



## Article

# Models for Organising the Education of Ukrainian Children Who Have Fled the War in Lithuanian Municipalities: Psychological, Material, and Linguistic Support

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**Abstract:** This article presents the situation of the education of Ukrainian refugee children in Lithuania. It analyses the political and practical actions taken by the Lithuanian state when, after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, schools unexpectedly received a large number of children from Ukraine who had not come of their own free will, having fled the war. This article presents how Lithuanian municipalities have acted and the decisions taken to strengthen the psychological microclimate and devise a suitable model of language education. The aim of this study was to describe the experience of different regions of Lithuania in integrating Ukrainian war refugee children into educational institutions in terms of psychological, material, and linguistic support. Semi-structured group interviews (n = 12) were carried out with municipal education department staff, the staff of pedagogical qualification centres, and school managers (n = 206) who have worked on the integration of war refugee children in their municipality. The interviews were analysed using thematic content analysis. The results were divided into the following groups: (1) psychological needs of the children, (2) physical needs of the children, (3) the chosen model of Lithuanian language education, and (4) support measures for the integration of the children. The study shows that the quick but timely decisions taken in Lithuania to recruit teachers from Ukraine have helped to resolve the traumatic situations regarding the integration of children.

**Keywords:** war refugee children; models for organising education; psychological; material; linguistic support



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## 1. Introduction

In the last 10 years, there have not been many returning students in Lithuania or students coming from abroad. For this reason, the largest cities in Lithuania (Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Šiauliai) have schools specialising in the field of foreign students and have been the most frequent destination for foreign students. If the pupils went to primary classes, they were usually integrated into their peers' classrooms and had extra tutoring to learn Lithuanian. Meanwhile, older pupils (grades 5 to 10), especially if they did not learn Lithuanian at all, were taught for at least half the year in an equalisation class, with as many as 20 lessons a week for Lithuanian language teaching. Research conducted in Lithuanian educational institutions has shown that one of the main reasons for the social and cultural exclusion of pupils returning from abroad is the lack of Lithuanian language skills (Poderienė and Tamulionienė 2020). For this reason, in 2020, when there were not yet such large arrival flows, measures were taken to develop descriptions of the educational models that will make the integration of the arriving pupils easier and simpler.

Before the war in Ukraine, there were not many school-aged children arriving in Lithuania; for example, the 2021 school year started with just over 2000 returning or incoming pupils (Jakavonytė-Staškuvienė et al. 2022). The situation regarding the education of children arriving from abroad changed particularly in March–April 2022, when a large number of children from Ukraine arrived in Lithuania, fleeing the war. More than 12,000

children from Ukraine are currently enrolled in Lithuanian schools. However, this is only half of the more than 24,000 Ukrainian children in Lithuania (Šiugždiniene 2022b). This means that more than half of the pupils are not yet registered in Lithuanian schools. At the moment, all the vacancies in the major Lithuanian schools (Vilnius, Kaunas, and Klaipėda) are full (Šiugždiniene 2022b). There are also very high numbers of enrolments in the two resort towns of Palanga and Druskininkai (Šiugždiniene 2022b). Returning Lithuanian citizens and foreigners are educated according to three educational models, chosen by the school (according to the document *Bendrieji ugdymo planai 2021*; *Lietuvos Respublikos švietimo ministro įsakymas 2022*).

Model 1 is based on the educational practice already implemented in Lithuania, where a pupil, upon returning to or arriving in Lithuania, immediately starts his/her education in the classroom together with his/her peers in the official Lithuanian language (Jakavonytė-Staškuvienė et al. 2022; *Bendrieji ugdymo planai 2021*; *Lietuvos Respublikos švietimo ministro įsakymas 2022*). The arriving child is provided with a positive social environment at school, as are all other pupils. Like everyone else, the child should feel completely safe, both physically and emotionally. If a pupil does not speak the language on arrival or return, but is educated in a general education classroom, he/she is assisted by a teaching assistant. The pupil is granted a six-month adaptation period, which may be shortened or lengthened according to need, during which he or she is educated according to an individual education plan. The pupil also attends an additional Lithuanian language module (based on the child's Lithuanian language ability, which can take place two to five times a week) and is involved in non-formal education activities (Jakavonytė-Staškuvienė et al. 2022; *Bendrieji ugdymo planai 2021*; *Lietuvos Respublikos švietimo ministro įsakymas 2022*).

Model 2 is based on educational practices already implemented in Lithuania, where a pupil who returns to or arrives in Lithuania is initially educated in an equalisation class and learns Lithuanian (in this type of classroom, education takes place for at least 3 months, with 6 months to a year being recommended) (Jakavonytė-Staškuvienė et al. 2022). An individual learning plan is drawn up for the child. The pupil is placed in an equalisation class with a small number of pupils (8–12 pupils) and a class teacher and participates in the life of the general classroom in which he/she will be studying for 6 months (in-class lessons, events, actions, projects, etc.). There is an adaptation period (from 1 month to 6 months). Student volunteers are assigned to help the incoming students. The class teacher works closely with the teacher of the levelling class (Jakavonytė-Staškuvienė et al. 2022; *Bendrieji ugdymo planai 2021*; *Lietuvos Respublikos švietimo ministro įsakymas 2022*).

Model 3 is a model for a school that is friendly to multilingual students as a step towards promoting multilingualism (Jakavonytė-Staškuvienė et al. 2022). This model is usually chosen when the school's community of children comprises between 25% and 50% of the incoming pupils (Alexander 2020; Beacco et al. 2016; Edelenbos et al. 2006; UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) 2003; Bureau de l'UNESCO à Dakar et Bureau régional pour l'éducation en Afrique 2011, 2020; Karakolidis et al. 2021; Council of Europe et al. 2018; Malone 2016; Riagáin and Lüdi 2003). A language-friendly school values all languages spoken by the pupils, parents/guardians, and school staff; recognises and develops pupils' multilingualism; and takes steps to create space within the school community to develop pupils' multilingual abilities in formal and informal activities (UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) 2003; Bureau de l'UNESCO à Dakar et Bureau régional pour l'éducation en Afrique 2011, 2020). Language-friendly schools are schools that have developed a plan for language learning and use that integrates all members of the school community: pupils, teachers, staff, and parents. It is a plan that takes the individual abilities of the pupils into account and is adapted to the needs of the school community to ensure an inclusive and friendly language learning environment for all pupils (Rapport National sur l'éducation au Luxembourg 2018; Riagáin and Lüdi 2003). When the pupils' mother tongues are used at school, at least during breaks and in informal activities to learn about different cultures and traditions, students can strengthen their cognitive and social skills

and feel involved. This not only improves the pupils' ability to learn the national language of the school but also enables them to grasp the content better (Council of Europe et al. 2018; Malone 2016; Riagáin and Lüdi 2003). It also fosters the notion that all children have an equal right to education at school, with respect to cultural diversity and experience (Alexander 2020; Beacco et al. 2016; Edelenbos et al. 2006). In order to ensure that each returnee is deeply integrated into the school environment, it must be remembered that a child can only receive a good quality education if he or she has a good command of the national language in which the education is conducted, but also that he or she must not forget his or her first (mother tongue) language, as knowledge of other languages is only developed on the basis of the child's knowledge of her/his first language. Indeed, Model 3 was thoroughly considered by the politicians of the Republic of Lithuania when making decisions about the education of children from Ukraine, as conditions were created for the recruitment of teachers from Ukraine, and 5 h per week were allocated for education on the Ukrainian language, culture, and history (Šiugždinienė 2022a). Model 3, which emphasises linguistic diversity, is particularly important during the adaptation period of new arrivals. These good educational practices are used in Luxembourg schools (Rapport National sur l'éducation au Luxembourg 2018; Riagáin and Lüdi 2003). Otherwise, if the children who arrive only hear a language they do not know in their environment, they experience problems of identification, identity fluctuations due to a lack of social openness, lack of dialogicality, and language barriers (Lukočiūtė et al. 2009). These children are alienated by the behaviour of others, often experiencing feelings of inferiority and loss of self-confidence.

The abovementioned models of organising education are important because this study aimed to identify the educational model used to educate Ukrainian children who have fled the war in different municipalities in Lithuania. The aim was to investigate the implementation of the Lithuanian Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport's decree allowing the recruitment of teachers from Ukraine.

## 2. Background

### 2.1. Ukrainian Refugees in Lithuania

According to the data of *The Population of Lithuania and Its Composition (2021)*, at the beginning of 2021, there were 2,795,700 permanent residents in Lithuania. People of other nationalities made up 14.5% of those living in Lithuania, of whom 1.4% are Ukrainians. According to the *Official Statistics Portal of Lithuania (2022)*, since the beginning of the war in February 2022, a total of 68,139 refugees from Ukraine have arrived, of whom 6163 are children under the age of 6 and 18,473 are school-aged pupils up to 17 years old. The total number is constantly changing, as some families return to Ukraine or change their place of residence or move to other countries. According to the Lithuanian Minister of Social Security and Labour, Mrs. M. Navickienė (2022), 700 Ukrainian citizens have informed the Migration Department that they are already leaving Lithuania (*Iš Lietuvos atgal į Ukrainą grįžo 700 ukrainiečių 2022*).

### 2.2. Legislative and Policy Instruments for the Integration of Persons from Ukraine in Lithuanian Educational Practice

Teachers from Ukraine are employed in formal and non-formal education in Lithuanian educational institutions. An exception for teachers from Ukraine for Lithuanian language proficiency was accepted (for 2 years). The teachers' education is accredited and the conditions for learning Lithuanian are provided. In addition, 5 h per week are allocated for teachers from Ukraine to teach the Ukrainian language and history to children (Šiugždinienė 2022a). A dedicated section entitled "Informacija dėl Ukrainos pabėgėlių/Інформація для громадян України/Information for Ukrainian citizens" is provided on the website of the Lithuanian Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport. This website provides a structured overview of all the necessary information, from how to register a child for school to didactic materials on how to talk to children about the war

in Ukraine ([Ukrainiečių vaikų mokymas 2022](#)). The training contract and other important documents are translated into Ukrainian. Teachers of general education subjects, as well as vocational teachers, educators, special educators, speech and language therapists, sign language therapists, speech and language pathologists, social educators, and school psychologists who come from Ukraine received the opportunity to find employment in Lithuanian schools.

Considering the number of children of early school age coming from Ukraine, the number of children in pre-school education groups has increased: the number of children in a group may be increased by no more than two children, if necessary, to ensure the provision of pre-school and/or pre-primary education services to children who have been granted temporary protection (in accordance with [On the Approval of the Lithuanian Hygiene Standard hn 75: 2016 “General Health Safety Requirements for the Implementation of Pre-School and Pre-Primary School Education Programmes” 2022](#)). This means that each state-run pre-school institution, especially in big cities such as Vilnius, Kaunas, and Klaipėda, can accept two children from Ukraine in each group. The maximum number of children allowed in educational institutions has increased. Smaller towns and cities in Lithuania do not need to apply this procedure, as there are already empty places in educational institutions.

All children from Ukraine studying in Lithuania were provided with monthly funds for their education (in accordance with the [Lietuvos Respublikos švietimo ministro įsakymas 2022](#)). Each month, 124 EUR is allocated for the education of one pre-school child, 352 EUR for one primary school pupil, and 352 EUR for one pupil at a basic education school.

[The Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania \(2022\)](#) has granted social assistance to Ukrainians. Ukrainians who have received temporary protection are entitled to social assistance in order to reduce the social exclusion of Ukrainians fleeing the war. They can receive the child allowances (including child support money and, in the case of children in care, a guardianship allowance), a one-off resettlement allowance, and reimbursement of part of the rent for housing and other social benefits. They are also entitled to social services. A child up to the age of 18 (up to the age of 23 if an educational setting) receives a monthly allowance of 80.50 EUR. There is also a lump sum of 440 EUR for the birth of a child and 270 EUR for a pregnant woman (paid once). In addition, cash social assistance, a one-off resettlement allowance, and a partial compensation for rent are provided.

### 3. Materials and Methods

#### 3.1. Study Setting

The aim of this study was to investigate the experience and the model used of different regions of Lithuania in integrating Ukrainian war refugee children into educational institutions. The research aimed to answer the following questions:

Q1. Has psychological support been provided to children arriving from Ukraine? If yes, what kind of support?

Q2. What kind of material support was provided to pupils and their families?

Q3. What was the educational model chosen (Model 1, Model 2, or Model 3)? What were the reasons for choosing this model?

Q4. What support is provided to Ukrainian children during the education process?

The study took place in 2022 from 4 to 21 April. Representatives of Lithuanian municipalities were interviewed. The interviews took place on the Zoom platform. The survey asked how children from Ukraine are educated in each municipality. Twelve meetings were organised, involving five municipalities each. In total, 206 representatives from 57 municipalities participated. The municipal teams consisted of members of the education department, education centres' administrators, and school leaders.

Table 1 shows that representatives of school administrators, representatives of educational aid agencies, and representatives of schools took part in the survey. All of the participants in the study are decision-makers responsible for organising the education of

children from Ukraine. Hence, it was possible to collect essentially objective baseline data on the decisions taken regarding the education of children from Ukraine and the provision of psychological and material assistance to these children.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of survey participants by position in the municipality.

Study Group of Participants	Date of Interview	Representatives of the Municipal Education Department	Representatives of the Teaching Helpdesk and Education Centres	School Leaders (Principals and Deputy Principals)
1	4 April 2022	3	4	10
2	5 April 2022	2	3	7
3	6 April 2022	4	2	13
4	7 April 2022	2	4	15
5	8 April 2022	5	3	7
6	11 April 2022	4	5	13
7	12 April 2022	4	3	8
8	13 April 2022	4	3	12
9	14 April 2022	3	1	14
10	15 April 2022	2	3	8
11	20 April 2022	4	3	12
12	21 April 2022	4	3	9

### 3.2. Study Design and Instrument

As the number of children from Ukraine was increasing day by day in all Lithuanian municipalities (March–April 2022), the aim was to investigate how the response was carried out and what decisions were made first regarding the education of children. Only adults took part in the study and they willingly agreed to share their insights and experiences. They were informed that the data would be analysed anonymously, in accordance with ethical principles and the rules of personal data protection. The chosen thematic content analysis approach focused on interpretation, process, and experience. The qualitative research involved self-reflection and reflection by the research participants. The qualitative method of conducting the research was chosen because the study focused on human experiences, based on systemic and interactional frameworks (Anderson 2004; Creswell and Poth 2016; Gee 2013; Jorgensen and Phillips 2002; Žydžiūnaitė and Sabaliauskas 2017), where open-ended questions were asked, the perceived experiences and feelings of school communities when mobilising support for children from Ukraine were explored regarding what action was taken first; how, why, and what actions were taken in each municipality; and the reasons why one or another model of education for children from Ukraine was chosen (Adams 2015; Brown and Danaher 2019; Evangelinou-Yiannakis 2017). The qualitative data were recorded as part of the protocol during the interviews, where the experiences of the participants in the study were noted, describing their experience of the topic of the study (Anderson 2004).

During the interviews, the following questions were asked about the educational situation of children from Ukraine. What was the first hurdle that was taken care of when the children from Ukraine arrived? What educational model was chosen? What types of situations have been dealt with regarding the integration of the children? What were the challenges? The questions were compiled by the author (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Rationale for the research questions.

Study Question	Category	Subcategory	Background
What was the first thing that was taken care of when the children from Ukraine arrived?	Psychological support	Psychological safety Motivation of the children who arrive	Clarification of the implementation of the assistance measures approved by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania and the Ministry of Social Work for the education of war refugees from Ukraine ( <a href="#">Šiugždinienė 2022b</a> )
	Material support	Tools for learning Organisation of meals	
What educational model was chosen?	Integrated Education Model 1	Integration based on the implementation of the Ukrainian programme Integration into Lithuanian mainstream classrooms	An analysis of the educational model related to children’s language development was chosen ( <a href="#">Bendrieji ugdymo planai 2021</a> ; <a href="#">Lietuvos Respublikos švietimo ministro įsakymas 2022</a> )
	Integrated Education Model 2	Levelling class	
What situations have been dealt with regarding the integration of the children?	Helping to organise the education process	Teaching assistants and/or teachers from Ukraine recruited Lithuanian classmates volunteer	Analysis of how the needs of Ukrainian children have been taken into account in the educational process, and the types of support used in educational activities ( <a href="#">Jakavonytė-Staškuvienė et al. 2022</a> ; <a href="#">Alexander 2020</a> ; <a href="#">Beacco et al. 2016</a> ; <a href="#">Edelenbos et al. 2006</a> ; <a href="#">UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) 2003</a> ; <a href="#">Bureau de l’UNESCO à Dakar et Bureau régional pour l’éducation en Afrique 2011, 2020</a> ; <a href="#">Karakolidis et al. 2021</a> ; <a href="#">Council of Europe et al. 2018</a> ; <a href="#">Malone 2016</a> ; <a href="#">Riagáin and Lüdi 2003</a> )
		Customisable measures	

Table 2 shows that there was interest in what action was taken in the face of unexpected challenges when an unplanned large number of pupils arrived from another country. It is also important to note that the analysis looked at how quickly municipal representatives were able to make decisions on the recruitment of teachers and pupil support specialists from Ukraine. As people also arrived unprepared and under psychological strain, the survey participants were asked about what measures had been taken to help. The categories and subcategories were based on the answers given during the study.

### 3.3. Analytic Approach

The empirical data were analysed using a qualitative thematic content analysis approach (Humble and Mozelius 2022; Creswell and Poth 2016; Anderson 2004). After analysing the responses to the group interviews, data were selected that could be grouped according to certain themes that emerged from the interviews. The researcher clustered and extracted a list of common themes from the texts in order to present the commonality of the views and experiences expressed by the participants (Humble and Mozelius 2022; Creswell and Poth 2016; Anderson 2004). This qualitative research uncovered the meanings and interpretations of constructs that are difficult to analyse quantitatively. The qualitative data collected reveal the experiences, meanings, and processes, and allows for a better understanding of community mobilisation, the sequencing of decision-making and the rationale for responding quickly and qualitatively to unplanned changes in the educational situation.

The data from the interviews were processed using a discourse analysis approach (Brown and Danaher 2019; Evangelinou-Yiannakis 2017; Žydžiūnaitė and Sabaliauskas 2017; Adams 2015; Gee 2013; Jorgensen and Phillips 2002), whereby the data from the first stage were continuously reviewed to identify the details that were relevant to the study by sampling the examples provided by the participants of the study, and thus enriching the data with more and more in-depth contextual descriptions and examples of the participants' responses (Humble and Mozelius 2022; Gee 2013; Jorgensen and Phillips 2002). The discourse method was used to define the themes, content, and context of the participants' responses, touching on examples of the education of children coming from Ukraine in terms of psychological, material, and linguistic support.

## 4. Results

The number of pupils in each Lithuanian municipality has varied greatly. The lowest number was 4 or 10 children across the municipality, whereas the largest numbers were 4000, 1500, and 1000 for main cities. There are schools with low enrolment, with up to 40% of children currently enrolled from Ukraine. Three private schools for Ukrainian children have been established (two in Vilnius and one in Kaunas). One private school in Vilnius has 400 school-aged children from Ukraine and there are 30 teachers from Ukraine. There is no early childhood education at this school. The second school in Vilnius has a pre-school group with 21 children from Ukraine and 200 children from Ukraine in total. There are 30 teachers from Ukraine working in this school. The private school in Kaunas has three classes for children aged 6 and up (a pre-school group of 50 children in total from Ukraine). There are 574 children from Ukraine attending the school and there are 56 Ukrainian teachers.

### 4.1. Psychological Safety of Children

The most important aspect that was taken care of was the psychological safety of children from Ukraine, which included psychological support, emotional support, and the creation of a safe environment (see Table 3).

**Table 3.** Key psychological needs of children arriving from Ukraine.

Subcategory	Examples of Opinions
Psychological safety	Creating an emotionally and psychologically safe environment (n = 23 municipalities). Examples of answers: “We have created a calm, safe environment. Children receive psychological support and art therapy” (Group 1). “Everyone is very welcoming to each other. The Lithuanian children are very welcoming, they help, and the classes that don’t have children from Ukraine yet keep asking when they will be with them” (Groups 5 and 10).
The consequences of war	It is difficult when children are bereaved (n = 15 municipalities). Examples of answers: “One girl is in a difficult emotional state and sees a psychologist” (Group 11). “The most difficult children are those who come from a war zone. Some of the children have a difficult situation because they are going through bereavement, they have a parent who died, and they receive psychological support” (Groups 7, 9, and 10).

Analysing the data in Table 3, it can be seen that municipalities and schools in particular have been concerned about the psychological safety and emotional well-being of pupils in Lithuanian educational institutions. Indeed, this aspect is in line with the OECD report (Cerna 2019), which highlights the educational needs of displaced people, i.e., emotional needs (e.g., helping children to feel safe and to cope with separation, loss, grief and trauma, by restoring safety, self-awareness, self-control, and developing their interpersonal relationships). Children affected by war need to focus on rebuilding a sense of security, i.e., a sense of identity and justice (Yohani 2015). Based on the example of the education of Syrian war refugees, it can be argued that the likelihood of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety in refugee children increases (Rogers-Sirin and Rogers-Sirin 2015). The participants in our study mentioned that the children who arrived at the beginning were less exposed to the trauma of war, as they had not been directly exposed to it. By contrast, those who arrived later (e.g., a month later) felt more intimidated and scared, especially if they had been exposed to bombing and had lived in shelters for some time.

#### 4.2. Meeting the Physical Needs of Children

During the interviews, the study participants stressed that they had been provided with the necessary tools for learning, such as textbooks, stationery, and sportswear (see Table 4).

**Table 4.** Meeting the physical needs of children from Ukraine.

Subcategory	Examples of Opinions
Tools for learning	Schools have been provided with tablets for use in the educational process (n = 20 municipalities). Examples of responses: “Schools are equipped with tablets” (Groups 1, 4, 6, and 11). “Pupils are offered [the chance] to listen to distance learning lessons from Ukraine in the library (a separate study area near the computer)” (Groups 2, 3, 4, 6, 9, and 11). “Uniforms have been donated by parents of other pupils” (Group 4). “Printed textbooks for children. Provided backpacks and stationery. Clothes are being provided to attend PE classes” (Group 6).
Organisation of meals	Children eat free, live in a dormitory where they are fed (n = 50 municipalities).

Nationally, it has been decided that in the first half of 2022, all children arriving from Ukraine will receive free meals in Lithuanian educational institutions. In return, each municipality has allocated an additional budget for meals. Malnutrition is a major public health problem in humanitarian crises (World Health Organization 2000). People in humanitarian crises, such as refugees, are at a higher risk of malnutrition, as they often lack access to adequate healthy food, physical activity opportunities, and health services (Bahwere 2014). The forced displacement of people (especially children) due to war leads to a wide range of health inequalities, such as access to food and hence adequate nutrition (Pernitez-Agan et al. 2019). It is therefore important that good nutrition is taken care of at the national level.



#### 4.3. Selected Models of Language Education

In most Lithuanian municipalities, Model 1 was chosen, where children arriving from Ukraine are immediately integrated into Lithuanian schools and taught together with their peers in Lithuanian (see Table 5).

**Table 5.** Integrated Education Model 1 and Model 3.

Subcategory	Examples of Opinions
Integration based on implementation of the Ukrainian programme	Studying via distance learning in Ukraine and attending Lithuanian language classes and informal clubs at school (n = 30 municipalities). In general, they mostly have Lithuanian language lessons or individual consultations (different numbers of hours, from 1 to 8 h per week). In one municipality, they do not learn Lithuanian and only attend extra English classes and informal activities.
Integrated into Lithuanian mainstream classrooms	Learn with peers and have individual/small group Lithuanian language lessons or tutoring (n = 40 municipalities). Examples of answers: “Children work individually with teachers for 4 h a week to learn Lithuanian (Russian, English teachers)” (Group 1). “Integrated in classrooms, only learning Lithuanian in a mobile group” (Groups 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 12). “Not only children but also mothers come to the Lithuanian language classes (first two lessons)” (Groups 3, 5, and 6). “Additionally, the English teacher teaches Lithuanian as a foreign language to the primary school children and the Russian teacher teaches it to the senior school children” (Group 11).

It is important to note that Model 1 was adapted for pupils from Ukraine, as funds were made available for learning Ukrainian language, culture, and history. This means that the elements of learning other languages and learning about other cultures, which had only been emphasised in Model 3, prior to the arrival of Ukrainian children, began to be developed in Model 1. In addition, children can be educated remotely in the Ukrainian curriculum while attending informal activities and learning Lithuanian in Lithuanian schools.

To summarise the data in Tables 3–5, it can be stated that the practice of educating Ukrainian children in Lithuania is in line with the main provisions of the European Commission document *Supporting the Inclusion of Displaced Children from Ukraine in Education: Considerations, Key Principles and Practices for the School Year 2022–2023* (European Commission 2022) as follows.

- Provision of school places for all displaced children, regardless of the length of intended stay;
- Preparation of schools and teachers to be able to meet the psychosocial, educational, and linguistic needs of displaced children;
- Targeted activities for displaced children to encourage feelings of belonging, such as sport and cultural activities;
- Engagement with displaced families and communities and support for children to maintain their links with Ukraine;
- Long-term measures to promote inclusive education and prevent discrimination and segregation;
- Measures for early childhood education and care, such as waiving fees, extra training for staff and liaising with families.

Model 2, where children are first educated in an equalisation class and learning Lithuanian, was initially adopted in seven municipalities (see Table 6).

**Table 6.** Integrated Education Model 2.

Subcategory	Examples of Opinions
Levelling class	Equalisation classes have been set up in seven municipalities. Sample answers: “There are two such classes: one for pupils in Grades 1–5 and one for pupils in Grades 6–10” (Group 2). “We have set up a temporary class (children from 1st to 8th grade) because the parents wanted it that way, but after Easter, we will split up the classes and make a mobile group to learn Lithuanian” (Group 5 group). “Due to the lack of places and space in the schools, the municipality has created seven levelled classes for Ukrainian children only: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5/6, 7/8, and 9. They are taught everything in Ukrainian by Ukrainian teachers, have five Lithuanian lessons a week, and attend Lithuanian extended groups” (Group 11).

Table 6 shows that in a small number of Lithuanian municipalities (7 out of 60), separate classes for children from Ukraine were established in Lithuanian schools. This was chosen for objective reasons in the spring of this year, as there was simply no space in other school classrooms, and the number of children from Ukraine was very high. This model is gradually being phased out, with Ukrainian children being integrated into Lithuanian classrooms so that they can study together with Lithuanian-born children. With regard to the integration of pupils in the school of the country of arrival, the European Commission document *Supporting the Inclusion of Displaced Children from Ukraine in Education: Considerations, Key Principles and Practices for the School Year 2022–2023* (2022, p. 8) draws the research-based conclusion that an unsegregated environment allows the focus to be on the quality of the education of the newcomer, and enables children to interact more easily with their peers, experience a sense of normality, and receive appropriate support services, regardless of the intended length of stay. It will also help prepare children for any possible future changes, e.g., returning to Ukraine after a temporary period of schooling in the EU or developing long-term plans to stay in the EU, should this become necessary. This approach can be useful to ensure a balance between inclusion in the host schools and activities that maintain the child’s link with his/her mother tongue. Education on the Ukrainian language and culture is important and can complement education in the host country. In this case, the children will also feel better for another reason, i.e., they will forget the hardships of the war sooner when interacting with their peers, and if there are Ukrainian children in classrooms of unfamiliar children from different regions of Ukraine, the aspects of the war and the loss of the children’s loved ones will be heard and analysed much more often, which will make it much more difficult to ensure psychological stability and peace. This idea was developed by the participants of the Groups 1 and 8 study, who argued why they did not agree to create separate classes only for children from Ukraine.

#### 4.4. Educational Support to Improve the Integration of children from Ukraine

The study looked at how municipalities deal with the issue of integration of children from Ukraine during the education process, i.e., who helps these children and how the necessary assistance is provided (see Table 7).

It should be emphasised that the recruitment of teachers and teaching assistants in many schools in Lithuania in the spring of this year is in line with the recommendations of the European Commission’s document *Supporting the Inclusion of Displaced Children from Ukraine in Education: Considerations, Key Principles and Practices for the School Year 2022–2023* (European Commission 2022, p. 10), i.e., by recruiting additional teaching and support staff, including staff with Ukrainian and/or Russian language skills (teachers, teaching assistants, interpreters from the Ukrainian community, etc.), to “supp’rt the inclusion of displaced children. Emergency legislation has played an important role in Lithuania by removing barriers to the recruitment of Ukrainian teachers and providing short-term access to EU education systems. For example, during the transitional period, language requirements in the host country are waived, and schools are given flexibility to assess the teachers’ competence to teach specific subjects. Lithuania allows the employment of Ukrainian nationals who have obtained a professional teaching qualification in Ukraine as teaching assistants in schools where displaced children from Ukraine are studying. Some exceptions

for Ukrainian teachers also apply in Germany (Saxony), Romania, Austria, Ireland, and the Czech Republic (European Commission 2022, pp. 10–11).

**Table 7.** Help in organising the education process.

Subcategory	Examples of Opinions
Teaching assistants and/or teachers from Ukraine recruited	Ukrainian women working as teaching assistants and teachers (n = 20 municipalities). Examples of answers: “Two Ukrainian women are employed as teaching assistants” (Group 3). “Ukrainian women are also employed in the pedagogical psychological service” (Groups 1, 2, 4, and 6). “Twenty-one persons from Ukraine have been employed in schools in various positions” (Group 10). “Seven Ukrainian teachers and three teaching assistants have been employed” (Group 11).
Lithuanian classmates volunteer	Russian-speaking pupils help and volunteer (n = 10 municipalities). “There are Lithuanian children who volunteer to translate into Russian during lessons if help is needed” (Groups 3, 5, 6, and 10). “There are children who volunteer to take care of children from Ukraine” (Group 7, 8, 9, and 11).
A third language learning model is applied, as children also learn Ukrainian at school	Facilities for learning Ukrainian (n = 40 municipalities). Examples of answers: “The children are learning Ukrainian, thanks to the hiring of a Ukrainian teacher” (Groups 3, 5, 6, 10, and 11). “Ukrainian language is taught by children’s mothers” (Groups 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, and 12). “The educational process is organised in Ukrainian, with 6 h of Lithuanian language learning (Group 11).

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

This study was an exploratory one, showing the measures taken by the Lithuanian state in response to the large number of war refugees from Ukraine. The war in Ukraine has shown that Lithuanian education policymakers and school representatives can work together and make quick decisions. It is important to mention the mobilisation of the school communities and the creation of a safe environment for the children arriving from Ukraine. The psychological safety of pupils was the first aspect to be taken care of by the majority of participants. The findings of other studies (Schwartz et al. 2022; Gudovitch et al. 2021; Keymeulen et al. 2020) are similar to ours, highlighting one means of psychological support for war refugee children, which is talking to these children, encouraging them to speak out, and listening to their experiences. In this study, similar to the study by Gudovitch et al. (2021), the peers of the country that hosted children fleeing war tend to be well-meaning, supportive children.

Note that only half of the children arriving in Lithuania are studying in Lithuania, and there are no data on where the other half are. It should be noted that the investigation was carried out in April 2022, at a time when the process of refugee arrivals to Lithuania was still underway. Some of the arrivals thought that they were coming for a very short period of time, and for this reason chose only distance learning from Ukraine and did not register in Lithuanian educational institutions. It is also important to note that children from Ukraine were already enrolled in all municipalities in April, and this situation shows that Lithuania has made decisions very quickly on how to educate the new arrivals in schools. As a result, the issue of psychological safety has not been fully resolved, especially for all the children who have entered the country. UNICEF (2022) data also show that many of the children who came from Ukraine are not yet enrolled in national education systems. On 31 July 2022, an estimated 650,000 Ukrainian children living as refugees in 12 host countries were still not enrolled in the national education systems (UNICEF 2022).

In terms of material support, this was mostly in the form of school supplies, computers, and tablets. It is also important to mention that the Lithuanian state provides free meals to all children from Ukraine who are enrolled in schools. Other researchers (Schwartz et al. 2022) have also emphasised the use of physical and other necessary assistance according to each person’s needs.

As far as language education models are concerned, it can be noted that Model 1 is the most common in municipalities, where children are integrated into mainstream classrooms

with their peers. In addition, an adapted version of Model 3 is often used, as Ukrainian teachers are recruited to teach children Ukrainian language and history. This possibility has led to a change in the Lithuanian education law, which allows the recruitment of Ukrainian teachers for a 2-year period without the need to speak Lithuanian. This is important for Ukrainian children, because they can feel that they have people close to them who can understand and sympathise with them better. In this way, both adults who come to Lithuania and children can adopt Lithuanian culture. It is also important to mention that teachers from Ukraine often learn Lithuanian together with the children. Other researchers also share this view (Gudovitch et al. 2021).

There has been discussion on the teaching of the Lithuanian language if children from Ukraine attend national minority schools in Russian or Polish. For example, it would be much better to teach Ukrainian children Lithuanian with a Lithuanian teacher than to teach Ukrainian children Russian (with a teacher of Russian origin) in wartime Lithuania. Indeed, a culturally close person is very important in language learning (Chomentowski 2014; Chomentowski and Gohard-Radenkovic 2014; Gohard-Radenkovic 2014; Gohard-Radenkovic and Radenkovic 2014; Auger et al. 2012; Guide pour l'élaboration des politiques linguistiques éducatives en Europe. De la diversité des langues à l'éducation plurilingue 2007). The reason why I have mentioned this aspect as a matter for future research is that a study conducted in Lithuania showed that there have been cases when children from Ukraine have refused to learn Russian as a foreign language. For example: "The children are in Lithuanian school and willingly attend all classes, but some children and their families refuse to learn Russian" (Group 11). "In one of Lithuania's largest cities, 600 children attend Russian schools, only 100 children from Ukraine attend Lithuanian schools, and 50 children attend private schools" (Group 7). This is a situation that requires a separate study, as most of the children (due to the lack of space in Lithuanian state schools) have been directed to schools where the main language is Russian. As mentioned by the participants of the study, some parents and children do not want to learn in Russian and are looking for ways to change the education institution. The Russian language has been positively accepted when the educational process is carried out in Lithuanian and, if necessary, the information is clarified to the pupils in Russian (if the child has mastered this language).

The study showed that Lithuanian classmates as volunteers and Ukrainian teachers help the children when there are problems. This is an example of social capital, i.e., community networks and peers that provide social support and resources in times of need. Children's peers tended to be a great source of support for them (Gudovitch et al. 2021). This mobilisation of the education community, its rapid response and the resolution of various issues are relevant when changes are needed in educational practice. Importantly, the municipal representatives who participated in the study largely echoed Fullan (2019), who stated that today's school leaders should be experts in understanding context. In recent times, working in a school brings a new context practically every week. From the perspective of change, there is nothing more complex to tackle than our current situation, and there is no sign that conditions will improve (Fullan 2019, 2020). It is clear that education needs to become an essential element in solutions and change, as it is a factor in both individual and social development that responds quickly to life changes.

## 6. Research Limitations

Lithuania has specific data on the number of school-aged children from Ukraine who have fled the war and to which municipality. It also knows, from the register of pupils, exactly how many Ukrainian pupils are being educated in which municipality, according to different age groups. These data provide an indication of the number of persons who have not yet arrived at educational establishments. There is a general overlap between the reports from the policy level and the insights of researchers on the education of Ukrainian children in Lithuania. However, some of the children from Ukraine are still not being educated in Lithuanian educational institutions, and municipal representatives

are working hard to ensure that Ukrainians who have arrived register at and attend schools in Lithuania.

The data presented in this article are relevant when an education system faces unplanned challenges. It provides many answers as to what and how education policymakers and practitioners can work together to integrate people who have arrived in another country due to particularly adverse circumstances such as war as quickly and efficiently as possible.

The educational situation of refugees from the war will be further analysed through qualitative research with teachers and pupils from Ukraine. Such research will allow for an even deeper exploration of the learning situation and emotional state of the arriving pupils, as well as to find out how the teachers are adapting to the Lithuanian educational practices.

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**Informed Consent Statement:** In the case of this study, written informed consent was not necessary, since the group interviews with study participants was conducted remotely without identifying the data of the study participants and their institutions; moreover, respondents from sensitive groups did not directly participate in the study.

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