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for every child

BETTER CARE

Pathways for the Return and Reintegration of children in Ukraine

September 2026

UNICEF supports all caseloads of Ukrainian children on the return and reintegration agenda. This includes children returned from occupied territories, the Russian Federation, and those in alternative care who were evacuated to other countries at the start of the war.

The approach follows a single principled framework: safe, voluntary, dignified, and individually assessed.

The challenges for these children and families do not stop once they cross the border. Comprehensive and sustained reintegration support is essential after they return to Ukraine. Many of these children face significant risks, including trauma, gaps in care, disputed guardianship, and disrupted education amid overstretched systems. Ensuring family unity, accessibility to quality social services, and family- and community-based care are all key for every child's wellbeing.

The Government of Ukraine's Better Care reform, supported by UNICEF, is enabling this work by expanding family-based care and strengthening community social services to transform the child protection system. This creates the conditions needed by providing a comprehensive pathway from return to stabilisation and effective reintegration where the best interests of the child are upheld and at the centre of decision-making processes.

As of August 2026, over 2,525 children and youth (18-23) have returned to Ukraine from occupied territories and the Russian Federation, some of whom were orphans or children deprived of parental care. Approximately 3,600 children, evacuated to the European Union and other countries from institutions, have returned to family-based care in Ukraine, or left institutional care abroad.

UNICEF works with the Government of Ukraine and partners, including civil society across three mutually reinforcing pillars to improve the protection and wellbeing of children returning and reintegrating.

UNICEF supports lawful, dignified and child-centred returns so children evacuated from institutions to the EU and other countries receive the services they need and are placed in family- or community-based care after they return to Ukraine.



PILLAR 1: CROSS-BORDER COLLABORATION AND TRANSNATIONAL CASE MANAGEMENT

- Transnational case management: Facilitating individual assessments, best interest assessments/ determinations, and care planning across borders.
- Family tracing and reunification: Strengthening the processes for identifying parents, relatives or alternative family-based solutions prior to return.
- Legal and procedural safeguards: Supporting national regulations that ensure decisions made are individualized, and prevent returns to unsafe areas.
- Coordinating between central authorities: Enabling cooperation under the 1996 Hague Child Protection Convention with 32 host countries, and bilateral engagement as relevant.

UNICEF-supported response since 2022

1,500
best-interest assessments for evacuated children across nine host countries; 100+ assessors trained.

New mandate adopted by the Government of Ukraine in 2023 on individual child tailored procedures and barring group returns (Cabinet of Ministers of UkraineResolution 546).

Transnational coordination established with
32
host countries under the 1996 Hague Convention.

PILLAR 2: POST-RETURN REINTEGRATION AND MONITORING

Returns that are followed by structured, sequenced and sustained reintegration support to prevent secondary harm and re-separation.

Immediate support on return

- Safe accommodation and transit care
- Medical screening, referrals and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)
- Legal assistance and documentation
- Interim care arrangements

Medium- to long-term reintegration

- Individual case management through local services and ongoing monitoring
- Family-based placement or reunification support
- School enrolment, educational catch-up and school-based mentoring
- Health and disability services

UNICEF-supported response since 2022

1,595
children returned from the Russian Federation and occupied territories received UNICEF-supported reintegration services.

565
children returned from EU, Türkiye and other countries reunited with families, placed in family-based care or provided with reintegration support.

750
patronage families established, caring for 4,300+ children.

Specialised foster care, supported independent living and family-based placement piloted in Dnipro, Volyn, Kyiv and Chernivtsi.

PILLAR 3: CAPACITY BUILDING AND SYSTEM STRENGTHENING

Reintegration must be underpinned by strong national and local systems and services to provide stable pathways back to life in a safe and nurturing family. UNICEF provides a range of technical assistance to lead institutions on the agenda to enable this work.

- Support to Child Rights Protection Centres in Kyiv, Dnipro, Kharkiv, Rivne and Volyn, which use a Barnahus-style, multidisciplinary approach to prevent re-traumatisation and ensure coordinated referrals.
- Strengthening the registry of deported children, including modernisation of IT systems, cybersecurity, data protection, staffing, and specialised training.
- Development of reintegration indicators and monitoring systems to track outcomes and inform policy adjustments.
- Technical contribution to the development of reintegration service standards, standard operating procedures for effective coordination and case management
- Development and rollout of UNICEF's 'Child Protection Information Management System' for the Coordination Centre for Care Reform to strengthen case management and referrals of children receiving reintegration support.
- Partnerships with regions and municipalities to expand integrated social services and coordinate local reintegration platforms.

UNICEF-supported response since 2022

Creation of new 'Family-Type Home' social service for returned children with complex needs.

Development and launch of 'State Social Service Standard for Reintegration' via Small Scale Grants.

Child Rights Protection Center network rehabilitated in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Dnipro, Rivne and Volyn, following the Barnahus-inspired model.

15 child rights monitoring experts positioned across 10 regions under the Ombudsperson's Office.

Sustained technical assistance to Ukraine's leading bodies on the agenda.



Partnerships for the reintegration of every child returned

Effective return and reintegration is about collaboration and sustained investment among all partners, including government, civil society and international partners UNICEF calls for:



Aligning resources and programming with government-led Better Care reforms to ensure systems based and nationally owned solutions



Ensuring flexible, multi-year funding to sustain Better Care reform and return and reintegration efforts at scale



Supporting transnational coordination and information sharing to ensure safe and effective returns and reintegration



Investing in long-term reintegration, including social services, family-based care and mental health and psychosocial support services



Contributing to evidence generation and post-return monitoring to inform policy and response.

Together, we must ensure that every returning child not only comes home but does so to care, protection and opportunity.

In Ukraine, UNICEF is committed to its strong partnerships with the Coordination Centre for Family Upbringing and Child Care Development, Ministry of Social Policy and Family Unity, National Social Service of Ukraine, State Service for Children, Office of Ombudsperson and Ministry of Justice.

UNICEF is grateful to the European Union and the governments of Austria, Canada, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Norway, Poland, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States for their support to UNICEF's work in the Better Care reform and return and reintegration agenda.

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