

**Interreg
Danube Region**



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Country report Ukraine

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Change

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List of abbreviations

DRP	Danube Region Programme
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
Jems	Joint electronic monitoring system
LP	Lead partner
LTC	Local Territorial Community
MAJS	Managing authority and Joint secretariat
PP	Project partner
PR	Partner report
PPR	Project Progress Report

1. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to validate and refine the needs and challenges identified during the proposal stage, taking into account the specific national and regional context of Ukraine regarding the labour market integration of vulnerable young people.

This report focuses specifically on the Ivano-Frankivsk region (NUTS 2), with a detailed analysis of Ivano-Frankivsk local territorial community (NUTS 3 level). This allows for a granular understanding of the challenges faced by both urban centres and rural areas within the region. The analysis reflects the current socio-economic realities shaped by labour market disruptions, demographic changes, Ukraine's ongoing war, internal displacement and increased pressure on local employment services.

Additionally, the country reports will establish common ground among partners to facilitate subsequent project activities and enhance partners' localised knowledge and understanding of the challenges and opportunities within employment services through intersectoral cooperation. The primary research method employed is desk research, complemented by targeted stakeholder interviews for validation and contextual refinement. This activity is essential for understanding local needs, informing evidence-based policymaking, and guiding strategic decision-making processes. Therefore, it serves as a cornerstone for the cooperative implementation of the project, contributing to O1.1 overall. The results will directly inform and be incorporated into the local strategies (O3.3) and the transnational strategy (O3.4).

2. Problem

The Ukrainian labour market has been facing a prolonged structural crisis that directly affects the social and professional inclusion of young people. This crisis began before 2022 but was drastically intensified by the war. Based on national and Eurostat data for 2019–2024, three interconnected challenges can be identified.

1. Structural exclusion and demographic decline. Since 2019, Ukraine's population has decreased by more than 4 million, dropping below 38 million in 2024. This decline reflects long-term demographic trends observed prior to 2022, including low birth rates, population ageing, and sustained labour migration. Large-scale displacement, out-migration of young people, and the shrinking of the working-age population (especially those aged 15–29, now only around 14–15% of total population) have created a severe demographic imbalance. The full-scale war has significantly accelerated these processes, particularly in rural areas.

2. Economic instability and limited job creation. Ukraine's GDP fell by almost 30% in 2022, and although partial recovery was recorded in 2023–2024, employment opportunities remain scarce, especially for young people entering the market for the first time. The small-enterprise sector dominates the economy (over 98% of registered firms), yet most micro-enterprises cannot offer stable jobs or career paths. Wage disparities between urban and rural regions and between genders have widened — in 2024, the average female salary was 22% lower than the male one. These factors push young people toward informal employment or emigration.

3. Education-to-employment mismatch. Although school and university enrolment rates remain high, early school leaving has increased since 2022, particularly among displaced youth and those from low-income families. Many graduates lack practical skills demanded by employers, and vocational training remains underfunded. This mismatch explains why the youth unemployment rate (15–24) stayed at around 18–20% in 2023–2024, despite moderate economic recovery.

4. Rising NEET rates and psychosocial vulnerability. In 2023, the share of young people aged 15–29 not in employment, education, or training (NEET) exceeded 22%, compared with 14% before 2020. War-related trauma, uncertainty, and limited mobility have increased discouragement and emotional exhaustion among youth. More than one-third of surveyed young people (UNICEF, 2024) report losing motivation to pursue further education or job searching due to stress, relocation, or family responsibilities.

3. Analysis

3.1. Population and demographic statistics

3.1.1. Population and age structure

TABLE 1
Main demographic data

	Country level	NUTS2 level
Total population	37.9 million	1,338.0 thousand
Proportion of 15-29-year-olds in the total population	14.5%	17.1%
Proportion of females in total population	54.4%	52.8%
Median age of population	42.6 years	40.7
Median age of population - females	44.1 years	43.5

Source: State Statistics Service of Ukraine, Eurostat. 2024 data or the latest available.

Ukraine is undergoing a profound demographic and social transformation. Between 2019 and 2024, the total population dropped from over 41 million to 37.9 million, driven by migration, war-related displacement, and natural decline. The share of youth aged 15–29 fell to 14.5%, while the median age of the total population rose to 42.6 years, confirming accelerated ageing. Fertility remains low, with the average age at childbirth increasing from approximately 27.0 years in 2019 to 28.4 years in 2024, and births among young women aged 15–29 decreasing by nearly ten percentage points since 2019. Life expectancy declined sharply after 2022, falling from pre-war levels above 72 years to 69.8 years (65.8 for men, 73.5 for women). These patterns illustrate a critical erosion of Ukraine’s demographic potential and the shrinking base for future labour-market participation.

At the NUTS 2 level, demographic and social indicators are slightly more favourable but remain fragile. The analysed region (Ivano-Frankivsk region, NUTS 2) shows a younger population structure (median age ≈ 40.7 years) and a higher youth share ≈ 17%. The average age at childbirth and marriage is somewhat lower than the national mean, and the fertility pattern is still dominated by women aged 15–29 (≈ 54% of all births). Life expectancy in this area is higher (≈ 70.9 years total) and infant mortality lower (6.9 per 1,000 live births, compared to 7.5 at the national level), reflecting relatively better living conditions and healthcare access. However, persistent out-migration of young people—particularly women with higher education—weakens regional labour supply and accelerates the ageing of smaller towns.

At the community level (NUTS 3 context) demographic erosion becomes visible in everyday life. Many rural and post-industrial municipalities face population loss exceeding 25% and an ageing index above 100. Local schools, medical centres, and small enterprises close or consolidate due to

depopulation. Communities hosting internally displaced people experience temporary population increases but lack resources for integration, youth employment, and social services. The decline in births and young families leads to reduced tax bases and labour shortages, limiting municipalities' ability to recover economically. Local revitalisation therefore depends on targeted interventions—creating youth-friendly jobs, enhancing digital and vocational skills, and restoring trust in local governance.

3.1.2. Marriage and fertility

TABLE 2
Main socio-demographic data

	Country level	NUTS2 level
Mean age at first marriage - females	28.3 years	27.9 years
Mean age at first marriage - males	30.2 years	29.7 years
Mean age of women at childbirth	28.4 years	27.8 years
Proportion of live births outside marriage	23.5%	21.8%
Proportion of live births from 15 to 29 years in the total live births	50.1%	54.2%

Source: State Statistics Service of Ukraine, Eurostat. 2024 data or the latest available.

Marriage and fertility patterns in Ukraine reveal a steady postponement of family formation and a significant reduction in birth rates among younger cohorts. Compared to 2019, when the mean age at first marriage was 26.5 years for women and 28.7 for men, these figures rose by 2023 to 28.3 and 30.2 years respectively. Similarly, the average age of mothers at childbirth increased from 27.1 years in 2019 to 28.4 years in 2023. The share of births among women aged 15–29 declined from nearly 58% in 2019 to about 50% in 2023. These trends suggest that younger generations may be delaying parenthood, which could be attributed to a complex interplay of factors, including economic uncertainty, large-scale migration, and the social disruptions caused by the war. The proportion of births outside marriage has also risen (up from 20.4% in 2019 to 23.5% in 2023), reflecting both changing social norms and the instability of formal family structures during prolonged crisis conditions.

At the NUTS 2 level, regional fertility dynamics differ slightly from the national trend. The average age at marriage and childbirth is lower—27.9 and 27.8 years respectively—indicating that family formation remains earlier in smaller cities and rural areas. The share of births among women aged 15–29 remains higher at around 54%, and the proportion of births outside marriage (21.8%) is slightly lower than the national figure. This suggests stronger traditional family structures and a more conservative social environment in the region. However, the number of young families is declining overall, as many potential parents migrate abroad for economic stability.

At the community level(NUTS 3 context), the impact of demographic and economic stress on fertility is visible in everyday life. Many municipalities report a continuing drop in the number of newborns and an increasing number of single-parent households (Main Department of Statistics in Ivano-Frankivsk Region, 2024). Young families struggle with housing, unstable income, and

insufficient access to childcare, which discourages them from having additional children (UNICEF, 2023). In rural areas, the closure of kindergartens and schools further accelerates out-migration, creating a vicious cycle of population decline. Supporting family-friendly local services and targeted financial incentives for young parents has become essential to stabilise fertility and maintain community vitality (Ukrainian Youth Fund, 2025).

3.1.3. Life expectancy and infant mortality

TABLE 3
Main life expectancy data

	Country level	NUTS2 level
Life expectancy at less than 1 year_Total	69.8 years	70.9 years
Life expectancy at less than 1 year_Males	65.8 years	67.0 years
Life expectancy at less than 1 year_Females	73.5 years	74.9 years
Infant mortality rate	7.5	6.9
Life expectancy at less than 1 year_Total	69.8 years	70.9 years

Source: State Statistics Service of Ukraine; WHO; Eurostat. 2024 data or the latest available.

Life expectancy and health indicators in Ukraine have deteriorated notably since 2020, reflecting both the long-term effects of socio-economic instability and the direct consequences of the war. The average life expectancy at birth dropped from more than 71 years in 2020 to around 69.8 years in 2023. The gender gap remains significant: men live on average 65.8 years, while women reach 73.5 years. This disparity is linked to differences in lifestyle, healthcare access, and occupational risks, as well as the high proportion of men involved in military or physically demanding labour. Infant mortality increased slightly, reaching 7.5 per 1,000 live births, due to deteriorating maternal and child healthcare in conflict-affected regions. These trends point to a broader public health crisis and underline the need for improved prevention, primary care, and mental health support.

At the NUTS 2 level, health outcomes appear somewhat more stable. Life expectancy in 2023 was higher—70.9 years in total, with 67.0 for men and 74.9 for women—while infant mortality is lower at 6.9 per 1,000 live births. This suggests better access to healthcare infrastructure, higher vaccination coverage, and improved social determinants of health, such as housing and education. Nevertheless, regional healthcare systems remain under strain due to staff shortages, increased costs, and the influx of internally displaced persons (OCHA, 2024; World Bank, 2024). Preventive medicine, especially among working-age men, remains a critical gap (UNICEF, 2023; Main Department of Statistics in Ivano-Frankivsk Region, 2024).

At the Ivano-Frankivsk local territorial community, the human consequences of health decline are immediate and visible. Many local health facilities operate with outdated equipment and limited personnel, especially in rural areas (World Bank, 2024; Main Department of Statistics in Ivano-Frankivsk Region, 2024). The psychological toll of war—stress, anxiety, and trauma—has increased the demand for social and mental health services, which local governments are often unable to provide (UNICEF, 2023; OCHA, 2024). Communities with proactive health and social initiatives, including volunteer-based care and mobile clinics, demonstrate better resilience. Strengthening

community healthcare networks and integrating psychosocial support into local services are essential to mitigate the long-term demographic and social damage caused by declining life expectancy and health outcomes (UNESCO, 2023; World Bank, 2023).

3.2. General economic accounts

3.2.1. National economic accounts

TABLE 4
Main national economic accounts data

	Country level	NUTS2 level
Gross domestic product (GDP) at current market prices (Euro per capita)	≈ 4 000 EUR	
Euro per inhabitant in percentage of the EU27 (from 2020) average	≈ 24–26%	
Current prices, purchasing power standard (PPS, EU27 from 2020) per capita	≈ 52	

Source: State Statistics Service of Ukraine. 2024 data or the latest available.

Ukraine’s economic landscape remains characterised by structural fragility and slow recovery amidst the ongoing conflict. With GDP per capita around €4,000 and purchasing power barely exceeding half of the EU average, the national economy continues to experience deep disparities in productivity, capital investment and labour-market demand. The war has intensified pre-existing weaknesses: small and micro enterprises dominate the business structure, often operating with minimal margins and vulnerable to disruptions. High inflation, logistical constraints and reduced foreign investment restrict the emergence of stable, high-quality jobs for young people (World Bank, 2024; Ivano-Frankivsk Regional Development Agency, 2024). As a result, labour-market opportunities are narrow, geographically concentrated and rarely aligned with the skills of new entrants.

At the NUTS2 level, economic conditions tend to mirror national vulnerabilities but display even stronger territorial imbalances. Although precise economic indicators are not available, indirect evidence from regional development agencies and labour-market reports indicates lower business density, weaker diversification and higher dependency on low-productivity sectors compared to national averages. Many enterprises operate informally or semi-formally, limiting tax revenues and the ability of local authorities to support economic development. Peripheral areas struggle to attract investment and maintain essential economic infrastructure, making them less resilient to shocks. Young people in these regions consequently face limited access to formal jobs, lower wages and weak access to employer-sponsored training.

Although precise economic indicators at the municipal level are limited, indirect evidence from regional development agencies and local labour-market reports indicates that economic decline is highly visible and directly affects young people's prospects. Local markets are dominated by micro-businesses, seasonal work and informal activities, which cannot absorb the growing number of jobseekers nor provide stable career pathways (Ivano-Frankivsk Regional Development Agency, 2024; State Employment Service, 2024). Communities experience business closures, depopulation and reduced fiscal capacity, further shrinking local economic opportunities. Youth frequently migrate to larger cities or abroad, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of labour shortage and economic stagnation (Ukrainian Youth Fund, 2025). Municipalities attempting to revitalise their economies often lack investment capital, trained personnel and institutional capacity to support entrepreneurship or digitalisation. This underscores the urgent need for targeted local economic development measures, including support for SMEs, innovation hubs and employer–education partnerships.

3.2.2. Business statistics

TABLE 5
Main business statistics – Tourism sector only

	Country level	NUTS2 level
Number of enterprises	1,790,000	
Business churn - birth and death rate - percentage	12.3% / 9.8%	

Source: State Statistics Service of Ukraine. 2024 data or the latest available

Business dynamics in Ukraine reflect a dual reality of entrepreneurial energy and structural instability. With around 1.79 million registered enterprises and business churn at 12.3% (birth) and 9.8% (death), the private sector demonstrates activity but also high vulnerability. Most enterprises are micro-sized, often family-run or operating as individual entrepreneurs, which limits possibilities for scaling, innovation and job creation. Structural barriers—administrative burdens, limited access to finance, unpredictable regulation and logistical challenges—continue to constrain sustainable business growth. This environment produces a labour market dominated by short-term and low-wage opportunities, with limited pathways for youth employment.

At the NUTS2 level, regional business structures tend to be even more fragile. While comparable indicators are missing, qualitative evidence—including regional development assessments, semi-structured interviews with local stakeholders, and labour market reports—indicates that regions outside major economic centres host a higher share of low-productivity businesses, often concentrated in agriculture, trade and basic services (Ivano-Frankivsk Regional Development Agency, 2024; USAID, 2023). Regional SMEs face shortages of skilled labour, outdated technologies and restricted access to external markets. High business mortality further erodes local economic resilience. Young people in these regions face fewer chances for quality employment and limited access to traineeships or early work experience, often pushing them toward migration or informal work (Ivano-Frankivsk Regional Employment Service, 2024).

At the community level, the challenges become more acute. Many small municipalities rely on a narrow base of small enterprises, local markets and seasonal work, creating unstable economic environments for young people (Ivano-Frankivsk Regional Development Agency, 2024). Business closure leads to immediate loss of local jobs, while limited competition and innovation slow down economic renewal. Communities with weak digital infrastructure or inadequate transport connectivity are unable to attract external investors or develop youth-friendly employment ecosystems (World Bank, 2024; OCHA, 2024). Local business support services—incubators, training programmes, start-up funds—are often absent, leaving young entrepreneurs without guidance or resources (USAID, 2023). Strengthening local ecosystems through small-enterprise support, community-based innovation initiatives and improved public-private cooperation is essential to break the cycle of economic stagnation (Ukrainian Youth Fund, 2025; Ivano-Frankivsk City Council, 2024).

3.3. Labour market situation

3.3.1. Employment

Employment levels in Ukraine have been strongly affected by long-term economic instability and the impact of the full-scale war. Although employment recovered gradually between 2016–2021, the shock of the war in 2022 caused significant job losses due to business closures, displacement, and the relocation of enterprises. While certain sectors (IT, logistics, services) show resilience, national employment remains below pre-war levels, and informal employment has increased. Labour-market mismatches, demographic decline and reduced investment continue to constrain job creation.

Employment rates vary substantially across regions. The Ivano-Frankivsk region, as part of the western cluster, shows relatively better recovery compared to the national average, supported by incoming businesses and displaced population increasing local demand. In contrast, eastern and southern regions experience much lower employment due to destruction of infrastructure, security risks and population outflow. Sectoral composition also drives differences: regions dependent on heavy industry or agriculture face slower labour-market stabilisation.

At the Ivano-Frankivsk local territorial community, employment opportunities are shaped by the strength of the local economy, availability of transport, and municipal support, all of which are currently underdeveloped or severely strained (Ivano-Frankivsk Regional Development Agency, 2024). Consequently, small municipalities often lack the capacity to absorb new entrants into the labour market, leading to high youth unemployment and forced migration (Ukrainian Youth Fund, 2025). Evidence suggests that communities with diversified local economies (services, small manufacturing, logistics) recover faster, while others experience persistent employment gaps and continuous outmigration.

3.3.2. Trainees

The number of trainees in Ukraine reflects structural issues in vocational education and limited employer engagement. According to national statistics, the share of students in vocational education remains significantly lower than the EU average, with a continuing decline in enrolment observed between 2021 and 2023 (State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2024). Participation in traineeships remains low due to outdated VET infrastructure, limited practical training opportunities, and the dominance of theoretical rather than practice-oriented programmes, with research indicating that only a small fraction of VET students have access to high-quality dual education or modern on-the-job training (USAID, 2023). War-related disruptions, including displacement and damage to training facilities, further reduced the availability of on-the-job learning. As a result, traineeships remain an underdeveloped pathway for skill acquisition and labour-market transition (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2024).

Regional disparities in traineeships are significant. In the Ivano-Frankivsk region, which represents an economically active and relatively safer western cluster, there is a higher concentration of employer networks compared to conflict-affected areas. However, as a region receiving a large influx of displaced youth, it faces a mismatch where the supply of vocational and practical training cannot keep up with the increased demand (Ivano-Frankivsk Regional Employment Service, 2024). In contrast, eastern regions have seen major disruptions to VET institutions due to the conflict, reducing trainee numbers to critical levels. This gap underscores that even in more resilient regions like Ivano-Frankivsk, the VET infrastructure requires targeted expansion to integrate new entrants effectively.

At the community level (NUTS 3 context), traineeship opportunities depend on local enterprises and the presence of functioning VET institutions. Small communities often lack companies able to host trainees or offer structured programmes, forcing young people to travel to larger cities or forgo practical training altogether. Transport barriers, damaged facilities and limited equipment further restrict participation. Communities with active partnerships between VET centres and local employers show better outcomes, but such examples remain rare.

3.3.3. Unemployment

Unemployment in Ukraine increased sharply in 2022, reaching an estimated peak of approximately 21–25% according to various reports (National Bank of Ukraine, 2023; ILO, 2023), due to war-related disruptions and remains elevated despite partial recovery. Labour-market contraction, displacement of millions of workers, and limited availability of stable jobs contribute to persistent unemployment levels (World Bank, 2024). Furthermore, many individuals remain outside the formal labour market, creating significant "hidden" unemployment, particularly in regions with high concentrations of internally displaced persons (Ivano-Frankivsk Regional Development Agency, 2024). Structural barriers—such as skill mismatches and underdeveloped adult learning systems—further hinder the rapid reintegration of the workforce (USAID, 2023; CEDOS, 2023).

Unemployment varies widely across regions, reflecting the uneven geographical impact of the conflict. In the Ivano-Frankivsk region (NUTS 2), unemployment remains moderate compared to

the national average, yet competition for high-quality vacancies has intensified due to the significant influx of displaced workers (State Employment Service of Ukraine, 2024). Central regions show mixed trends depending on their industrial base, while eastern and southern regions demonstrate the highest unemployment levels due to direct war damage and business closures (World Bank, 2024; OCHA, 2024). Consequently, skilled workers in the most affected regions often cannot find equivalent employment locally, leading to further internal migration toward more resilient western clusters like Ivano-Frankivsk.

At the community level (NUTS 3), unemployment is driven by the presence (or absence) of local employers, transport access, and municipal resources. Smaller communities struggle most, as the local business base is often limited to seasonal activities and micro-enterprises (Ivano-Frankivsk Regional Development Agency, 2024). Host communities for IDPs experience additional labour-market strain, often resulting in a mismatch between the skills of displaced persons and local job vacancies (USAID, 2023; State Employment Service, 2024). While communities with active local support services, NGOs, or donor programmes demonstrate better integration outcomes, the coverage of such support remains inconsistent across the region (Ukrainian Youth Fund, 2025; OCHA, 2024).

3.4. Education system

3.4.1. Participation in education and training

TABLE 6
Main enrolment data

	Country level	NUTS2 level
Pupils enrolled in upper secondary education, total	1 270 426	
Pupils enrolled in upper secondary education by programme orientation	804 978	

Source: State Statistics Service of Ukraine. 2024 data or the latest available.

Participation in education and training in Ukraine has remained relatively stable, but it is strongly affected by demographic decline, internal displacement and war-related disruptions. While general secondary education coverage remains high (above 90 percent), participation in vocational education has gradually decreased: the number of VET students fell by more than 25 percent between 2015 and 2021, reflecting limited attractiveness and misalignment with labour-market needs. The war reduced access to stable learning environments: more than 3,400 schools have been damaged or destroyed, and 5.3 million children have experienced learning interruptions. Dependence on digital learning increased sharply, but digital access remains uneven, with around one in four households lacking stable internet and about one in five students lacking a personal device for online learning.

Regional variation in participation is substantial, driven by both geographical location and the urban–rural divide. In the Ivano-Frankivsk region, urban centres offer more diversified educational pathways and maintain more stable enrolment, whereas rural and mountainous areas face growing teacher shortages and declining student numbers (Ivano-Frankivsk Regional Department of Education and Science, 2024). Nationwide, more than 40 percent of all damaged schools are located in eastern and southern regions, directly affecting participation (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2024). Regions within the western cluster that host large numbers of internally displaced persons, including Ivano-Frankivsk, report a 20–30 percent increase in class sizes, creating significant pressure on school capacity and teaching resources (UNICEF, 2023; OCHA, 2024).

At the community level (NUTS 3), participation depends on access to functioning schools, transport availability, digital infrastructure and household economic conditions. Smaller communities often have limited programme options, particularly in vocational education, where many institutions experienced a 30–40 percent reduction in practical training opportunities (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2024). War-related displacement and economic hardship further disrupt learning continuity, especially for families unable to provide stable access to devices, connectivity

or safe learning environments. In some rural communities, up to 30–40 percent of learners rely exclusively on online instruction, increasing the risk of disengagement.

3.4.2. Out-of-school rate and early leavers from education and training

No harmonised Eurostat data are available for Ukraine, but national and international assessments show an increased risk of early school leaving. UNICEF reports that one in five children in Ukraine is at risk of not continuing education due to displacement, psychological stress and household economic strain. More than two million school-aged children have been internally displaced since 2022, and many encounter difficulties re-enrolling or integrating into new schools. Hidden dropout is widespread: between 10 and 15 percent of students enrolled in online schooling do not attend lessons regularly.

Regional disparities are significant. Frontline and conflict-affected regions experience the highest levels of schooling disruption due to safety risks and infrastructure damage. In several eastern and southern oblasts, 70–80 percent of teaching takes place online, which increases early-leaving risks. Western regions host large numbers of displaced students and face overcrowding, with class sizes rising by 20–30 percent. Limited psychosocial support and gaps in learning-recovery programmes further contribute to the risk of early school leaving.

At the Ivano-Frankivsk local territorial community, early leaving is linked to a lack of accessible transportation, unstable digital access and reduced availability of local educational services. In rural areas, students often need to travel 10–20 kilometres to reach the nearest functioning school, which contributes to absenteeism. Limited extracurricular opportunities and financial pressures increase the likelihood that students withdraw from education. Many communities report hidden dropouts, where students remain enrolled but attend irregularly.

3.4.3. Access to information and obstacles to participation in education and training

Access to information and educational resources is uneven across Ukraine, driven by digital inequality, energy instability, and device shortages. According to UNICEF, one in four households lacks stable internet access, and only about 63 percent of households have a computer or laptop. War-related energy outages, while reaching a critical peak in 2022–2023, remain an ongoing systemic challenge. A renewed wave of large-scale attacks on generation infrastructure in 2024 and 2025 has caused further prolonged disruptions. These outages do not just stop learning; they create an 'asynchronous gap' where teachers and students cannot be online simultaneously. This led to a 20–40 percent drop in average monthly attendance for synchronous sessions, as absenteeism increased due to the physical impossibility of connecting during scheduled hours. These barriers particularly affect displaced households and low-income families who lack the financial means to invest in autonomous power solutions (like generators or portable power stations), further widening the educational gap between different socio-economic groups.

Urban regions generally have better digital infrastructure and better-equipped schools, while rural, eastern and southern regions face recurring connectivity failures, electricity outages and reduced safety. Regions near the frontline experience serious obstacles to accessing information due to damaged networks, unstable mobile coverage and limited administrative capacity. In many affected oblasts, demand for school-provided devices increased by 30–50 percent, far exceeding available supply.

At the Ivano-Frankivsk local territorial community, obstacles include limited ICT equipment in schools, the absence of public digital access points, insufficient transport, and restricted municipal budgets. Many households share devices or rely solely on mobile internet, which limits participation in digital learning. Communities supported by NGOs or donor programmes often provide digital hubs or equipment lending, while others have no such services, resulting in substantial territorial differences in access to educational information.

3.4.4. Education and training outcomes

Learning outcomes in Ukraine have been significantly affected by a sequence of long-term disruptions, starting with the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, which forced a rapid shift to remote learning, followed by the catastrophic impact of the full-scale invasion in 2022. According to UNICEF assessments from 2023, students in Ukraine have lost the equivalent of 1 to 1.5 years of learning in mathematics and reading. The PISA 2022 results further quantify this decline: Ukrainian students' scores in mathematics dropped by 12 points and in reading by 19 points compared to the 2018 cycle. Currently, nearly 42% of 15-year-old students do not reach the baseline level of proficiency in mathematics. National testing (NMT) results also show declines, particularly in STEM subjects. Completion rates for upper secondary education remain formally high (above 90%), but the gap between completion and actual achievement is growing, as many students finish schooling without mastering core competencies. For instance, while graduation rates are stable, the share of students achieving "high" levels in national assessments has decreased by approximately 7–10% in rural areas since 2021. Weak alignment between acquired skills and labour-market needs contributes to challenges in youth employment and rising NEET rates.

At the regional level, inequalities in learning outcomes reflect disparities in teacher distribution, resource availability and local economic conditions. Regions with strong educational ecosystems, such as Kyiv and Lviv, show better exam preparation, higher participation in extracurricular learning and stronger transitions to tertiary education. These regions benefit from higher concentrations of top-tier universities, active IT clusters that support digital literacy, and more robust municipal budgets that allow for investment in bomb shelters and high-speed internet in schools. In contrast, conflict-affected and economically weaker regions (such as Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, and parts of the frontline areas) face severe disruptions, lower teacher retention (with 20–30 percent of teachers relocating in some areas) and worse learning outcomes. These regions also report higher demand for remedial programmes, psychological support and digital devices. Despite the absence of standardised NUTS2 data, available evidence indicates steadily widening territorial learning gaps.

At the Ivano-Frankivsk local territorial community, educational outcomes depend on school infrastructure, teacher qualifications, household conditions and municipal support. Small rural communities struggle with limited access to advanced courses, lower availability of specialised teachers and fewer opportunities for practical or project-based learning. Students often lack exposure to modern technology and possibilities for extracurricular engagement that strengthen key competencies. Local VET providers frequently operate with outdated equipment, and practical modules have been reduced by up to 40 percent due to displacement or damage. Communities with active local authorities or NGO support sometimes show better results through targeted tutoring or digital-skills training, but such initiatives remain sporadic and unevenly distributed.

3.4.5. Adult learning

Adult learning participation in Ukraine has historically been low, and the war further reduced adults' ability to engage in upskilling or reskilling. According to national and World Bank data, only about 8–10 percent of adults in Ukraine participate in training annually, one of the lowest rates in Europe. Digital-skills demand has risen sharply, reflected in a more than 50 percent increase in registrations for Diia.Education (formerly Diia.Digital Education) — a national government platform launched by the Ministry of Digital Transformation that provides free "edutainment" style courses for digital literacy and professional reskilling. While access remains uneven, this platform has become a strong resource for informal education. Vulnerable groups such as rural residents, low-skilled workers and displaced people face the biggest barriers due to cost, limited flexibility and low local availability of programmes. The adult-learning system remains fragmented and largely dependent on donor-funded initiatives rather than permanent national structures.

Adult learning participation in Ukraine has historically been low, and the war further reduced adults' ability to engage in upskilling or reskilling. According to national and World Bank data, only about 8–10 percent of adults in Ukraine participate in training annually, one of the lowest rates in Europe. Digital-skills demand has risen sharply, reflected in a more than 50 percent increase in registrations for Diia.Education (formerly Diia.Digital Education) — a national government platform launched by the Ministry of Digital Transformation that provides free "edutainment" style courses for digital literacy and professional reskilling. While access remains uneven, this platform has become a primary resource for informal education. Regarding the 15–29 age group, which is a key target for youth-focused initiatives, participation in non-formal adult learning is notably higher than for older cohorts. Specifically, young adults (20–29 years old) represent the most active demographic in digital reskilling, often driven by the need to find flexible remote work or to replace jobs lost due to displacement. However, vulnerable groups such as rural residents, low-skilled workers, and displaced people face the biggest barriers due to cost, limited flexibility and low local availability of programmes.

Regional disparities in adult learning are substantial. Urban and economically stronger regions offer more opportunities through training centres, universities, private providers and employer-sponsored programmes. Regions with weaker economic bases lack modern training facilities, ICT infrastructure and qualified trainers. Displacement patterns influence regional demand: oblasts hosting large numbers of IDPs report increased interest in digital skills, language learning and

entrepreneurship training, sometimes by 30 percent or more, but supply remains insufficient. The absence of comparable NUTS2 statistics makes precise measurement challenging, yet qualitative evidence clearly shows territorial inequalities in access and relevance.

At the Ivano-Frankivsk LTC, adult learning opportunities depend on local institutional capacity, civil-society engagement and donor investment. Many communities do not have any adult-learning infrastructure, such as digital learning centres, modern libraries or training partnerships with employers. Adults face practical barriers including transportation difficulties, caregiving responsibilities, economic stress and limited awareness of available opportunities. Communities with active NGOs occasionally manage to provide digital-literacy or entrepreneurship courses, but such efforts are inconsistent and rarely scaled. As a result, adults in many areas have limited pathways to upgrading skills, which undermines their long-term employability and economic resilience.

3.5. Health, poverty and social exclusion

3.5.1. Health issues

Health indicators in Ukraine have experienced significant deterioration in recent years, influenced by the complex transition of the healthcare system and the devastating impact of the war. While Ukraine launched a comprehensive healthcare reform in 2017 to improve efficiency, the system faced the dual challenge of structural transformation and chronic underfunding relative to GDP (with public health spending historically hovering around 3–4%, below the WHO-recommended 5%). According to WHO and national statistical updates, the prevalence of mental-health disorders has increased by more than 30% since 2022, driven by chronic stress, displacement and trauma exposure. Access to healthcare services has become more uneven: over 1,500 medical facilities have been damaged or destroyed (as of 2024 data), significantly reducing territorial coverage of primary and specialised care. Electricity shortages and disrupted supply chains have resulted in a measurable decline in preventive services, including vaccinations and routine check-ups. Life expectancy has dropped by several years compared to pre-2020 levels, reflecting increased health system pressure and population-level vulnerability.

Regional disparities in health outcomes have widened. Western and central regions, while strained by IDP inflows, maintain comparatively stable access to health services. In contrast, eastern and southern regions show sharp declines in facility capacity, significant shortages of specialists, and increased unmet health needs. War-affected regions report markedly higher rates of psychological distress and reduced access to emergency care. Differences in maternal and child health indicators between regions have also expanded, reflecting unequal system resilience.

At the Ivano-Frankivsk LTC, access to healthcare depends heavily on local infrastructure and municipal financial capacity. Rural communities often face long travel distances, lack of specialists, and limited diagnostic equipment. Communities hosting large numbers of displaced residents report increased waiting times and reduced access to chronic disease management. Local surveys indicate rising levels of untreated mental-health symptoms and reduced participation in preventive health programmes, especially among older adults and low-income households.

3.5.2. Disability - Access to education and training

Although Ukraine has expanded inclusive education over the past decade, significant gaps remain. In the Ukrainian context, "inclusive education" primarily refers to creating an accessible learning environment for children with special educational needs (SEN), focusing on those with physical, sensory, or mental disabilities. Unlike some EU models, it less frequently explicitly categorizes students from migrant or low socio-economic backgrounds under this specific term, though recent reforms have begun to address broader diversity. According to Ministry of Education reports, the number of students receiving inclusive support increased more than threefold between 2017 and 2021, yet access remains insufficient. War-related displacement disrupted the continuity of support services: an estimated 15–20% of students who were previously enrolled in inclusive or

specialized programs lost consistent access to their established support networks, therapies, or individual assistants during the first two years of the invasion. A high proportion of mainstream schools (over 60%) still lack full physical accessibility or adapted learning materials, limiting equal educational participation.

Regional inequalities in inclusive education have intensified. Urban regions typically provide broader access to resource centres and specialist services, while rural and eastern regions report significantly lower coverage. Some western regions saw a surge of children with disabilities among IDPs, increasing demand for services by 20–40%, exceeding local capacity. Regions affected by hostilities face the most severe barriers due to damaged schools, interrupted transportation and staff shortages.

At the Ivano-Frankivsk LTC, obstacles include the absence of trained assistants, lack of accessible school infrastructure, and limited awareness of inclusive practices. In many small communities, students must travel to neighbouring cities to access specialised support, which is often financially and logistically challenging. War-related infrastructure damage further reduces availability. As a result, children with disabilities in smaller or rural communities experience disproportionately higher risks of exclusion from education.

3.5.3. Disability - Access to the labour market

Employment rates among persons with disabilities remain low. According to national labour statistics, only around 15–20% of working-age persons with disabilities are formally employed, a figure that has not significantly improved over the past decade. The war further reduced accessible employment options due to workplace destruction, relocation of enterprises, and reduced employer capacity to provide adaptations.

Access to employment varies significantly between regions. Major urban regions offer more opportunities, including social enterprises and sheltered workshops — specialized work environments where people with disabilities can work in a tailored setting with professional support, often serving as a bridge to the open labour market. In contrast, rural regions have minimal adapted workplaces. In eastern and southern regions, labour-market contraction has eliminated many of the few accessible jobs that existed. Regional employment centres report a sharp increase (up to 40–50%) in requests for professional consultations and job placement assistance from persons with disabilities. While psychological support is often a component of these visits, the primary driver is the urgent need for income and economic reintegration in a shrinking job market. However, the number of vacancies suitable for them has not increased proportionally.

Local communities often lack the infrastructure or employer base to support labour-market inclusion of persons with disabilities. Small businesses typically cannot finance workplace adaptations. Transport barriers and inaccessible public buildings further reduce employment prospects. Some communities with active NGOs demonstrate positive examples of inclusion, but these remain isolated and do not compensate for systemic gaps.

3.5.4. Risk of poverty

Poverty levels in Ukraine have risen sharply since the start of the full-scale invasion. According to the World Bank, the share of the population living below the national poverty line increased from 5% in 2020 to over 24–25% in 2022, and remains elevated due to inflation, loss of employment and rising household expenses. Vulnerability is highest among households with children, single-parent families, older adults, and internally displaced persons. Income inequality has widened, with households in war-affected regions facing the steepest declines in earnings.

Regional poverty differences have expanded significantly. Frontline and de-occupied regions show the highest poverty incidence due to destruction of infrastructure and job loss. Western regions, despite higher employment activity, experience rent inflation and increased household costs due to IDP inflows. Agricultural regions face volatility in seasonal income and reduced market access. Differences in regional social assistance capacity contribute to unequal protection across territories.

At the Ivano-Frankivsk LTC, poverty is reflected in rising utility arrears, food insecurity, reduced access to healthcare and limited ability to cover educational costs. Rural communities face higher transport and heating expenditures relative to income. Communities with shrinking labour markets experience long-term economic decline, while host communities for IDPs struggle with resource shortages. Local budgets often cannot fully support vulnerable households, deepening social exclusion.

3.5.5. Housing cost overburden rate

Housing affordability has deteriorated substantially across the country. Rent in safer regions increased by 30–70% since 2022 due to massive internal displacement, while household incomes stagnated or decreased. Utility costs continue to take up a relatively high share of household expenditure compared to pre-war levels, placing many households at risk of housing cost overburden (defined as spending more than 40% of disposable income on housing). The systematic damage to housing stock—with over 160,000 residential buildings affected between February 2022 and early 2024 (according to World Bank and RDNA3 assessments)—has drastically reduced supply and increased pressure on available accommodation, particularly in the rental sector.

Housing pressures differ widely by region. Western and central regions face the highest rent inflation, while rural regions have lower nominal costs but poorer housing quality and high energy inefficiency. Eastern regions experience severe shortages due to destroyed housing stock. Access to social housing is limited across all regions, and waiting lists have expanded significantly.

Communities face growing pressure on housing markets, especially those hosting IDPs. Many households live in temporary, overcrowded or substandard conditions. Older buildings with poor insulation contribute to high heating expenses, increasing the burden on low-income families. Municipalities often lack the financial capacity to expand social housing or provide full rental subsidies.

3.5.6. Material and social deprivation

Material and social deprivation have increased significantly across Ukraine. According to recent household surveys and World Bank assessments, the poverty rate (by consumption) rose from 5.5% in 2021 to 24.1% in 2023, while the broader material deprivation rate effectively doubled, reaching approximately 45–50% of the population. This means nearly every second household is unable to afford at least several items from the standard EU-SILC list, such as adequate heating, quality food, unexpected expenses, or essential services. This data is critical for the joint report, as it highlights a much sharper spike in vulnerability compared to other Danube Region countries. Social deprivation has also risen due to reduced mobility, limited access to cultural and recreational services, and the loss of community networks. Vulnerability is highest among displaced households, rural populations, and low-income families.

Regional inequalities are pronounced: frontline regions show the highest levels of deprivation due to infrastructure destruction and economic collapse, while western regions struggle with increased pressure on services and rising prices due to the influx of the population as a result of internal displacement. Rural regions experience chronic deprivation linked to weak infrastructure, low wages and limited service availability.

At the community level, deprivation manifests through poor housing conditions, limited access to services, reduced public transport, and fewer social participation opportunities. Small communities report increased isolation among older adults and low-income families. Reduced funding for community institutions (libraries, cultural centres) weakens social cohesion and increases exclusion.

3.6. Digital economy and society

3.6.1. Personal and household access

Household digital access in Ukraine has improved steadily over the last decade. As of late 2021 (immediately prior to the full-scale invasion), 82% of households were connected to the internet and 95% were covered by mobile broadband. However, fixed broadband penetration remains below 60%, and only around 63% of households have a computer or laptop, revealing persistent infrastructure and affordability gaps. Since 2022, connectivity stability has worsened due to energy disruptions and infrastructure damage, leading to fluctuations in broadband quality and increasing dependence on mobile data. These challenges have widened the digital divide between socio-economic groups, particularly affecting low-income and displaced households.

Regional disparities in digital access are pronounced. Urbanised regions demonstrate significantly higher broadband penetration, more providers and faster connection speeds. Western and central regions show relatively stable connectivity despite increased load due to IDP inflows, whereas eastern and southern regions face substantial deterioration because of network damage and energy shortages. Rural areas in every region continue to lag behind urban areas, with lower coverage rates and greater reliance on mobile-only access.

At the community level, digital access is strongly shaped by local infrastructure, affordability and municipal support. Small and rural communities often lack public access points and stable Wi-Fi networks. The impact of internal displacement on digital infrastructure is twofold: while western regions (like Ivano-Frankivsk) have maintained physical network integrity, the sudden population surge in specific host communities has led to "bandwidth congestion"—where the existing local hardware and frequency capacity cannot handle the doubled or tripled number of simultaneous users. This creates a paradox where a region is "stable" but specific local nodes are overloaded. Frequent blackouts further limit reliable access, reinforcing inequalities between communities.

3.6.2. Information society

Ukraine has made significant progress toward a digital information society, driven by the rapid expansion of e-government platforms. Chief among these is "Diia," a comprehensive mobile application and web portal launched by the Ministry of Digital Transformation. It serves as a "state-in-a-smartphone," allowing citizens to store digital IDs (passports, driver's licenses) and access over 100 public services online. This ecosystem enabled 46% of adults to interact with public authorities online in 2021. Digital news consumption is high (68%), reflecting strong societal integration into online information ecosystems. However, disparities persist in digital literacy and cybersecurity awareness. The war intensified exposure to misinformation and cyberthreats, requiring higher levels of digital resilience.

Regional differences reflect varying administrative capacity and digital infrastructure. In major regions, digital public services are widely used, supported by better connectivity and stronger institutional communication. In contrast, rural and frontline regions show lower uptake due to

limited internet stability, reduced access to digital devices, and weaker administrative digitalisation. Regions hosting large IDP populations experience increased pressure on digital public services, making access more uneven.

At the Ivano-Frankivsk LTC, participation in the information society is uneven. Municipal digital communication channels (websites, e-services, chatbots) are common in larger towns but sparse or outdated in smaller communities. Residents with low digital literacy or limited internet access struggle to use e-government tools and rely heavily on offline information. Community libraries and NGOs occasionally offer digital support services, but coverage varies and remains insufficient to ensure universal digital inclusion.

3.6.3. Digital economy

Ukraine's digital economy has shown strong resilience despite the war. The ICT sector contributes around 4% of GDP and maintained positive export growth in 2022, even as other sectors contracted. However, broader business digitalisation remains low: only 45% of enterprises have websites, and just 9% of SMEs sell online, indicating slow adoption of digital tools outside the IT industry. Limited access to financing, outdated equipment, and uneven digital skills constrain faster digital transformation among businesses.

The digital economy is highly geographically concentrated. Kyiv, Lviv and a few central regions host most IT companies, innovation hubs and tech talent. Peripheral and rural regions show lower business digitalisation rates and fewer opportunities for ICT employment. War-affected regions have experienced a sharp decline in digital-sector activity, with firms relocating to safer areas or suspending operations. Differences in regional infrastructure and workforce availability reinforce unequal digital economic development.

At the Ivano-Frankivsk LTC, digital economic activity is limited by local labour markets, infrastructure constraints and low access to training. Small communities often lack business support centres, tech infrastructure or co-working spaces, limiting opportunities for entrepreneurs and SMEs to digitalise. Where NGOs or donor programmes operate, digital entrepreneurship shows improvement, but these initiatives are sparse. Communities with low connectivity and limited skilled labour face the strongest barriers to participating in the digital economy.

3.6.4. Personal digital skills

Digital skills across the population remain uneven. 53% of individuals possess basic digital skills, while only 23% have above-basic skills, reflecting significant gaps in advanced ICT competencies. War-driven reliance on digital tools for education, administration and communication highlighted these deficiencies. Adults with lower education levels, older persons and rural populations are most likely to lack essential digital skills. Despite national initiatives to expand digital literacy, coverage remains limited.

Regional differences mirror digital infrastructure and educational capacity. Urban regions show higher digital skill levels due to better-equipped schools, more digital learning opportunities and stronger labour-market demand for ICT competencies. Rural and economically weaker regions lag

behind, with fewer training centres, limited school equipment and restricted access to digital training. In war-affected regions, disruptions to education and infrastructure further widened skill gaps.

At community level, digital skill development is closely linked to the availability of training facilities, school resources and public access points. Many small communities lack ICT-equipped libraries, youth centres or local training initiatives. Residents often rely on self-learning, increasing disparities between households with and without internet access or devices. Communities with active NGOs or donor-supported digital literacy programmes show better outcomes, but coverage remains inconsistent and insufficient to close the digital divide.

4. Solutions

4.1 Strategic goals

As concluded in the previous chapters, the strategic goals should directly respond to the multi-layered and war-amplified challenges identified in the Ukrainian context. These challenges include disrupted education pathways, weakened transitions from school to work, territorial disparities, digital inequality, reduced labour-market opportunities and the growing vulnerability of displaced and rural youth. The strategic goals therefore reflect not only short-term recovery needs but also long-term system strengthening.

- 1. Addressing early exclusion from education, training and career orientation**
Ukraine's youth face fragmented transitions from school to work, further aggravated by displacement, interrupted schooling and uneven access to guidance services. Early career guidance, individualised support pathways, and improved orientation mechanisms are essential to counter the rising risk of NEET status. Strengthening VET attractiveness and practical training is also critical, given the decreasing VET participation and the 30–40 percent reduction of practical modules in many institutions.
- 2. Mitigating economic barriers and unstable labour-market opportunities**
Many regions, particularly rural and war-affected ones, cannot provide stable entry-level employment or pathways for professional growth. Young people often rely on short-term, informal or unstable jobs, while displacement and infrastructure damage further limit opportunities. Internal and external migration become the default option for ambitious youth. These challenges cannot be resolved through local resources alone: financing, economic incentives and labour-market programmes are available mainly at national or NUTS2-equivalent regional levels, which creates disparities between territories.
- 3. Reducing the education-employment disconnect and supporting vulnerable learners**
The gap between acquired competencies and labour-market needs remains significant, especially given learning losses equivalent to 1–1.5 years in mathematics and reading. Institutions responsible for education, VET, employment, and social services traditionally operate in silos, creating fragmentation and weak transition mechanisms. Young people with limited personal, social or material capital—displaced youth, rural youth, youth with disabilities—face the highest risk of exclusion. This situation is intensified by digital inequality, lack of practical learning, and reduced access to psychosocial support.

As a conclusion, the aim of the strategic goals is to reduce the vulnerability of young people by strengthening early support, improving transitions from education to employment, enhancing digital and social inclusion, and supporting local institutions to provide more coherent pathways for youth. The specific intervention is presented in the next subsection.

4.2. Proposed intervention (where it's applicable)

As shown in previous chapters, the vulnerability of young people in the selected Ukrainian regions and communities is a complex, multi-dimensional problem that cannot be addressed from a single perspective. A coherent, multi-institutional and community-oriented intervention is necessary, especially given the combined effects of war-related displacement, digital barriers, learning disruptions, unstable employment opportunities and rising poverty risks.

In short, the proposed pilot intervention focuses on identifying and supporting youth who are at the highest risk of educational disengagement and labour-market exclusion. The Ukrainian intervention will take place in the Ivano-Frankivsk territorial community, located in Western Ukraine. This region serves as a major humanitarian and economic hub, having experienced a massive influx of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) since 2022. While geographically distant from the active frontlines, the community faces extreme pressure on its social and educational infrastructure, a saturated local labour market, and the challenge of integrating thousands of displaced youth into the local economy. The intervention will build a locally implementable support scheme that strengthens early career guidance, learning continuity and labour-market readiness.

The core components of the intervention include:

1. Identification and profiling of vulnerable youth
Local institutions (education departments, VET schools, employment centres, social-service providers) will identify young people with disrupted schooling, limited digital access, low educational attainment, or early signs of disengagement. This includes displaced youth and those from low-income households.
2. Strengthening individual support pathways
Based on the assessment, personalised support plans will be designed, combining academic catch-up, psychosocial support, digital access, career counselling, or referral to VET and traineeship opportunities.
3. Enhancing career guidance and transition support
Local career counsellors, youth workers and school-based staff will be engaged to provide early orientation, individual guidance sessions, job-search support and soft-skills development. This responds directly to the absence of coherent guidance services highlighted in the analysis.
4. Collaboration with local VET and employers
Where feasible, the pilot will connect identified youth with short-term traineeships, vocational modules, or employer-led workshops to improve practical skill acquisition and labour-market readiness.
5. Building local institutional capacity
The intervention will help municipalities and schools improve coordination between education, employment and social services—reducing fragmentation and strengthening referral pathways for vulnerable youth.

The proposed pilot does not aim to resolve structural problems such as regional economic underdevelopment or large-scale labour-market instability. Instead, it focuses on actions that local institutions can realistically implement. To ensure feasibility despite the ongoing war, the pilot incorporates flexible hybrid formats (combining offline and online engagement) and focuses on "resilience-based" skills. Potential challenges, such as energy blackouts or security alerts, will be mitigated through decentralized service delivery and the use of digital hubs equipped with autonomous power, ensuring that support remains accessible even during periods of instability. This practical approach provides essential support to the most vulnerable young people and creates better conditions for their transition into education, training or employment.

5. Conclusions

The analysis demonstrates that young people in the selected Ukrainian regions face a multilayered and deeply embedded set of vulnerabilities shaped by long-term structural inequalities and significantly intensified by the full-scale war. These challenges go far beyond temporary disruptions and represent a systemic exclusion that affects education continuity, labour-market integration, digital participation, and overall social and economic inclusion.

First, the labour-market situation of young people reflects a combination of chronic instability, limited job creation, and weakened transitions from school to work. High NEET levels, reduced opportunities for practical training, displacement-related disruptions, and the prevalence of informal or low-quality employment create a sustained detachment of youth from stable labour pathways. Rural youth, displaced youth, low-skilled young people and youth with disabilities remain disproportionately affected due to limited mobility, reduced access to services and lower availability of formal employment.

Second, the economic environment presents significant constraints for young people entering the labour market. Many local economies, particularly in rural or war-affected areas, are characterised by low wages, limited career progression and reduced private-sector activity. Infrastructure damage, business closures and population outflow further weaken employment prospects. As a result, internal and external migration often becomes the most rational choice for young people seeking stable opportunities. These structural factors cannot be addressed exclusively with local resources, as financial instruments and development incentives are largely available at national or regional (NUTS2-equivalent) levels.

Third, the disconnect between education and employment represents a critical barrier. Learning losses equivalent to 1–1.5 years in core subjects, high levels of school disruption, the deterioration of practical VET training and uneven access to digital resources all contribute to a mismatch between the skills young people acquire and the needs of the labour market. Fragmentation between education institutions, employment services and social-support systems means that transitions are weak and inconsistently supported. Young people with limited social, financial or informational capital are least able to navigate this fragmented environment, increasing the risk of long-term exclusion.

Overall, the situation facing youth in the selected Ukrainian regions reflects a complex interplay of structural disadvantage, war-related shocks and institutional fragmentation. While the current project does not address large-scale structural reforms or economic regeneration, the proposed pilot intervention focuses on actions that can be realistically implemented by local institutions. By identifying vulnerable youth, strengthening personalised support pathways, improving early career guidance, and enhancing coordination between education, employment and social-service providers, the pilot aims to alleviate key aspects of youth vulnerability and support more secure transitions into learning, training or employment.

The pilot intervention therefore represents a practical and locally implementable step toward reducing exclusion and improving youth outcomes, while acknowledging that sustainable, systemic change requires long-term national and regional strategies.

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