

**PERCEPTIONS OF INCLUSION, WELL-BEING, AND
IDENTIFICATION WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION AMONG
UKRAINIAN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

**EU Strategies for Psychological
Well-being and the EU Mental
Health Strategy in Ukraine**



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On February 24, 2022, the Russian Federation invaded Ukrainian territory, creating a crisis in migration, economic, psychological, educational, and human terms. Europe activated, for the first time, Directive 2001/55/EC of the European Council in response to the refugee crisis caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Currently, according to estimates from the European Commission updated to November 2023, there are 4.2 million refugees from Ukraine in the EU (IT = 161,500; HR = 22,900; RO = 144,295). Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, on June 17, 2022, the Commission expressed a positive opinion on the granting of candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova, and six days later, the European Council granted official candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova for accession to the European Union. According to an ongoing survey conducted by the European University Association (EUA) exactly two years after the start of the war (February 24, 2024) in 41 European countries and with over 300 responses, approximately 80% of universities offer some form of support to Ukrainian students.

However, the support modalities vary significantly across participating countries, including language support, housing assistance, educational support, etc. In addition to the educational crisis, there is a greater risk for refugee students related to the effects of the war on mental health. According to the UNHCR (2023) and the diagnostic classification of the PHQ questionnaire, 42% of Ukrainian refugees suffer from moderate symptoms of depression. However, the methods for evaluating the effectiveness of inclusion measures for Ukrainian students and issues related to the promotion of European values and identity remain largely unexplored.



Analysis of social factors and obstacles for the accessibility to quality psychological support (ie social stigma)

Linguistic barriers

UkraStud wanted to face several barriers to psychological support.

Accessibility to quality psychological support

Adoption of methodologies and techniques that requires limited verbal interactions

The Communication is a starting point for a new approach. A comprehensive, prevention-oriented and multi-stakeholder approach to mental health has been developed after extensive consultation with Member States, stakeholders and citizens. The new approach recognises that mental health strongly involves many policy areas, such as employment, education, research, digitalisation, urban planning, culture, environment and climate. This cross-sectoral approach aims to put physical health on par with mental health.

Protecting children's online safety

In just 15 years, across the EU children aged 9 to 15 more than doubled the time they spend on screens and social media. The European Commission is therefore conducting an EU-wide inquiry on the broader impacts of social media on well-being. This complements other EU actions to protect children in the digital world, including a prototype for an age-verification method designed to work across the EU. Five Member States – France, Spain, Greece, Denmark, and Italy – are currently testing the pilot. A panel of experts will also advise on the best approach to empower parents and build a safer Europe for our children, including on social media age restrictions for Europe. The Digital Services Act requires online platforms to ensure their services are safe for the physical and mental wellbeing of their users, including children. The Commission published a set of guidelines providing guidance on how platforms can protect minors online, that are now available in all EU languages.

Mental health situation in Europe

The 2023 edition of the Country Health Profiles report prepared in the context of the State of Health in the EU by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies (Observatory), introduced a snapshot of the mental health situation in all EU Member States, Norway and Iceland.

Worries, anxieties and feelings of depression caused by the devastating effects of the pandemic, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, climate change and loss of biodiversity, unemployment and rising living costs, the pressures of the digital sphere and social media, all have exacerbated the already poor levels of mental health, especially for children and young people. There is an unequal distribution of mental health problems between population groups, with depression being more prevalent among women and in population groups with lower income and education levels. The need for action was emphasised in a recent Eurobarometer survey on mental health (October 2023). The survey showed that 46% of Europeans experienced an emotional or psychosocial problem, such as feeling depressed or anxious, in the past twelve months. One out of every two individuals dealing with a mental health issue did not seek assistance from a professional. Already before the COVID-19 pandemic, 1 in 6 people in the EU suffered from mental health issues, at a cost of 4% of GDP.

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