

Supporting Ukrainian refugee children: building inclusive Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) systems

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CHILDREN ARE OFTEN THE FORGOTTEN ONES IN CRISES

OPENING



MEP Klemen Grošelj

“Supporting Ukrainian refugee children: building inclusive Early Childhood Intervention systems” means **to build up access and support system and enhance Early Childhood Intervention** for, in the case of the ECDUR project, those countries adjacent to Ukraine: **Moldova, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, and Poland.**”

Setting the scene

Building national ECI systems in Europe: UNICEF perspective and approaches



Vera Rangelova, ECD Specialist UNICEF ECARO

The **first couple of years of life of a child** are very important for brain development in order for it to interpret the environment and learn from it.

Persistent stress or stressful events can undermine the brain structure and its connections, furthering their disengagement.

70% of children under 3 years who participated in ECI had made **greater than expected growth in their knowledge and skills**. It also benefits families as it enhances parental competences and social inclusion of the child, including academic competences.

In Europe, there's a **deficit to meet the needs** due to different institutional models, serving different age groups and others.

UNICEF's vision: **Ensuring access for every child at risk or developmental difficulties and disabilities.**

Way forward - expanding ECI in Europe and beyond

Emergency Response for Early Childhood Development, the ECDUR project actions, key findings and recommendations

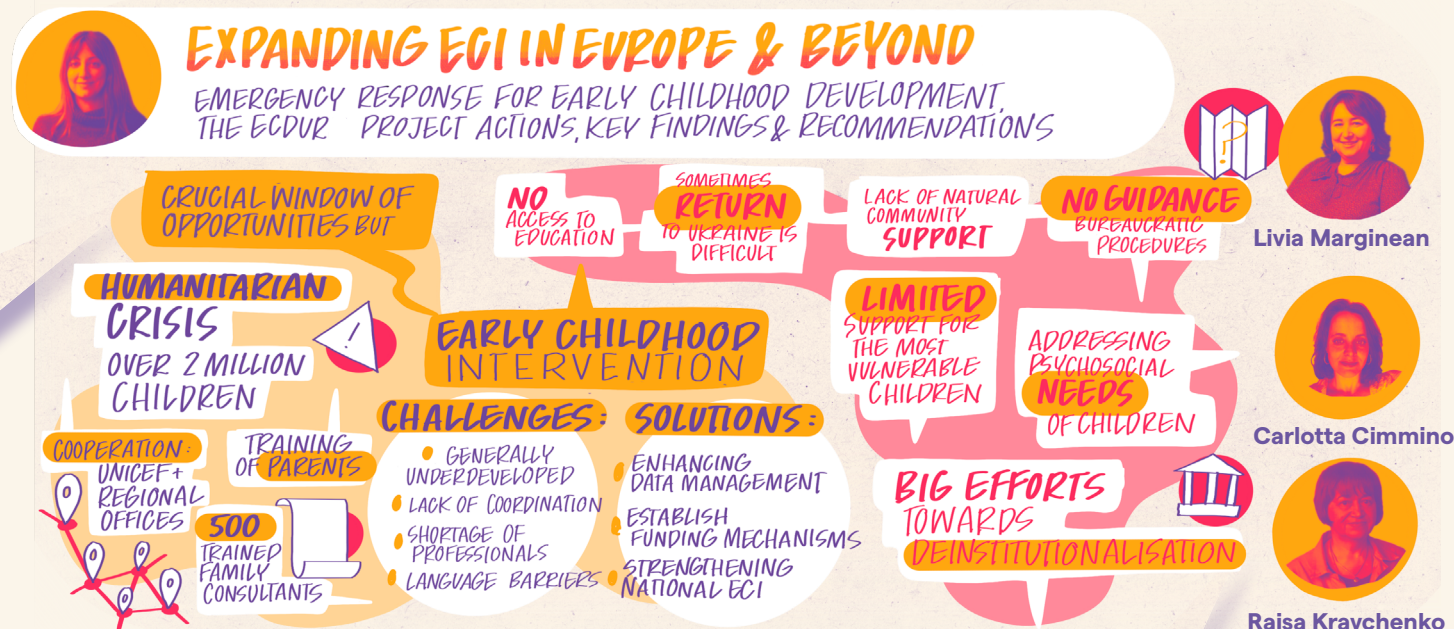
Irene Bertana, EASPD

National Common challenges

Underdeveloped policy framework (lack of general definition); coordination between different systems; when the support is there, there is a lack of professionals trained in this matter; language barriers; and access barriers in support.

National Recommendations

Building and strengthening national ECI systems, improving coordination with the current systems, launching information campaigns, enhancing data management, ETC. EASPD prepared a **position paper** that outlines the vital role of ECI in supporting families and children, provides an overview of the current state of ECI services in a selected number of countries, and provides recommendations for the EU on improving ECI.



Carlotta Cimmino, Save the Children

- **Institutional care** has **negative impact** (physical, emotional growth, mental health) as it does not prioritise the attachment period present in children 0-3.
- **Great progress** has been made in order to **deinstitutionalise** centres in Ukraine.
- Deinstitutionalisation is **long-term process**, which needs community-based services available and made accessible.
- **Community-based childhood services.**
- Focus on **hard-to-reach areas** due to the active military hostilities and in rural areas.
- High importance to **include ECI services across Europe.**

Livia Marginean, Programme Manager from Moldova, Hopes and Homes for Children

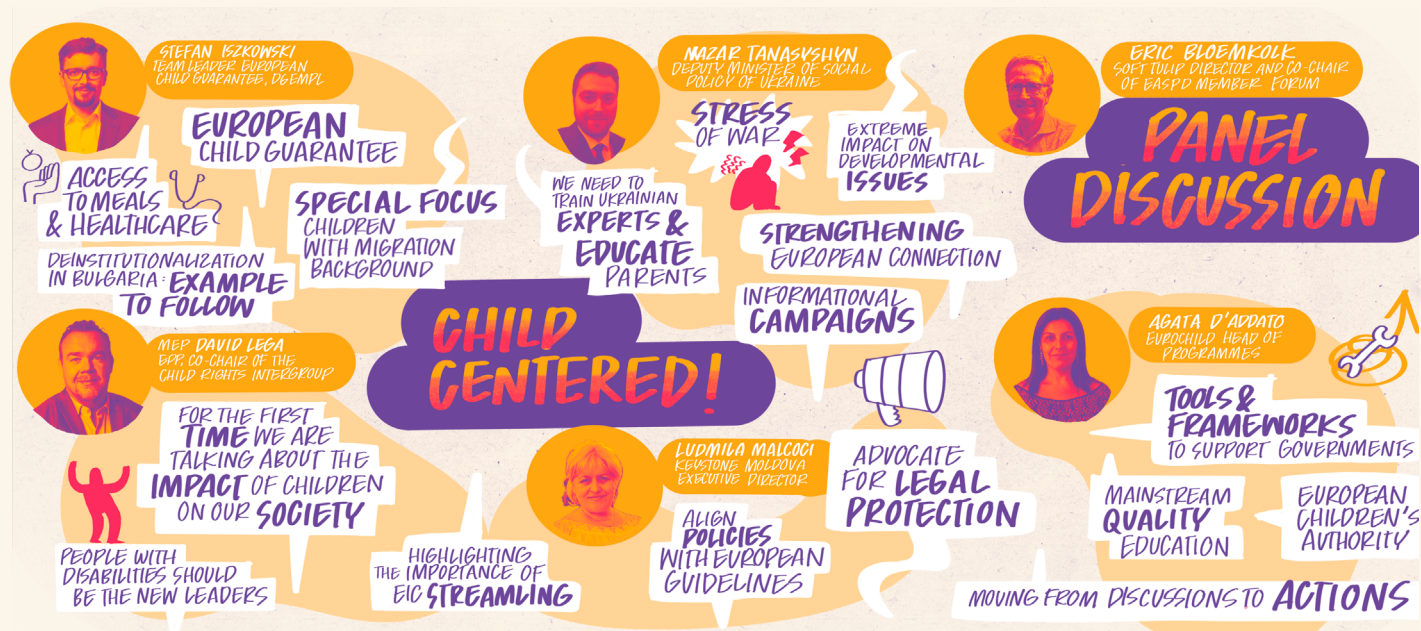
Emphasis on deinstitutionalisation of children aged 0-6, since February 2022 that include refugee children from Ukraine.

- **Over 4% of Ukrainian children (5000)** have been **integrated into the school system.**
- **Limited support** and activities promoting local inclusion and integration, enhancing social exclusion.
- **2021 assessment:** most disadvantaged children in residential care are either children with **severe disabilities and complex emotional needs** or **children aged 0-3.**

Raisa Kravchenko, All Ukrainian NGO Coalition for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities

- For each family it is important that the **recommendations are followed.**
- Due to the **language barriers**, they feel less support.
- It's easier to cope when there is **someone else supporting the mother** with her child, be it another family member or a close friend.
- **60% of mothers** with a child with a disability have intended to come back or have already returned to Ukraine.
- **51 ECI agencies** in total in Ukraine.
- **5 times less ECI users** attending these services due to the war.

Panel discussion: How can the EU help strengthen ECI for children and families, including the refugees?



MEP David Lega, EPP, Co-Chair of the Child Rights Intergroup

- We're not only focused on how to make these children suffer less, but think of the possible contributions they're also able to make.
- People with disabilities are also leaders, so change the discourse. We need to enable children to contribute back, not only to help them.

Stefan Iszkowski, Team Leader European Child Guarantee, DG EMPL

Working closely with UNICEF towards deinstitutionalisation. How to use this difficult situation in order to **ensure access for children to ECI services, alongside access to meals and healthcare.**

Ludmila Malcoci, Keystone Moldova Executive Director

- Very important aspect is to ensure that **national policies** in Moldova are in line with the **EU guidelines.**
- Advocate for **legal protection** to ensure that all children (**disregardful of immigration status**) are able to access these services.
- Importance to **increase data collection** to better understand needs of children and refugees in ECI.

Agata D'Addato, Eurochild Head Of Programmes

- Important initiatives on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECC) in needs or disability, tools and frameworks to support governments.
- Demand to set European Children's authority **cooperation between European Commission, civil society, and public organisations.**
- Need to include ECI related policies in **political agenda.**
- **Public investments** are needed.

Tanasyshyn Nazar, Deputy Minister of Social Policy of Ukraine

- **54% of children** have psychological alterations due to aftermath of war.
- Children at risk/with disabilities and their parents are one of the most vulnerable groups. Due to this, **ECI must be family-oriented, in partnership between families and professionals.**
- **Ukraine has the biggest number of institutionalised care.** One crucial matter is timely response and addressing needs of children with disabilities and their parents.

Closing

BUILDING
& STRENGTHENING
ECI's

INVESTMENT
IN THE FUTURE

CLOSING
REMARKS

STILL A LOT
OF WORK TO
BE DONE

PEOPLE WITH
DISABILITIES AS
LEADERS

SUPPORT IS
NEEDED ON
THE GROUND

Ivana Davidovska, EASPD

Regarding ECI, pointing out the **needs of strengthening/building the capacity** for services. The role of **different stakeholders** is important, especially the EU when it comes to **push the national systems** in how to approach these matters and vulnerable groups. There's a lot that needs to be done. However, **this is an investment in our future**. After closing this project, we're sure that there's a more pressing need that **the emergency is not over, and these families still need support**.