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# Community Report

Conclusions and Recommendations

August 2024

# Community Report

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# 1: Background

## 1.1. Introduction and methodology

Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, more than 14 million Ukrainian refugees crossed borders in search of a safer environment<sup>1</sup>, with Europe hosting approximately 6 million refugees, predominantly women and children<sup>2</sup>. The high family separation rate – around 70%<sup>3</sup> – has placed children at significant risk of violence, trafficking and exploitation. Both within Ukraine and in host countries, children’s physical wellbeing, mental health and education are under severe threat, leading to increased pressure on mental health and psychosocial support services. Child helplines can play a crucial role in addressing these needs, providing essential support and guidance to affected children and their families. Despite the availability of services in host countries, data suggests that Ukrainian children and young people often do not utilize these resources<sup>4</sup>. The current project aims to explore why this is the case and **improve access to and effectiveness of support services**. We focused on four countries bordering Ukraine – Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania.

The methodology employed in this report and the separate country-specific reports combines qualitative and quantitative approaches. Primary data was collected through surveys of young people from Ukraine and interviews with stakeholders from various sectors involved in refugee support. This data aimed to capture insights on service awareness, accessibility and effectiveness. Secondary data involved analysing existing documents and publications related to child protection and refugee services. The process faced several limitations, including time constraints, difficulties in securing stakeholder participation and a low number of survey respondents, which affected the comprehensiveness of the findings. Despite these challenges, the methodology provided a foundational understanding of the barriers faced by Ukrainian refugees in accessing child helpline services.

1. World Vision (2023). Child Protection Multisectoral Needs Assessment - Ukraine 2023, p.1, accessed on 22 April 2024 at [Child Protection Multisectoral Needs Assessment - Ukraine 2023 - Ukraine | ReliefWeb](#)
2. For overall refugee numbers: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Operational data portal, Ukraine refugee situation, available at <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>. The 88% women and children figure is broken down as follows: 52% women, 18% girls, 18% boys. Source: UNHCR, Displacement patterns, protection risks and needs of refugees from Ukraine: Regional protection analysis #2 – Hungary, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania and Slovakia, April 2023, available at <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/100191> as cited in UNICEF (2024). Ukraine and Refugee Response, p.1
3. Specific needs include disabilities or serious medical conditions. Source: UNHCR, Displacement patterns, protection risks and needs of refugees from Ukraine: Regional protection analysis #2 as cited in UNICEF (2024). Ukraine and Refugee Response, p.4.
4. Child Helpline International (2023). Voices of Children & Young People Affected by the War in Ukraine Monthly Contacts with Child Helplines in the Region

## 1.2. Context analysis

This section presents information from secondary sources, i.e., publications, websites and demographic information.

The findings from online sources show the efforts to support Ukrainian refugee children in Romania, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia with shared goals and unique challenges. All countries emphasize education and MHPSS but differ in their implementation and the comprehensiveness of their services. Even though there are differences between the four countries in regard to education and health services, the overall commitment to integrating and supporting refugee children remains a critical priority across the region.

Country	Total refugees	% children	Education statistics	MHPSS services	Child protection focus
Romania	77,902 <sup>5</sup>	33% <sup>6</sup>	10,936 enrolled in Romanian schools	Extensive NGO support	Child protection and related educational activities
Hungary	44,627	42%	79% enrolled, some follow Ukrainian curriculum	MHPSS through multiple initiatives	Comprehensive child protection by several stakeholders
Poland	1,000,000+	40%	Less than half the refugee children from Ukraine were enrolled in Polish schools in the 2022/23 school year, with 78% of secondary school-aged children reported as not being part of the Polish education system.	Several initiatives and Integration of refugees on education	Child protection and GBV focus
Slovakia	121,598	33%	Nearly 12,000 in schools	Blue Dots – now with takeover by municipalities, and other programmes	Child protection and GBV efforts

5. Note: Data from July 2024 - UNHCR (2024). Ukraine Refugee Situation, May 2024, Operational Data Portal, accessed at: [Situation Ukraine Refugee Situation \(unhcr.org\)](https://www.unhcr.org/situations/ukraine/)

6. Note: Data from February 2024 - Data from the Ministry of Education from the website of Europa Libera Romania accessed at: <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/doi-ani-de-razboi-elevi-ucraineni-romania/32828993.html>

### Support systems for Ukrainian refugees

The table presents the findings on services found on secondary sources, mostly online.

Country	Total services	MHPSS services	Medical services	Family/housing support	Legal assistance	Child rights protection services	Focus on children
Romania	32	21	2	13	3	26	26
Hungary	39	20	6	6	8	Not specified	23
Poland	49	32 (6 on GVB)	Not specified	18	4	12	44
Slovakia	26	18	Not specified	13	4	18	19

Overall, each country has developed a comprehensive support system tailored to the needs of Ukrainian refugees, with a strong focus on children and mental health<sup>7</sup>.

**Child-Focused Services:** All countries emphasize child protection, but the number of services dedicated to children varies. Romania and Slovakia have a higher proportion of services focused on child rights protection relative to their total services. Poland places significant focus on children's needs.

**MHPSS:** Mental health support is a key area in all four countries, with Poland and Romania having a substantial number of MHPSS services. Romania's focus is also significant, though not as detailed for specific categories.

**Medical and Legal Support:** Medical and legal assistance is covered across all countries, though detailed numbers for Romania are less specified.

7. Note: these results are based on a service search done specifically for this study, and is subject to limitations and might not reflect the totality of the services in each country.



### Similarities between the countries

Given the findings from secondary sources, similarities and differences were found regarding the context and services offered to refugees from Ukraine.

**Educational access:** Each country emphasizes integrating Ukrainian children into local education systems. Romania has 10,936 children enrolled in Romanian schools<sup>8</sup>. Hungary reports 79% of school-aged Ukrainian children are enrolled<sup>9</sup>; **children comprise around 40% of all the 1 million Ukrainian refugees registered in Poland**<sup>10</sup>, and in the 2022/23 school year, less than half of those refugee children were enrolled in Polish schools<sup>11</sup>; Slovakia has nearly 12,000 children in schools<sup>12</sup>.

**Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS):** In all four countries, there is a recognition of the importance of addressing mental health issues. Romania, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia all offer a range of MHPSS services through various NGOs and government programmes.

**Child protection:** Protecting children from violence and exploitation is a priority. Each country has implemented measures to safeguard refugee children, including child protection services and initiatives to prevent gender-based violence (GBV).

### Differences between the countries

While all four countries are grappling with similar issues, their approaches and the extent of their support systems vary.

**Scale and registration:** While Romania, Hungary and Slovakia host between 18 and 40 thousand children from Ukraine, Poland hosts around 400,000 such children (40% of the approximate 1 million Ukrainian refugees in the country)<sup>13</sup>. The differences in scale impact the depth and scope of support required.

**Access to education:** Access to education varies across the countries. In Slovakia, Ukrainian refugee children can attend school, but it is not compulsory and language barriers pose challenges. In Poland, education is mandatory for children aged 6-15, but less than half of the refugee children were enrolled in schools by the end of the 2022/23 school year, with many feeling isolated due to online learning. In Hungary there is a similar situation where children have to attend school once they register for temporary protection. Hungary has a higher enrolment rate of 79%, but language barriers remain an issue. Local organizations implement play-based activities and after-school programmes, supported by UNICEF. Similarly, in Romania, since April 2023, it has become obligatory for Ukrainian refugee children to enrol in Romanian schools or local non-formal education services to qualify for social benefits under the temporary protection scheme.

8. Child Helpline International (2024) Country Report Romania - MHPSS Services for Refugees from Ukraine, p.8: <https://childhelplineinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Country-Report-Romania.pdf>
9. Child Helpline International (2024). Country Report Hungary – MHPSS Services for Refugees from Ukraine, p.7: <https://childhelplineinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Country-Report-Hungary.pdf>
10. Child Helpline International (2024) Country Report Poland – MHPSS Services for Refugees from Ukraine, p.7: <https://childhelplineinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Country-Report-Poland.pdf>
11. Ibid.
12. Child Helpline International (2024). Country Report Slovakia – MHPSS Services for Refugees from Ukraine, p.9: <https://childhelplineinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Country-Report-Slovakia.pdf>
13. Child Helpline International (2024). Country Report Poland – MHPSS Services for Refugees from Ukraine, p.7: <https://childhelplineinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Country-Report-Poland.pdf>



**Access to healthcare:** Healthcare access is also inconsistent, with refugees in Slovakia facing difficulties related to insurance and appointment availability, while Hungary provides healthcare but lacks additional disability grants for refugees. Slovakia has experienced significant healthcare access challenges for refugees, with 47% having healthcare needs but facing appointment difficulties, lack of insurance and language barriers. Slovakia has seen a shift in priority needs from food and accommodation in 2022 to healthcare and employment in 2023, reflecting an evolving focus on more sustainable support mechanisms.

**Legal and social integration:** The Temporary Protection (TP) status presents unique challenges, including issues related to long-term integration and access to social services. In Hungary, refugees with TP can access several services including compulsory education. Once they apply for TP, they are obliged to participate in the Hungarian education system. This resulted in the absence of a lot of applications for temporary protection, which subsequently resulted in children not attending the Hungarian education system. In addition, the support for housing and other essential services is being decreased regularly in Hungary, placing this community in a more vulnerable situation. In Slovakia, there are other challenges. Ukrainian refugees with TP status are granted access to rights such as education, employment, healthcare and social protection per the EU TP Directive, but this type of “tolerated stay” is linked to practical barriers. For example, while education is accessible, it is not compulsory for children (differently than in Hungary and other countries), and there are also restrictions on self-employment and limited social benefits<sup>14</sup>.

14. Child Helpline International (2024) Country Report Slovakia – MHPSS Services for Refugees from Ukraine, p.9; <https://childhelplineinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Country-Report-Slovakia.pdf>

## 2: Findings

### 2.1. Survey of young people from Ukraine

We received a total of **113 responses** to our survey, from children and young people aged 13 to 30 (66% girls, 26% boys and 8% other/prefer not to say).

Overall, **local child helplines are not well known** by young people from Ukraine, with just under a third indicating they are familiar with them (30%). Importantly, of the 28 who *were* familiar with them, only one person in our sample had contacted a local child helpline. This is not surprising given the low rates of contacts the child helplines reported to us<sup>15</sup>, and thus the reason for undertaking this mapping exercise.

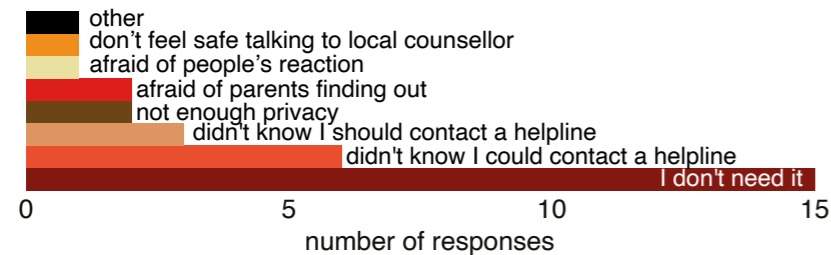
Have you heard about the local child helpline?



Have you ever contacted the local child helpline?



Why not?

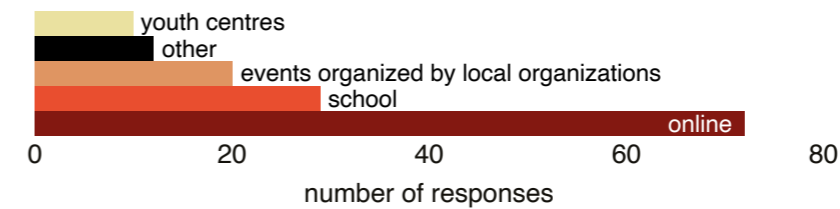


15. Child Helpline International (2023). Voices of Children & Young People Affected by the War in Ukraine Monthly Contacts with Child Helplines in the Region

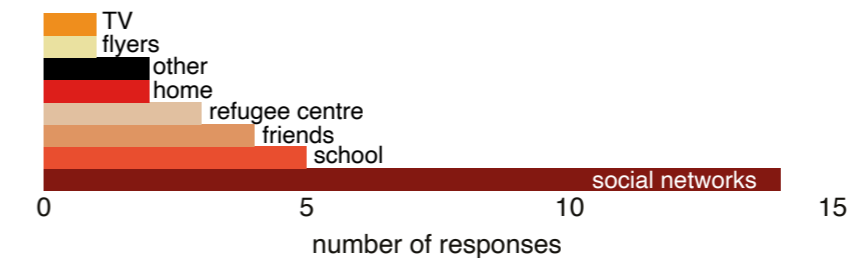
We also asked questions to find out which other places young people from Ukraine turned to, to seek help and support. Most young people reported turning to their family members (76%). They also sought help from friends (33%) and researched their issues online (25%).

Our survey provides a strong indication that **to efficiently reach young refugees from Ukraine in European countries, efforts are best spent online**. Online is where they mostly interact with other Ukrainians (79%), and social media came up as a frequent suggestion of how to best advertise child helplines' services. Indeed, the respondents to our survey who were aware of the local child helpline had mostly learnt about it from **social media** (44%). The social media and messaging apps most frequently used by our sample are **Telegram** (88%) first and foremost, and **Instagram** (81%), followed by YouTube (70%), TikTok (57%) and Viber (57%). Telegram is also by far the most common method used by children and young people residing outside Ukraine to contact La Strada, the child helpline in Ukraine (between 88% and 100% of their contacts from refugees residing in the target countries have come through Telegram; see more information below in section 2.3). Other modes of exposure to child helplines have been the school system – that's how 16% of our sample learnt about the services, and also an answer that came up fairly often in the open-ended questions.

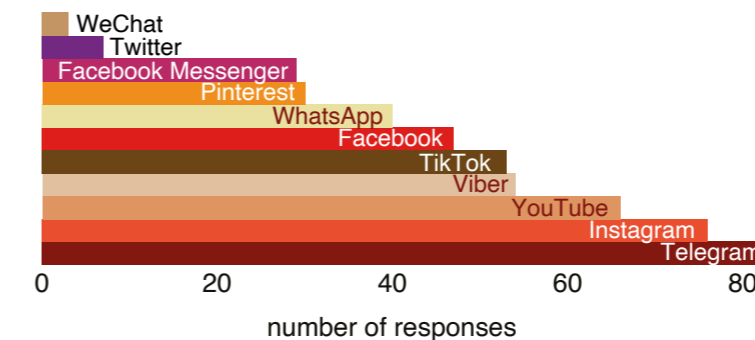
Where do you interact with other Ukrainians?



How did you learn about the local child helpline?



Which of these social networks and messaging apps do you use?

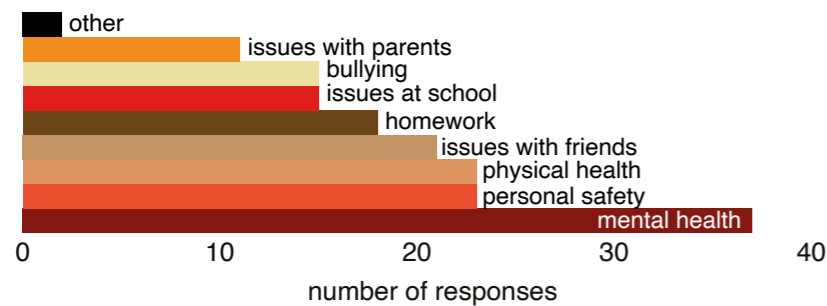


When asked whether they thought they would contact the local child helpline in the future, should they need to, only 10% answered they would not contact, while 90% responded “Yes” or “I Don’t Know”. As a follow-up question, we asked what kind of help they thought they might need in the future. Responses varied, with the most common ones indicating potential help with mental health issues (42%). Mental health was also the most common concern that La Strada, the child helpline in Ukraine, received contacts from Ukrainian refugees about. While Mental health was commonly indicated by respondents in Poland (46%), Slovakia (64%) and Hungary (50%), respondents in Romania indicated mostly needing help with their homework (43%).

Will you contact the child helpline in the future?



What are you likely to need help with in the future?



16. This is only possible if it is not necessary to activate local protocols with local authorities, but this is feasible for general counselling.

## 2.2. Interviews with stakeholders

In this section we present information from primary sources, i.e., interviews with stakeholders. Eighteen stakeholders from Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Romania were interviewed to better understand what services they offered to Ukrainian refugees and how they were targeting young people from Ukraine. We also asked about the challenges that they encountered, cultural or otherwise, to providing support to Ukrainian families and young people.

### Key Services Provided in Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia:

- Mental Health and Psychological Support Services (MHPSS)
- Health services
- Educational services and childcare
- Legal assistance and support in obtaining refugee status
- Financial support
- Housing support
- Awareness and prevention of gender-based violence (GBV) and human trafficking
- Direct counselling and integration work with refugees
- Social inclusion activities and community-based activities
- Job search
- Translation services and helplines
- Referral to national police authorities and work with government offices for child protection
- Services for children with special needs and training people to work with children with special needs

According to the interviewees, among these services, the most sought by refugees from Ukraine were:

- Information regarding how to get status and legal advice
- Information about financial and accommodation assistance
- Information about education
- Education services such as childcare
- Language learning
- Job search
- Psychosocial support

**Main challenges:**

- **Language barriers:** For the past two and a half years, Ukrainian refugees – mainly the single mothers – faced extreme stress, and prioritized childcare and work over learning the host country’s language, hoping for a quick return home. This led to communication difficulties due to a lack of translation services. Recently, many have started seeking language courses, but the demand exceeds the available supply, highlighting the ongoing need for translation services and trained communication professionals.
- **Education** – Refugee children face significant challenges in host countries’ education systems due to language barriers and – in some cases – being placed in grades below their age. Some were skipping school due to parental uncertainty about staying, preferring online Ukrainian education. Additionally, in some cases, when children were integrated into a school, there was the possibility that they would be in a class with Roma children, which – similar to the host community – the parents were opposed to.
- **Minors travelling alone** – A significant challenge is that many 16-year-old refugees arrive at universities alone, often receiving incorrect information, leading to a 50% dropout rate after the first year. This raises concerns about resource use (including resources from private sector) and proper support for these students. In response, some organizations are offering informational sessions to clarify conditions and expectations.
- **Stigma regarding mental health services** - There is a significant cultural stigma around mental health services among both refugees and host communities, leading to a reluctance in seeking help. To overcome this, more awareness campaigns are needed to educate on the importance of mental health care, ensuring that services are culturally sensitive and accessible.
- **Stigma by host population towards refugees from Ukraine** - Ukrainian refugees often encounter stigma and discrimination from host populations, hindering their integration and access to services. Overcoming this requires continuous efforts to foster empathy, understanding and inclusivity through public education and community engagement.
- **Need for continued psychological support and combatting hate speech and xenophobia** - Refugees need ongoing psychological support to address trauma, but it’s as equally important to combat hate speech and xenophobia. Promoting tolerance and inclusivity within host communities is essential for creating a safer, more supportive environment for refugees.
- **Access to services** - Refugees in remote areas struggle to access services, which can be time-consuming and costly (when not reimbursed) if there are no local support partners or mobile services.
- **Resource constraints:** Limited resources and funding cuts since January 2024 have significantly impacted the well-being of Ukrainian refugees, especially those in female-led households. Many women are forced to work long hours, while others, caring for children or facing unemployment, struggle to meet basic needs, increasing their vulnerability and prompting some to consider returning to Ukraine despite their homes being destroyed.

**2.3. Data from La Strada Ukraine**

We examined the number of contacts that the Ukrainian child helpline, La Strada, received from children and young people residing in Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Romania, whenever this information had been logged. We did this to better understand the needs of refugees, who may not contact the local child helpline for various reasons, but still need and seek help.

Between 77% and 100% of contacts to La Strada from children and young people in the four target countries are made during the night (20:00-07:00). This confirms the importance of maintaining online services that operate 24/7, and also confirms that funding is needed to maintain or increase the hours of operation of the local child helplines so that Ukrainian counsellors can follow-up on those contacts during the day. Unfortunately, funding is being discontinued in some of the countries and Ukrainian counsellors are operating on a volunteer basis. Alternatively, another solution would be to facilitate coordination between the local child helplines and La Strada, either by redirecting contacts to La Strada to a local counsellor<sup>16</sup> or by working jointly to raise awareness of the refugee children contacting La Strada about the options available to them in their host countries.

Most young refugees contacting La Strada are 13–15 years old and 16–17 years old, and they mostly use Telegram to make contact (88%-100%, depending on the country), with Instagram being a far second (0%-12%, depending on the country).

The issues that come up in these contacts are usually related to mental health, which accounts for between 25% and 45% of contacts, depending on the country. Other issues include family relationships, peer relationships, issues at school, domestic violence, bullying and sexuality.

It is important to highlight that the outcomes of the survey with children are similar to the outcomes of the interviews with stakeholders in the four countries. Concerns about stigma towards refugees from Ukraine, the need for continued psychological support and combatting hate speech and xenophobia, together with the feeling of isolation in relation to the existing educational opportunities due to language barriers and other factors, were all mentioned by the stakeholders interviewed.

**Schedules per country**

The child helplines in the neighbouring countries to Ukraine are available at the following schedules:

Hungary	Tuesday to Thursday from 16.00 to 20.00
Poland	Daily from 14:00 to 24:00
Romania	24h / day through online channels
Slovakia	Every Tuesday 13:30-19:30;

16. This is only possible if it is not necessary to activate local protocols with local authorities, but this is feasible for general counselling.

## 3: Conclusion and recommendations

After identifying the barriers that refugees from Ukraine face in accessing services, this report identified recommendations on how child helplines can increase access to and use of child helpline services by children and young people (and their parents and/or caregivers) affected by the war in Ukraine, as follows:

Barrier	Recommendations
<b>Language and cultural barriers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand and improve translation and interpretation services, especially for child helplines.</li> <li>• [Continue to] Train and employ Ukrainian-speaking professionals to facilitate communication and integration.</li> <li>• Foster community engagement through cultural exchanges to aid social integration and language practice.</li> </ul>
<b>Availability of overnight support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to make online channels available overnight, and ensure follow-up during the day.</li> <li>• Explore possibilities of providing counselling overnight through the La Strada child helpline – this is not possible for cases where local protocols need to be activated, in these cases children should always call the emergency number of their countries.</li> </ul>
<b>Lack of awareness support services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch targeted awareness campaigns using social media platforms such as Telegram, TikTok, Instagram and Viber to reach younger audiences.<sup>17</sup></li> <li>• Increase the visibility of available services through community outreach and information dissemination.</li> <li>• Whenever possible, implement a chatbot option on the website, and other channels of communication, that can guide children in their search for information.</li> <li>• Develop clear communication strategies to ensure refugees understand the availability and benefits of local support services.</li> <li>• Engage in communications with families of Ukrainian children and young people. These were mentioned by the young respondents as the people they would reach out to when they needed someone to support them, and they can become a target group for communications as they can be a channel to disseminate information about the child helplines.</li> </ul>

17. Refer to the country reports for specific recommendations on the communication channels.

Barrier	Recommendations
<b>Uncertainty about anonymity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Registering for Temporary Protection status implies, in some cases, that children are obliged to attend education in the host country. This means that children will not have time to attend the Ukrainian education system online, and so they end up not being registering. In this way, children remain “unseen”. This fact can be connected to children and young people being hesitant to use MHPSS services, which would imply their permanency in the country. It is important to create awareness and understanding about the anonymity and the fact that contact with the child helpline is not traced.</li> <li>• Implement targeted awareness campaigns that clearly communicate these aspects. By addressing this barrier, children will feel more secure and confident in seeking help without fear of being traced.</li> </ul>
<b>Discrimination and social exclusion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ukrainian refugee children often face discrimination and violence due to their nationality, legal status or socioeconomic situation. This can discourage them from seeking help from local services, including the child helpline. Ensure the involvement of children and young people from Ukraine – taking various genders, ages and disabilities into account – in the decision-making process from the stage of programme development, through the implementation of programs, and upon completion.</li> </ul>



**Every child has a voice.  
No child should be left unheard.**

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Child Helpline International is a collective impact organization with more than 150 members in over 130 countries and territories around the world.

We coordinate information, viewpoints, knowledge and data from our child helpline members, partners and external sources. This exceptional resource is used to help and support child protection systems globally, regionally and nationally, and to help our members advocate for the rights of children and amplify their voices.

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