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for every child

UNICEF PROGRAMME BRIEF 2025

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

Multisectoral programming promoting the well-being of children and their families

44-48%

self-reported moderate to severe anxiety in Ukraine

x2

annual increase in depressive disorders (15.7 to 29.1%) , co-morbid anxiety disorders (15.1 to 27.8%) in adolescents.

x2

increase (17.3% to 32.3%) increase in prevalence of probable post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in adolescents

The Situation

The full-scale war in Ukraine has created a profound mental health crisis affecting individuals across all age groups. Before the full-scale war in 2022, Ukraine was already facing a substantial mental health burden intensified by intergenerational trauma, the conflict since 2014, and the COVID-19 pandemic[1], with mental health disorders being the country's second-highest disability burden affecting approximately 30% of the population[2]. The COVID-19 pandemic and the full-scale war further intensified the mental health burden, leading to the Ukrainian population experiencing significant psychological distress and increased prevalence of anxiety and depression. Recent surveys indicate that 77% of Ukrainians have experienced stress or severe nervousness, 44-48% of the population exhibits moderate to severe anxiety, and 32-39% shows symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Vulnerable groups facing heightened vulnerabilities and disproportionately affected include Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs); children and adolescents at large; residents in humanitarian areas near the frontline; women and adolescent girls; children and families affected by military service; children with disabilities, in alternative care or in contact with the law. Recent research has highlighted the impact of war on **children**, with 32% of households reporting children displaying signs of psychosocial distress[3] and the alarming increase in mental health challenges faced by **adolescents** exposed to the war, with prevalence of probable PTSD among adolescents increasing from 17.3% to 32.3%, co-morbid anxiety disorders from 15.1% to 27.8%, and depressive disorders from 15.7% to 29.1% within a year (Goto et al. 2024).

Pre-existing challenges in the mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) service delivery such as **under-resourced, institutionalized mental health services with limited MHPSS services in communities and in the health, education and social sectors**, have been compounded by the ongoing conflict, displacement, and socio-economic upheavals. In addition, **cultural beliefs and stigma** remain an important barrier to seeking professional help.

A child takes part in a psychosocial support workshop led by a UNICEF-supported mobile team in Kharkiv—helping children regain a sense of safety, connection, and hope amid the ongoing war.

The Vision

In response to these challenges, UNICEF has developed a **multisectoral Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Strategy** for Ukraine. The MHPSS strategy supports UNICEF overarching goal to ensure that all children in Ukraine, particularly those affected by the war and those with specific vulnerabilities, live in safe, nurturing environments and exercise their rights fully. The strategy aims to build a **resilient and sustainable mental health** ecosystem where children, adolescents, and caregivers have access to **quality evidence-informed MHPSS services** that promote well-being, encourage help-seeking, and enable active participation in society and contribute to the nation's recovery and development.

The strategy **adopts a comprehensive**, **cross-sectoral approach**, recognizing that mental health is interconnected with various aspects of children's lives, including health, child protection, education, and social development. It aims to address the social determinants of mental health, promote positive mental well-being, prevent mental health issues, and ensure access to appropriate mental health care. The strategy uses a social-ecological model, placing children at the centre and surrounding them with supportive environments from family, community, and society.

Aligned with the Ukrainian government's vision, the strategy supports the **transition to deinstitutionalized community-based care**, leveraging **multisectoral platforms** where children, adolescents, and their caregivers naturally engage, at **schools, healthcare facilities**, **communities**, and **digital spaces**. By integrating services across these multiple platforms, the strategy ensures mental health support is accessible where children and families naturally engage. The strategy uses a **holistic, age-appropriate,** and **gender-responsive** approach and offers a comprehensive framework to address both the **immediate humanitarian MHPSS needs of conflict-affected populations** and the **long-term mental health recovery and system reforms**.

Priority target groups include **children, adolescents and their caregivers** at large, including those with specific vulnerabilities such as children and caregivers living in frontline areas, areas no longer occupied, and other areas that are heavily conflict-affected; children and caregivers who have been displaced and/or evacuated; children and families affected by military service; children in alternative care forms, children in contact with the law. Additionally, frontline workforce in the health, education and social sectors will also be targeted with specific interventions to enhance their wellbeing.

1. Smith & Orlov, 2023
2. Reinhard et al., 2021
3. IMPACT, 2024

Mobile team in Mykolaiv region is being busy with processing cash payments, providing psychological counselling to children who have lost their homes, and distributing hygiene kits for families.

UNICEF's Programmatic Priorities

1. Strengthen Ukraine's leadership and governance for the development of an evidence-based multisectoral MHPSS System:

UNICEF supports the Government in strengthening national, sub-national, and community-level governance for MHPSS. By enhancing coordination, policy development, and community participation, UNICEF supports MHPSS decision-making that is informed, evidence-based, and attuned to local realities, particularly in humanitarian contexts where child-focused priorities must remain central.

2. Further develop and reform Ukraine MHPSS legislative and regulatory framework, enabling decentralization and greater accessibility:

UNICEF assists the government in reforming laws, policies, and standards to foster a rights-based, inclusive, accessible, and modernized MHPSS environment. This includes promoting community-based care, ensuring the protection of rights, and establishing clear regulations and standards of care across health, education, and social sectors advocating for the protection of rights.

3. Scale up a barrier-free, multilayered, multisectoral, and gender-responsive service ecosystem of MHPSS services

Spanning across health, education, child protection, justice, and social sectors and through community, youth-driven, digital, and humanitarian platforms. UNICEF's approach across multiple platforms and sectors creates a continuum of care, from prevention to early support and specialized services, catering to individuals across their lifespan. By establishing referral pathways and leveraging multisectoral platforms and entry points, UNICEF supports MHPSS interventions that are accessible, integrated, and scalable.

4. Build a robust and diversified MHPSS workforce across sectors:

To support the creation of a multi-tiered and accessible system of care for children, adolescents and their caregivers, UNICEF invests in capacity-building of workforce through pre-service and in-service training, equipping specialists and non-specialized frontline workers across sectors, including teachers, social workers, community volunteers, primary healthcare workers and specialized mental health professionals, to deliver quality MHPSS services. The emphasis on ongoing professional development and capacity-building, task-shifting, credentialing and accreditation processes for both specialized and non-specialized MHPSS aims to fill critical workforce gaps, especially in underserved areas.

5. Reduce stigma and increase help-seeking behaviors:

To address the barriers that prevent children, adolescents and caregivers from seeking help for mental health concerns, UNICEF implements a comprehensive stigma reduction and awareness-raising strategy to enhance mental health literacy in all spheres of society, focusing on reducing stigma around youth mental health to remove any stigma-related barriers preventing this group from accessing MHPSS services. In this purpose, UNICEF will implement campaigns, community dialogues, and youth-led initiatives to shift public perceptions around mental health, challenge misconceptions, and encourage early help-seeking. By engaging community leaders, influencers, and those with lived experience, UNICEF will foster more supportive and inclusive attitudes toward mental health.

6. Generate evidence to strengthen MHPSS in Ukraine:

UNICEF maintains a strong focus on the use of evidence, grounded in the best available research, adapted to the specific context in Ukraine. UNICEF prioritizes strengthening routine monitoring systems and generating evidence through implementation research, systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of MHPSS interventions and document lessons learned and best practices. UNICEF will establish participatory monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, partner with research institutions, and leverage digital tools for data collection and contribute to developing a national MHPSS Information Management System. This evidence will inform policy decisions, and ensure that MHPSS programming remains adaptive, efficient, and responsive to emerging needs.

UNICEF MHPSS strategy aligns with the Ukrainian's government's Mental Health Action Plan for 2024-2026 and supports national efforts to transform Ukraine's mental health system shifting from a heavily institutionalized to a decentralized community-based system with comprehensive reforms across health, education, and social sectors, while maintaining UNICEF's unique focus on children, adolescents and their caregivers.

Operationalizing the Strategy: Scaling-up and Scaling-deep MHPSS Interventions Across Platforms

UNICEF's operationalization approach involves implementing a **continuum of MHPSS services**, going from prevention, promotion, early targeted interventions to specialized care **across multiple interconnected platforms (communities, healthcare settings, learning environments, digital spaces, and emergency contexts)** by **scaling up** MHPSS services for **children**, **adolescents** and **caregivers** to ensure broad accessibility while **scaling deep** to ensure high-quality, cultural responsiveness and community ownership of interventions. Supporting the scaling up and scaling deep of MHPSS services across multiple platforms and sectors, the cross-cutting components of **strong local governance**, **robust M&E and evidence generation**, and **Social and Behavior Change (SBC)** will sustain the foundation of UNICEF MHPSS strategy.

Why UNICEF?

Multi-layered and Multisectoral approach to deliver **MHPSS interventions** through **multiple** interconnected **platforms** (communities, healthcare settings, learning environments, digital spaces, and humanitarian sites) where children and adolescents naturally interact and along the comprehensive continuum of their MHPSS needs, from prevention to promotion, early targeted interventions and specialized care.

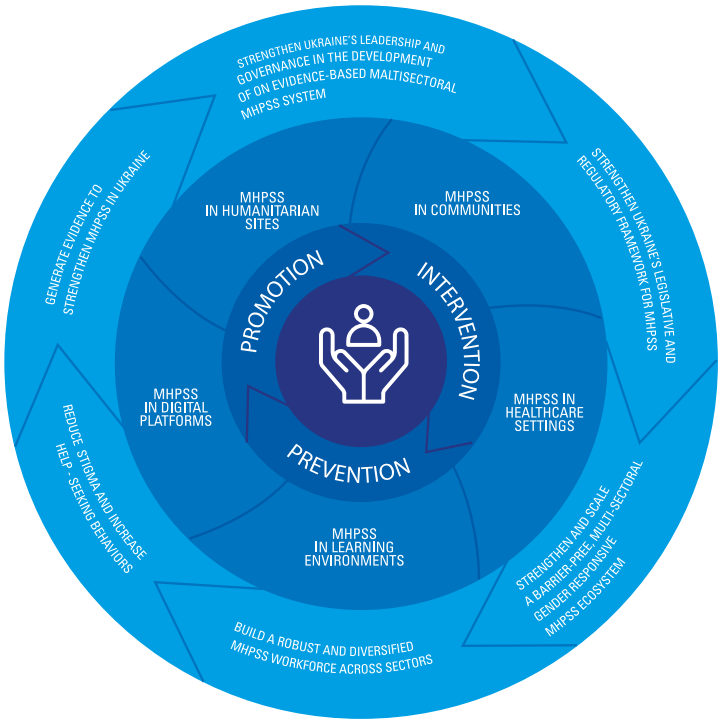
Operational capacity to deliver a **barrier-free eco-system of MHPSS services** for children, adolescents and their caregivers **at hromada level**.

Technical expertise to support government upstream **MHPSS policy reform** while **enhancing system strengthening for improved MHPSS service delivery models** and **responding** to the immediate **MHPSS needs in humanitarian areas**.

Youth-led participation and meaningful involvement ("MHPSS services for youth and by youth").

Strategic approach to leveraging humanitarian resources and lifesaving response to build government capacities **to reform the mental health system** in the mid to longer term.

Figure 1: UNICEFF Ukraine multisectoral MHPSS strategy



Funding needs for 2025[4]

MHPSS ACTIVITIES IN CHILD PROTECTION

Total funding needs:

US$ 116,000,000

Funded
US$ 23,664,000

Funding Gap
US$ 92,336,000

MHPSS ACTIVITIES IN EDUCATION

Total funding needs:

US$ 54,288,000

Funded
US$ 16,124,000

Funding Gap
US$ 38,164,000

MHPSS ACTIVITIES IN HEALTH

Total funding needs:

US$ 11,948,000

Funded
US$ 2,436,000

Funding Gap
US$ 9,512,000

4. Funding needs represent MHPSS-related interventions as part of broader sectoral needs. Data as of June 2025.