

Refugees and Disaster Frameworks – Ukraine’s Education in Time of Crisis

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Abstract

The number of refugees globally is at an all-time high and it is predicted to continue to rise in the years ahead. Host countries of these refugees are put under pressure as they must stretch the limited resources to accommodate them. The Ukraine war with Russia has caused around 10 million Ukrainians to flee their homes to find safety in neighbouring countries such as Poland. This has consequently disrupted the education of millions as learning institutions have been demolished. The call for continuing education amid crisis resonates with the disaster framework; Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE Framework). The goal of the framework is to make provisions for education during emergencies. The Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) which stipulates inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all is hugely violated during crisis as happening now in Ukraine – children are out of school because of the war. The INEE Framework brings a lifeline to educators and learners as they seek to provide access to safe and relevant learning opportunities as well as to ensure the quality of educational preparedness, response, and rehabilitation. This literature also looks at the integration of refugee educators and learners into their host country’s educational system, the preparedness of host communities and the enhancement of policies by ensuring a functioning multisectoral path to assist the most vulnerable groups as well as individuals with special needs.

Keywords: Refugee, Education, Conflict, Disaster Framework, Ukraine

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Introduction

The international dispute between Russia and Ukraine, a country that used to be a member of the former Soviet Union Republic, has been going on for quite some time now until the recent escalation of matters in early 2021. Russia's invasion of Crimea in 2014 as they argued to have a historic claim to it, has caused Ukraine to live in trepidation and fear of a ticking bomb yet to explode – war with Russia. The two countries have been on bad terms with each other for a prolonged period, with Russia tending to recapture the now sovereign state of Ukraine, with a claim of it being part of its territory and also fiercely acting against Ukraine's burgeoning links to the West.

With an ever-growing tension between these two countries, Russia finally invaded Ukraine on the 24th of February 2022 which has consequently caused Europe's largest refugee crisis since World War II. This invasion has also caused more than 8 million Ukrainians to migrate to other countries and has accounted for a third of the population displaced (Onciu, 2022). The clash has resulted in many deaths, the bombing of buildings and other properties, the hindering of normal living conditions and others have made Ukraine untenable for many to live in and therefore had to flee. The ongoing war has adversely disrupted the educational system in Ukraine as schools have been damaged and more than half of school-going children have fled their homes to seek refuge in surrounding countries. There were no efforts and thoughts to resume traditional classes in Ukraine as schools building have been converted into shelters for displaced victims and some school sites have now become makeshift graveyards as the conflict intensifies.

Ukraine's Education Pre-Invasion

The Ukrainian educational system is divided into five stages: preschool, primary, secondary, upper secondary, and postgraduate education. The country's educational system, just like many of the post-Soviet countries, has been defined by over 70 years rule of by the Soviets. In an effort to strengthen the educational system after the collapse of the Soviet rule, Ukraine embarked on many reforms such as the introduction of private education. As a country that declared its independence in August 1991 after the dissolution of the Society Union, it is seriously severed by the prolonged and continuing conflict between its leaders and pro-Russian separatists. Based on that, its educational sector development was badly affected.

Even before the invasion, the Ukrainian educational system struggled in the midst of political instability and a high rate of malfeasance to manage societal relations and create quality public institutions. The Ukrainian educational system possesses a long tradition, but its standing in terms of prestige and prominence has been dented recently by heightened quality issues. The causes of these situations are but not limited to the ramifications of the former Soviet rule and the swift social transformation that occurred when the communist society disintegrated. Filiatreau, S. (2011), an international educator illustrated the situation as "Ukraine's economic crisis of the 1990s that led to a decline in the financing of education, including research and development.... [It] has had a tremendous negative impact on the educational system of Ukraine leading to the mass immigration of educated people ... and the marketization of higher education. These factors, combined with the increasing levels of corruption in Ukrainian society, Soviet-style higher education, and lack of transparency mechanisms in Ukrainian higher education at all levels, have led to skyrocketing corruption in higher education, [and] declining quality" Although Ukraine joined the Bologna

Process in 2005 with the anticipation of building the capacity of its educational system, the political climate and instability have unfulfilled that objective.

Ukraine's Education After the Invasion

The conflict in Ukraine has had a wide-ranging impact on the educational system. As the unfolding hostile circumstances rupture the social institutions of the country, the educational sector has not been left out as it has been one of the major casualties. More than 74 million children drop out of school or have their education interrupted each year because of disputes and emergency situations. With the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, about 7.5 million school-going children have abruptly experience disruptions in their education. About 22 educational institutions a day have been destroyed as the war progresses (Confronting Ukraine's education crisis, 2022). Parents, educators, and school governing bodies are struggling to offer classes for school-going children who are still in the country, as well as for those who have left to seek refuge in other countries. Teachers, who are facilitators in the learning process have also had their activities hugely disrupted. Over 25,000 educators (6% of the total educators in Ukraine) have fled to neighbouring countries as a result of the war (Ukraine: Education - Impact of the War in Ukraine May 2022).

Wars like the one between Ukraine and Russia can take a very long time before peaceful resolutions are attained. However, education cannot be on hold until the days of accord and peaceful pact. This has therefore shifted the educational paradigm in Ukraine by resorting to online education in order to promote lifelong and inclusive education as the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) has stipulated. This alternative form of teaching and learning comes with many challenges, especially as many of these children may not have access to the internet and to some, the technical know-how will be a bottleneck if they must join online classes. However, per the situation at hand, this will be the best alternative if the children have to continue their education. Also, refugee students that fled to other neighbouring countries like Poland, Romania, Hungary, and others, will definitely face the issue of integrating into the culture and educational system of that country.

Approach to the Challenge | Research Questions

As an educator and a social worker, the issues pertaining to refugees and lifelong learning are crucial and very important to me. I have the greatest desire to understand educational systems, people's living circumstances, and to help ameliorate situations using education as a tool.

First, I read through many refugee and disaster frameworks that will go along with the challenge – Ukraine's education in the time of crisis. I also had it at the back of my mind, the concept; formula of disaster risk = national or national hazards x vulnerability, divided by the capacity of a societal system to deal with it. I cogitated a disaster risk reduction strategy; The Preparedness Package for Refugee Emergencies (PPRE), which embarks on emergency risk analysis, advance preparedness actions and works with host countries for a smooth integration of refugees.

The call for continuing education in the midst of crisis goes in sync with the INEE's Framework. The goal of the framework is to make provisions for education during emergencies. I examined and read through many scholarly articles and web pages to get abreast with the current situation in Ukraine. I also furthered my enquiry into the root cause

and reason why the Ukraine war is happening. The findings shaped my understanding of the general overview of the case.

In my quest to find out more about the relief measures put in place to help refugees continue their education, I thought about how many of these children are able to access education in their host countries. How is the initial education response by host countries to the refugee children? Are the host countries prepared and receptive enough to receive these refugees? Are there going to be attitudes against the refugees? All in all, it is assumed that a positive response by European host countries will bring enhanced refugee education policies and boost more innovative practices.

The Preparedness Package for Refugee Emergencies (PPRE)

One of the outcomes of wars is the inevitable creation of refugees. Most often than not, they flee to other neighbouring countries to seek refuge and proper living conditions. Managing these displaced people in an emergency requires a strategic plan and that is where PPRE features. When things are not managed properly, it will deeply affect the socio-economic structure of the host countries. In narrowing it down to Ukraine, the fierce battle that is ongoing has led to many people leaving Ukraine as refugees. “Many of these people are educators and students whose dreams of climbing the academic ladder have been cut short” (UNCHR Operational Data Portal, Ukraine Refugee Situation, 2022). The goal of the PPRE is to set the pace, analyse risks, and put into place relief measures to be taken in a period of emergency. It works through three (3) pillars namely: analysis, partnership, and capacity development. It calls for solidarity and global support from governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other humanitarian acting bodies (UNHCR Emergency Handbook, 2021). In the same vein, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction has enacted Word into Action guidelines to provide plans for host community authorities to thread in order to successfully integrate the displaced into national and regional areas. This is very crucial as those fleeing for refuge face significant risks coupled with an increased humanitarian need (UNDRR words Action Guidelines, 2022). With the situation in Ukraine, the inter-agency Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) tend to support likely host countries such as Poland, The Republic of Moldova, Hungary, and Slovakia. It is done in conjunction with government authorities, UN agencies, local stakeholders, civil societies, and NGOs to unleash detailed responses and activities to support hosting communities. This will go all the way to help teachers and students to properly integrate into their new environment as there will be available resources including but not limited to counselling services, flexible curriculum implementation, shelter, and food (Ukraine Situation, 2022). For the PPRE’s Block of Preparedness, refer to the appendix.

Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE Framework) in Ukraine’s Crisis

According to UNESCO, (2022), “every humanitarian crisis is also an education crisis. Beyond learning, education offers a protective environment that is even more relevant to crisis-affected populations, particularly children”. This quote is in sync with the INEE Framework which has the objective of making provisions for education during emergencies through stakeholders. The framework leans on quality education, response and rehabilitation and ensures a safe environment for learning. Like all human beings, refugees whose education has been disrupted should have the right to education no matter the circumstances and no matter where they eventually find themselves. They must enjoy the same rights as

other people. Refugees drop out of school and may lose the chance to continue their education which would consequently affect their future aspirations. That is why this framework and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) call for an immense effort to make learning and education accessible to these refugees. To ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, many functional actors and NGOs such as Osvitoria are continually developing and restoring education and providing quality education to all in the midst of the crisis.

Impacts/Conclusion

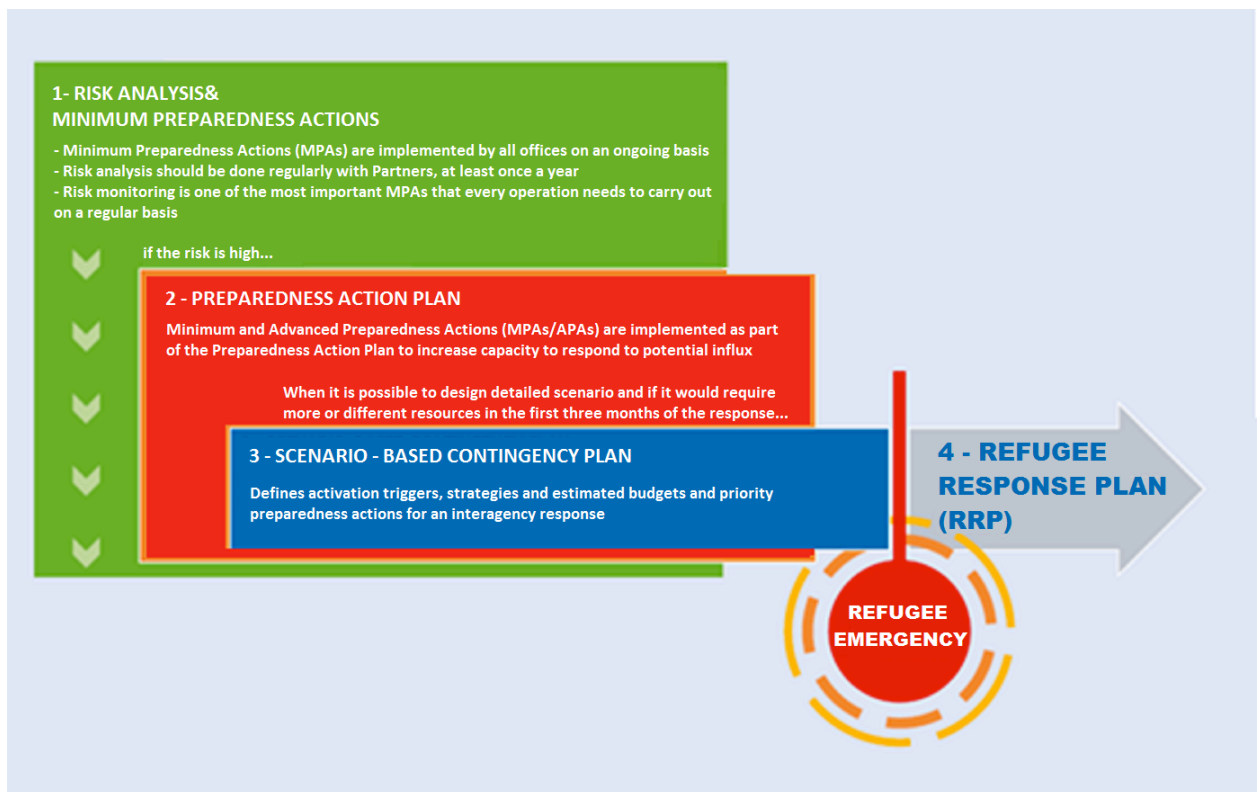
The refugees and disaster framework INEE is a benchmark that provides education even in emergency periods. It has made education available to those who otherwise would not have had it due to hostile conditions. As education is being provided during emergency situations, host nations that make some of these milestones possible should not be left in need of resources. This is where the PPRE, with the help of other agencies, has assisted hosted nations to make provisions for refugees in terms of education and other humanitarian and basic needs. SDG 4 calls for quality and inclusive education. It reminds us that education is a right and must be enjoyed by all irrespective of circumstances such as the Ukraine-Russian War. It is imperative for policymakers to consider proactive measures to tackle current and future conflicts and refugee crises. There could be the development of international and regional exchange programmes for learners and teachers alike to learn more about the educational systems surrounding them. That way, in emergency cases, the assimilation of such an educational system in another country would be easily comprehended by the vulnerable refugees.

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Appendix

PPRE Building Blocks of Preparedness



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