

Child- and Youth-Centered Recovery in Ukraine

As of: June 2026

Fostering Recovery and EU-Aligned Reforms for Children and Youth in Ukraine

Title	Child- and Youth-Centered Recovery in Ukraine
Region	Ukraine
Donor	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project / Political Partner	UNICEF
Project Volume	EUR 177 mln, including EUR 40 mln for winter response
Description	The programme supports child- and youth-centered stabilization, recovery, and structural transformation by protecting human capital, strengthening social systems, modernizing infrastructure, and enhancing local resilience across key social sectors in priority communities.

Project Background

More than four years into the war against Ukraine, Russian attacks continue to significantly impact children and their families. Millions of children face persistent insecurity, repeated displacement, and limited access to essential resources such as safe water, electricity, and other basic needs. For many children, the war has disrupted years of education, play time, and time with family, affecting their development and well-being.

While more than 50% of Ukraine’s state budget are allocated to defence and security, the country continues to pursue vital reforms for EU integration. These include decentralization, public financial management, climate resilience, WASH sector modernization, Better Care Reform, education and social protection transformation, and European Child and Youth Guarantee commitments.

Project Approach

In this volatile environment, the UNICEF programme “Child- and Youth-Centered Recovery in Ukraine” operates at the nexus of stabilization, recovery and structural transformation.

Implemented in 68 communities, the programme contributes to Ukraine’s recovery agenda by protecting and rebuilding human capital, strengthening social systems, modernizing critical infrastructure and reinforcing local economic resilience. It reflects an integrated approach to national reforms and multi-sectoral community recovery across key social sectors of WASH, Health, Education, Social Policy, Child Protection, and Adolescents and Youth. The programme combines policy and regulatory reforms at national level with decentralized implementation, rehabilitation of critical social infrastructure, large-scale workforce capacity development across sectors, and

strengthened municipal recovery financing and public investment mechanisms for social services. Simultaneously, it advances EU-aligned system transformation.

The programme is financed by KfW on behalf of the German Government, represented by BMZ. KfW’s current portfolio with UNICEF in Ukraine amounts to EUR 177 million, with EUR 40 million allocated to UNICEF’s winter response measures.



Map of 68 project communities. Source: UNICEF 2026

Objectives

1. Early Childhood Development (ECD) and Better Care Reform
Integrated maternal and child health, early learning and family-based child protection systems are strengthened by:

- Integration of ECD into primary healthcare.
- Expansion of home visits and preventive child health services

- Operationalization of the Better Care Reform (2024–2028 Strategy) to accelerate deinstitutionalization and strengthen foster family care.
- Standardization of resilience-oriented integrated social services at community level.
- Support to preschool reforms under the new Ukrainian Law on Preschool Education.



Students are getting ready to write a letter to their future selves. Image Source: UNICEF/Dmytro Smolienko

2. Adolescents and Youth: Skills, Employment and Participation

The ongoing primary and secondary education reform is supported and youth activation is anchored within EU-aligned reform and fiscal frameworks through:

- Support to the implementation of the New Ukrainian School (NUS) reform at national and sub-national level
- Adaptation and local piloting of the EU Youth Guarantee
- Career management, school-to-work transition and life skills support
- Strengthened youth participation and civic engagement platforms in project communities

3. Systems, Public Finance and Decentralized Governance

This component functions as the cross-sector reform backbone of the project, ensuring that investments in health, education, child protection, social protection, youth and WASH are fiscally anchored, institutionally embedded and aligned with Ukraine's EU accession agenda.

4. Gender-Based Violence and Violence Against Children

In response to rising protection risks, this component ensures that recovery in the focus areas remains rights-based and protection-sensitive, through:

- Alignment of national frameworks with Istanbul and Lanzarote Conventions
- Integration of survivor-centered case management
- Strengthened referral systems and safeguarding
- Support to women-led organizations
- Community-level prevention and gender-transformative programming.

Winter Response and Energy Resilience

In response to specific needs, two consecutive winter packages (EUR 20 mln each for 2024/2025 and 2025/2026) have safeguarded essential services under intensified energy warfare. The focus has been on strengthening energy resilience across WASH, education and health.

Impacts

More than 1 million people have so far benefitted from the programme. To date, 80 child friendly spaces and 10 ECD centres have been renovated and equipped. Mental health and psycho-social support has been provided to over 136.000 children, youth and carers, and 488.000 women and children have gained access to essential health care and nutrition services. At the policy level, substantial progress has been made in advancing ECD and reforming care support in Ukraine, contributing to improved access to services and opportunities for girls and boys.

In the framework of the Winter Response, more than 1,8 million people, including a large number of children, were reached during the winter of 2024/25. For example, solar installations helped safeguard health services for more than 213.000 patients and heating and water supply were secured for over 1.1 million people. In addition, more than 400.000 children were able to continue in-person education throughout the harsh winter months as schools were provided with heating reinforcement and backup power systems.



A girl playing in a heated shelter during the harsh winter 2025/26. Image Source: UNICEF

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