

DOI 10.36074/logos-13.03.2026.043

# LESSONS FROM UKRAINE: SCALABLE APPROACHES TO OVERCOMING LEARNING LOSS IN CRISIS-AFFECTED EDUCATION SYSTEMS

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The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, which began in February 2022, triggered one of the most severe education crises in modern European history. According to UNICEF, approximately 5.3 million children faced barriers to education, including 3.6 million directly affected by school closures inside the country and over two million who fled abroad as refugees [1]. By early 2023, over 3,790 educational facilities had been damaged or destroyed [2]. PISA 2022 data confirmed significant learning loss: Ukrainian students fell behind by approximately two years in reading and one year in mathematics compared to pre-war benchmarks [3]. These disruptions, compounded by two prior years of COVID-19-related closures, make Ukraine a critical case study in crisis education response. This paper presents five scalable approaches developed and implemented in Ukraine to address learning loss, with implications for other countries facing conflict, displacement, or prolonged educational disruption.

## 1. National Digital Learning Infrastructure

Ukraine's All-Ukrainian School Online (AUSO) platform, established during the COVID-19 pandemic and rapidly scaled after February 2022, became a primary educational lifeline. The state-backed portal provided curriculum-aligned video lessons for grades 5–11 across all core subjects, accessible via smartphone with basic connectivity [4]. Its scalability rests on a low entry barrier and pre-built content repository. Countries in conflict-prone regions can adapt this model by investing in offline-capable platforms and accessible content before a crisis strikes, rather than attempting to build infrastructure under emergency conditions.

## 2. Accelerated and Remedial Learning Programmes

Recognising that students returning after prolonged disruption could not resume learning at prior benchmarks, Ukraine — in partnership with UNICEF, Save

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the Children, and national NGOs — piloted accelerated learning programmes (ALPs) targeting critical gaps in literacy and numeracy [1]. These combined rapid diagnostic assessment with differentiated small-group instruction and game-based learning to re-engage trauma-affected students. The approach is directly transferable to post-crisis contexts where blanket grade-repetition policies are both logistically impractical and pedagogically counterproductive.

#### **3. Psychosocial Support Integrated into the Educational Process**

A key feature of Ukraine's response was the systematic integration of psychosocial support (PSS) directly into classroom practice rather than as a standalone service. Teachers were trained in trauma-informed pedagogy, and structured social-emotional learning (SEL) curricula were embedded in the regular school day [1]. This approach is grounded in neuroscientific evidence that chronic stress significantly impairs children's working memory and executive function [5]. In 2022 alone, nearly 300,000 children received PSS and participated in SEL activities nationally. Ukraine's teacher-mediated model — low-cost and scalable — offers a replicable template for any crisis-affected system where specialist mental health resources are scarce.

#### **4. Modular Teacher Professional Development**

Effective implementation of the above approaches required rapid investment in teacher capacity. Ukraine delivered modular, self-paced online courses through the EdEra and Prometheus platforms, covering distance instruction, trauma-informed practice, differentiated teaching, and digital tool use [4]. Short-format courses (15–30 hours) with micro-credentials allowed teachers to upskill while continuing to work, including those who were themselves displaced. This decentralised, asynchronous model demonstrates that large-scale teacher professional development is achievable at low cost and without stable physical infrastructure — a critical lesson for systems operating under disruption.

#### **5. Community-Based Learning Continuity**

Where digital access was insufficient and schooling unsafe, Ukraine mobilised libraries, community centres, and underground shelters as informal learning spaces, staffed by volunteer tutors operating under formal school oversight for curriculum alignment [1]. This hybrid model — a formal curricular backbone supported by community delivery — echoes community school approaches documented in Afghanistan, Syria, and Sub-Saharan Africa, but adds the distinctive feature of digital coordination with formal institutions. It requires minimal capital investment and is among the most immediately replicable strategies for low-resource crisis contexts.

**Conclusions.** Ukraine's educational response to ongoing war has become an accelerated laboratory for crisis education innovation. The five approaches

outlined — a national digital learning platform, accelerated learning programmes, integrated psychosocial support, modular teacher professional development, and community-based learning continuity — share features that enhance their transferability: low resource requirements relative to impact, compatibility with formal curriculum frameworks, and reliance on existing human capital. Their simultaneous system-wide deployment under extreme conditions has generated a body of implementation knowledge of direct relevance to other countries facing conflict, climate disasters, or protracted health emergencies. As the global education community continues to address the enduring legacy of learning loss from multiple overlapping crises, Ukraine's experience deserves serious attention from researchers, policymakers, and practitioners.

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