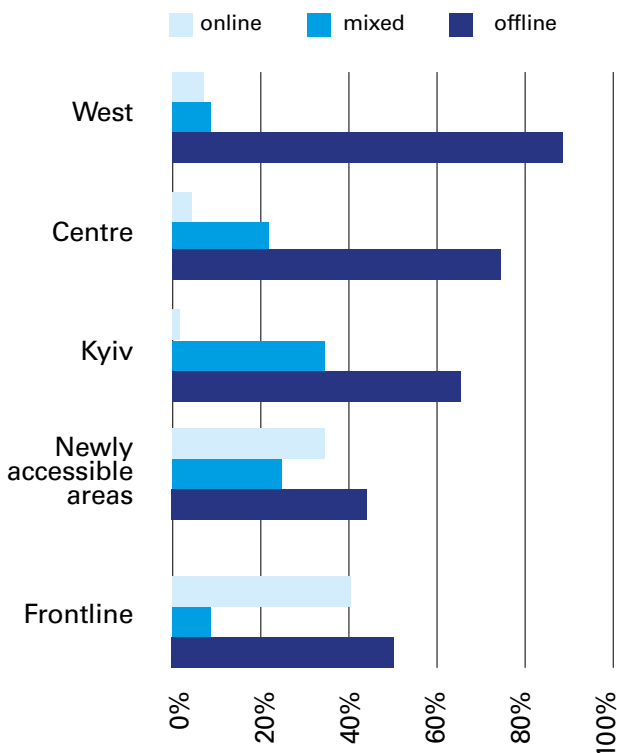
Responses from parents revealed a notable emphasis on their children’s yearning for increased social and emotional interaction with peers, a need exacerbated by fear for their children’s safety.

KEY FINDINGS

- 17%** Children who solely access education online.
- 53%** Frontline resident children aged 6-17 who only study online.
- 60%** Children who engage in hybrid forms of education.

KEY: FGDs

Educational Model per Region



Education per Region

West	Respondents expressed willingness to engage with mixed methods but were hopeful of continued social and mental development.
Centre	Poor facilities for children noted as a negative impact on children’s mental well-being.
Kyiv	Respondents prefer flexibility of mixed methods but highlight a lack of facilities for children outside of school and home environments.
Newly accessible areas	Respondents would like children’s emotional development to be as important as their academic development.
Frontline	Lack of safe facilities and procedures forcing many respondents to keep students at home for online learning.

EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES

Research has shown that the Ukrainian educational landscape is marred by a significant barrier – four out of every 10 students face obstacles in accessing education due to a lack of adequate facilities. Overcrowding and split shifts, prompted by insufficient space in bomb shelters, have become commonplace, disrupting the traditional learning environment.

Data reveals that 40 per cent of respondents with children aged 3 to 17 are unable to send their kids to school or kindergarten, a statistic directly attributable to the non-functional state of these facilities. This situation underscores the urgency of addressing infrastructure challenges to ensure a seamless educational process for children across the entire state.

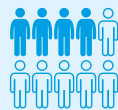
In frontline areas, the impact of the ongoing conflict is even more pronounced. In these regions, five out of every 10 students are unable to access education due to the acute shortage of facilities. This is further exacerbated for the youngest learners, with 43 per cent of children under the age of five unable to attend kindergarten. The lack of on-the-ground infrastructure, including safe spaces in shelters and standalone facilities, presents a formidable obstacle to children’s social and emotional development.

KEY FINDINGS

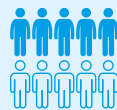
26%

Children aged 5 and under are unable to take part in the educational process.

4 out of every 10 students cannot access the educational process due to a lack of facilities. This figure rises in frontline regions with 5 out of every 10 students unable to access education.



Nationwide



Frontline

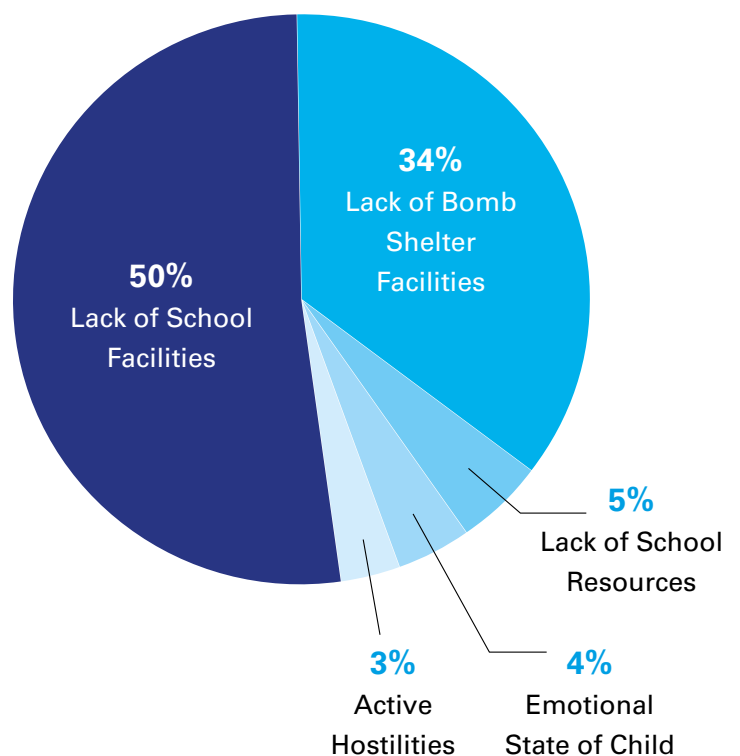
27%

Children are unable to attend their educational facility due to a lack of bomb shelter facilities.

KEY: Phone Survey



Barriers to Education: 6-17 Years



Mental Health

CURRENT STATUS AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS

In the surveyed regions, findings illustrate the continuing influence of the ongoing war on the health status of children. With 10 per cent of children reported as having an unsatisfactory mental state, 9 per cent of parents attributed their children’s state to the war, with little variation by location, manifesting in mood swings, irritability and traumatic experiences.

Parents, who face fear, uncertainty and financial challenges due to unemployment and rising costs, observe visible signs of stress and increased anxiousness in their children. The psychological impacts of war are widespread, with 43 per cent of respondents reporting high levels of anxiety, sensitivity to loud noises, and trouble sleeping among children, requiring urgent attention.

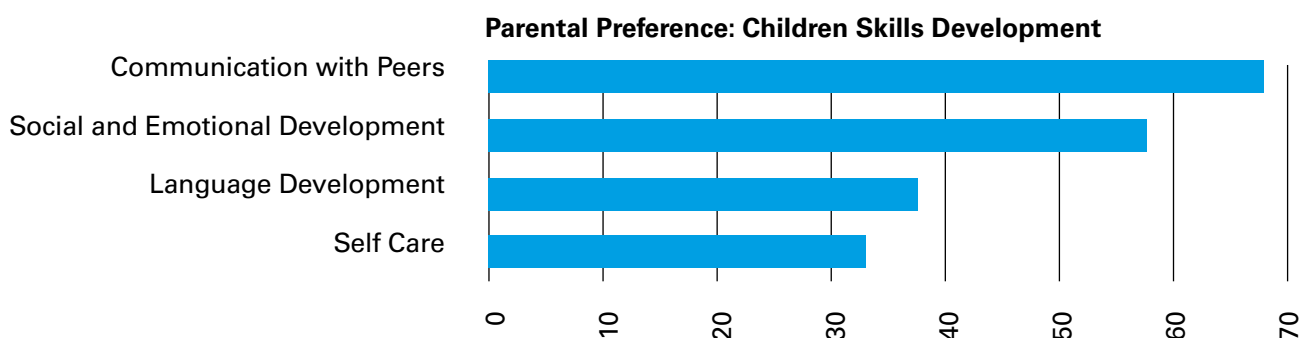
The survey also highlights regional disparities in access to support services. While parents in some areas feel they have adequate activities for children but lack psychological support, others, particularly in newly accessible areas, face a stark absence of both. Regardless of location, parents unanimously express the need for professional psychological assistance for their children, emphasising the importance of activities that allow children to play and experience the joy of childhood.

There was little variation in the emotional state of children who had been displaced, remained or returned.

“Sometimes many kids are left without the help. The children need psychological help”
(42, female, West)

KEY FINDINGS 36% Children who had suffered a traumatic experience in the war.	9% Children with an unsatisfactory state of mental health due to the effects of the war.
69% Parents who rank communication in groups with peers to be the most important skill for early childhood development .	There was little variation in the emotional state of children who had been displaced, stayed, or returned . Parents nationwide highlighted a dearth of access and availability of professional psychological support .

KEY: FGDs Phone Survey



Areas of support needed

“We try to take our child to groups so that they develop, take part in society, communicate, maybe play sports and feel tired, which maybe somehow switches from this”

(34, male, East)

“He is afraid, scared, but I am always there. In case of something, I can’t go to work but, all the same, I am always with the child and he is calmer that way”

(36, female, East)

PARENTAL SUGGESTIONS

Many parents noticed changes in the mental health of their children, reporting high levels of anxiety, sensitivity to loud noises due to their experiences of shelling, and trouble sleeping. To counter this, children have learned from their parents a sense of acceptance that the situation ‘needs to be overcome’ through force of will and strength of character. Across all regions, parents commented on how children’s maturity level had rapidly grown and that they had been forced to prematurely become adults. Parents’ suggestions for support reflect this concern over the loss of childhood, with most requesting activities to allow their children to play and have fun as children should.

The primary concern is how the war experience will impact children’s emotional and social development, alongside the negative impacts of lost educational opportunities and fear for a safe future. Unanimously, parents in all locations want to improve their child’s health, emotional well-being and quality of life, and request more access to psychological assistance for their children or activities that will help.

KEY FINDINGS

45%

Parents who spend 8 or more hours per day developing the skills of their child aged 0 to 3.

Regional breakdown

West region

Overcrowding in activities and facilities for children due in part to an influx of IDPs, would like to see more offered and parks built.

Centre region

Numerous activities and facilities for children but lack of psychological support.

Newly accessible areas

A lack of activities or facilities for children to enjoy, in combination with losses of psychological support.

Kyiv

Parents want opportunities to leave the city and take their children to natural environments for rest, as well as access to activities and psychological support for themselves also.

Frontline areas

Activities and facilities exist for children, but there is a lack of psychological support and stigma around this.



Internally Displaced People

CURRENT STATUS

Migration is a major theme in the context of the war in Ukraine, where individuals forced to flee their homes due to conflict or persecution play a significant role. A total of 39 per cent of households surveyed had relocated since the full-scale war escalated in February 2022, with 84 per cent of Donbas residents who had relocated continuing to live away from their original homes. Safety concerns persist, as 29 per cent of households consider their location unsafe, with this figure rising to 41 per cent in frontline regions. Access to assistance poses a multifaceted challenge, with displaced people expressing a need for ongoing financial support, particularly in the western region.

Some 11 per cent of displaced people have not vaccinated their children. This is more than double the number of parents who were not displaced or had returned to their prior place of residence.

Displaced people face further challenges in education, with 37 per cent of displaced children unable to attend kindergarten and 69 per cent of 6 to 17-year-olds relying on online learning, contributing to inconsistent school attendance. Child development follows the broader narrative of children countrywide experiencing heightened stress and anxiety, compounded by being unable to access medical services such as doctors since the onset of full scale war.

KEY FINDINGS

39%

Households **displaced** since the start of the war.

29%

Households who consider their current location to be **completely or rather unsafe**.

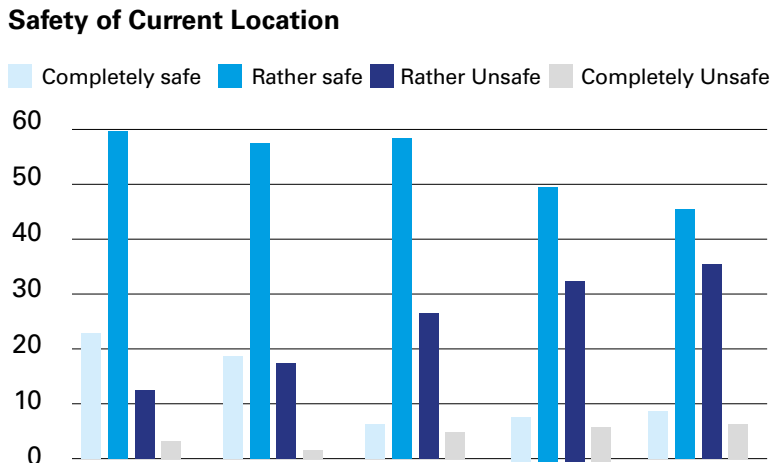
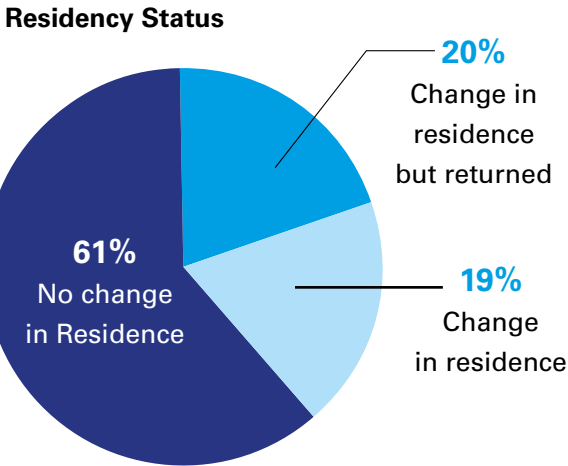
69%

Children aged **6-17 years** **reliant on online learning**.

Displaced people have **less access to doctors nationwide**.

IDP's are experiencing a **decrease in support** from humanitarian groups.

KEY: FGDs Phone Survey



Awareness

“It is more on a mental level – psychologically, it is very difficult to go and ask for some aid, when you used to be a self-sufficient person, you had everything, you could provide for yourself. For now, even if you need it, I’d rather take a loan. It is very difficult for me to do this. We were forced several times by our neighbours – they gave us a kick, they told us to go, go.”

(40, female, West).

“I don’t see anything so shameful in this, if, for example, you need help and some organization announces that this help is distributed and you meet their criteria, because with many organizations, their criteria is limited according to the help.”

(36, female, Kyiv City).

“They [UNICEF] returned childhood, the real childhood to the children. This is especially precious now.”

(33, Female, Kyiv).

UNICEF AND NGO’S

The research results reveal a significant awareness gap regarding UNICEF’s role in Ukraine, with only 32 per cent of respondents having knowledge of the organization and 13 per cent receiving assistance.

Widespread misconceptions contribute to this lack of assistance, including the belief that UNICEF primarily targets specific demographics, leading to a reluctance among individuals to seek aid. Self-sufficiency and concerns about aid distribution further hinder the willingness of residents to engage with external organizations. Notably, many prefer seeking support from their immediate social circles, emphasising the need for improved communication with affected communities to dispel misconceptions and encourage a more informed approach to seeking assistance.

The research underscores diverse attitudes towards aid in different regions, with Kyiv displaying openness, while the central region expresses dissatisfaction with distributed aid, with newly accessible and frontline regions facing notable accessibility challenges to assistance.

KEY FINDINGS

32%

of respondents have heard about UNICEF.

13%

have received some type of assistance from UNICEF.

All regions felt UNICEF could provide more information about their programmes.

KEY: FGDs



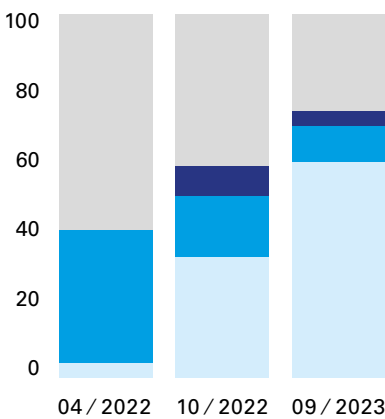
Wave Comparison

Two previous waves of data collection were conducted over the course of UNICEF’s project, taking place in April and October 2022. This section offers a comparative analysis of the third wave conducted in September 2023, highlighting the distinct characteristics and examining the relationships between each wave regarding each research area. This breakdown aims to clarify the evolving dynamics and patterns observed across the different phases of data collection, providing a comprehensive understanding of the project’s progression and insights into the connections between successive waves.

EDUCATION

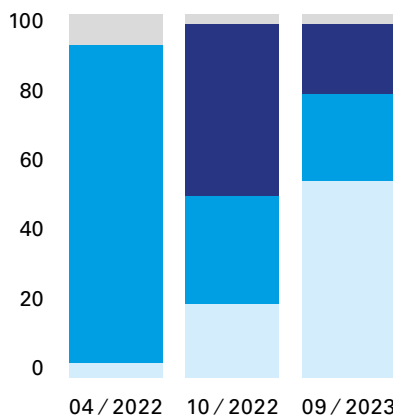
Children under the age of 5 able to join the educational process

- Attend Kindergarten
- Online study
- Hybrid study
- No study



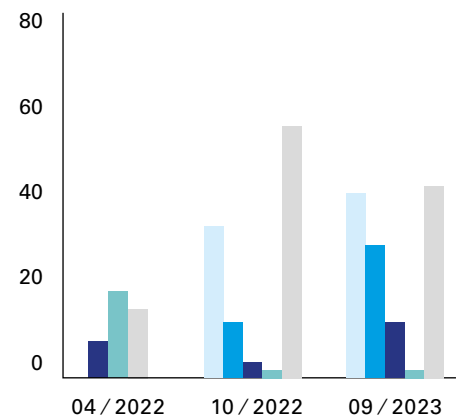
Children aged 6-17 able to join the educational process

- Attend School
- Online study
- Hybrid study
- No study



Reasons children currently not involved in the educational process

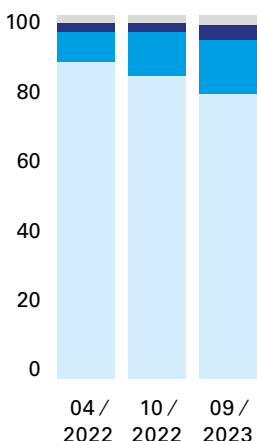
- School/Kindergarten not working
- No bomb shelter
- Active hostilities
- No internet access
- Other



HUMANITARIAN

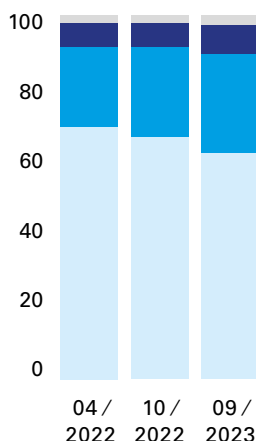
Clean drinking water

- Completely enough
- Rather enough
- Not really enough
- Not enough at all



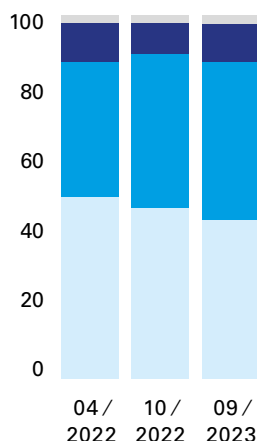
Hygiene

- Completely enough
- Rather enough
- Not really enough
- Not enough at all



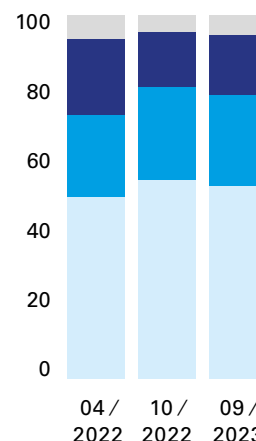
Food

- Completely enough
- Rather enough
- Not really enough
- Not enough at all



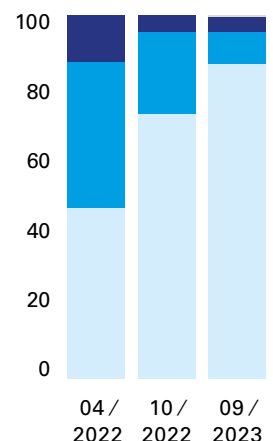
Medicine

- Completely enough
- Rather enough
- Not really enough
- Not enough at all

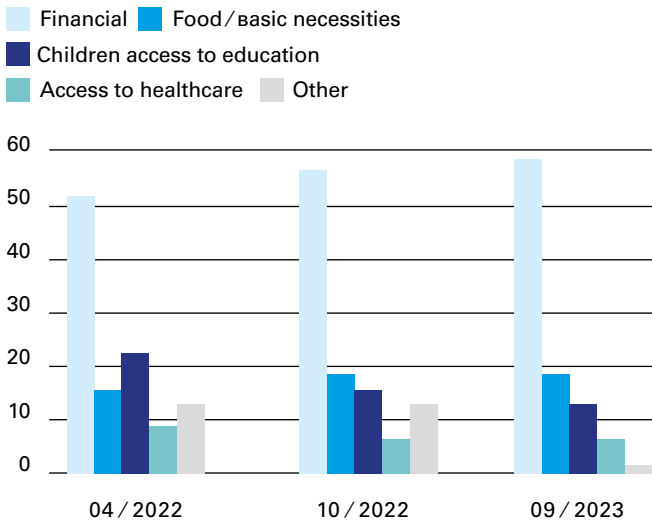


Medical Services

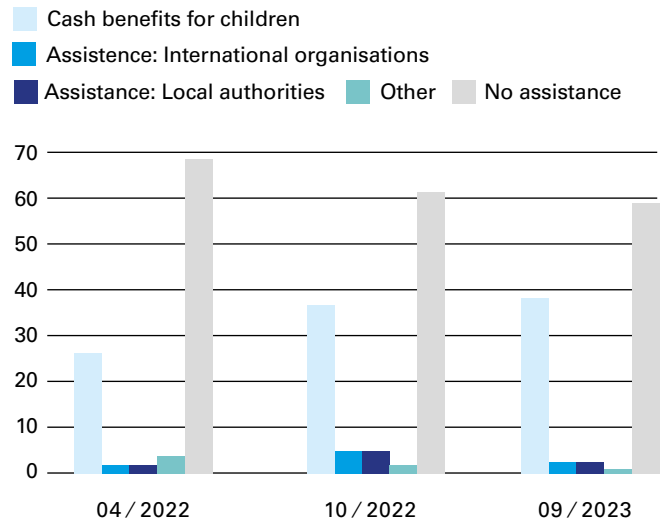
- Consultation available
- Not required
- Not available



Family most pressing needs

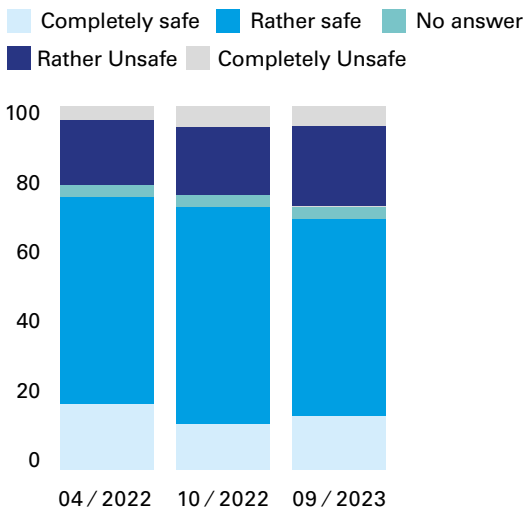


Social assistance currently received



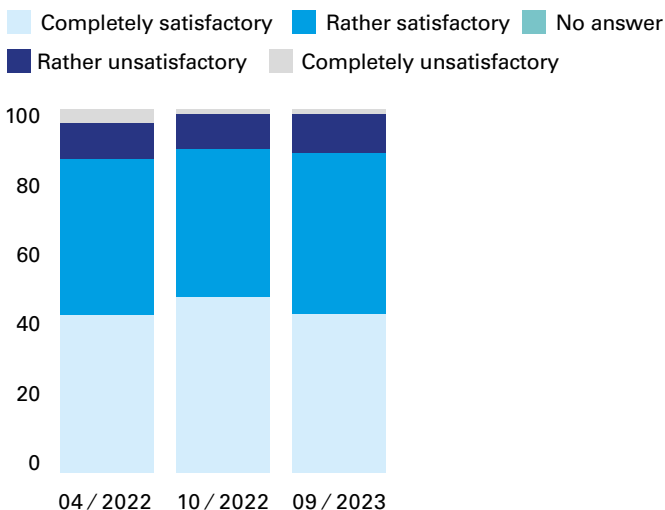
INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE

How safe is your current residence?



MENTAL HEALTH

Child mental health assessment



Most important skills in the early development of a child

