TO SCHOOL IN THE NETHERLANDS, A FUTURE UNKNOWN

MONITORING STUDY ON THE EDUCATION OF UKRANIAN STUDENTS IN DUTCH PRIMARY AND SECONDEARY EDUCATION

ENGLISH SUMMARY

seo • economisch onderzoek

SARDES

PHAROS



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Summary

In recent years, due to the ongoing war, the education sector has had to accommodate a large number of Ukrainian children and young people. To support schools and school boards in this task, the Temporary Education Act for the Mass Influx of Displaced Persons (hereafter: TOV Act) was introduced. This made it possible to establish a temporary educational provision (tov), where Ukrainian children and young people could receive education with certain adjustments.

SEO Economisch Onderzoek and Sardes/CAOP, in cooperation with Pharos and Prof. Dr. Pieter Huisman, have studied the situation of Ukrainian children and young people in education in general, and the tovs in particular. This report is the final part of a trilogy and combines the third round of data collection from the monitor with an evaluation of the TOV Act. The research used education registrations from DUO and CBS Microdata, conducted surveys among school boards, municipalities, and Ukrainian parents, carried out case studies and focus groups, consulted experts, and studied relevant documents such as legislation and phase-out plans for the tovs. The main research question addressed is: To what extent has the Act ensured accessibility and quality of education for Ukrainian students?

The report (in Dutch) discusses numerous findings across different themes. This summary highlights the main results and conclusions. The research also makes several recommendations, which can be found at the end of each chapter (in Dutch).

Findings of the TOV Act Evaluation

The TOV Act enabled the establishment of tovs: educational facilities where Ukrainian students could attend when placement in other education provisions for newcomers was not possible. The requirements for tovs were less strict than those normally applied to education for newcomers. Part of the curriculum at tovs could be offered in another language of instruction (such as Ukrainian) if this contributed to education quality. This made the tovs unique in the Dutch education system (normally, education in another language is only provided at non-publicly funded schools under the supervision of a foreign authority or an international accreditation body). The target group (Ukrainian displaced persons) was also unique in its size, residence status, and the relatively high-quality education previously received in the country of origin.

The research examined whether tovs contributed to the accessibility and quality of education. These two aspects are interdependent: ensuring accessibility requires concessions in quality. The tovs undeniably created additional education places. Supplementary funding for student transport and housing contributed as well. Some tovs even transitioned into regular educational provisions for newcomers. However, there were major differences in implementation and quality among tovs, despite guidelines issued by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW). Differences were evident in the curriculum, the use of Ukrainian or unqualified staff, the handling of online education, and the number of Dutch language instruction hours. Existing structures for newcomer education were helpful but not available everywhere. Access to further education (vocational and higher education) was not covered by the Act, but bottlenecks were nevertheless reported.

Furthermore, the Act showed a duality in objectives, as concluded in the first monitor report (Van der Ven et al., 2024a). On the one hand, the Act allowed deviations from other education legislation to make Dutch education accessible with quality safeguards; on the other hand, it permitted deviations to facilitate pursuit of a Ukrainian diploma. Ukrainian staff, teaching in Ukrainian, and distance learning opportunities positively contributed to Ukrainian diploma prospects. At the same time, education at most tovs likely reduced chances of earning a Dutch

diploma compared to regular newcomer schools without an adapted program. Main reasons cited include less attention to Dutch language learning and the use of unqualified or inexperienced staff. Tovs kept open the possibility of both Dutch and Ukrainian diplomas, but support for Dutch education pathways was generally weaker. It is important to note that tovs varied significantly in the extent to which Ukrainian education was offered, and that following both Dutch and Ukrainian education posed a heavy burden for many Ukrainian students. Moreover, the share of Ukrainian students attending a tov was relatively limited. In October 2023, about 11% in primary education and 22% in secondary education attended a tov. Most students were placed in language classes, ISKs, or regular education.

Key Recommendations from the Evaluation of the TOV Act

(More extensive recommendations are included in the final chapter (in Dutch).)

- The duality in the Act's objectives should be resolved. Provide schools with clarity: is the goal to ensure appropriate education in the Netherlands or to facilitate return?
- A crucial aspect of newcomer provisions such as tovs is effective instructional time in Dutch. More accessible knowledge and tools are needed for schools and professionals to create language-rich environments and to monitor children's (language) development.
- Ensure clear national registration of temporary provisions to enable proper monitoring of students' educational trajectories.
- In cooperation with the Inspectorate, establish oversight mechanisms to safeguard quality in temporary provisions, especially when deviations are allowed in instructional time, the use of unqualified staff, and instruction in other languages.

Results of the monitoring study

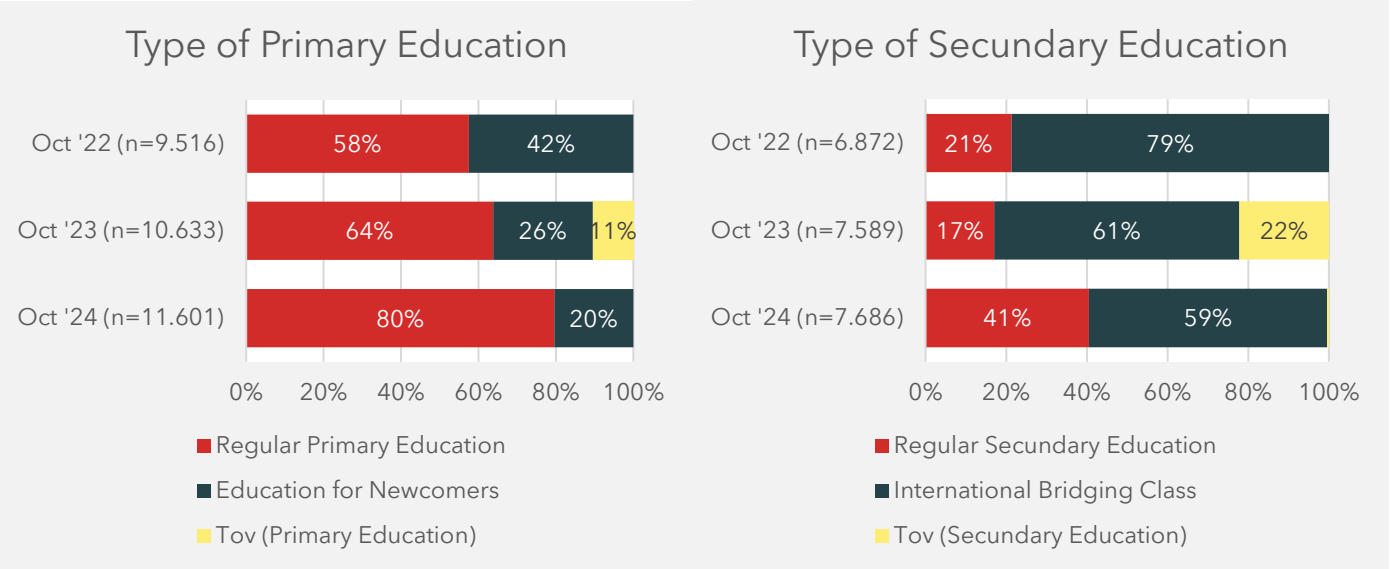
Conclusions regarding the social position and well-being of Ukrainian students

By the end of 2024, the group of Ukrainian children (aged 4–17) in the Netherlands stabilizes at around 25,000 children. Relocations are becoming less frequent, though schools still occasionally face new arrivals. The temporary displaced status, the living conditions of (often broken) families in concentrated reception facilities for Ukrainians, and the cultural differences (including school culture) compared to the Netherlands pose new challenges for schools, which they are not always equipped to address. The lack of clarity about the future prompts some Ukrainian parents to enroll their children in Ukrainian (online) education to keep the option of a Ukrainian diploma open.

Conclusions regarding educational participation and educational position

Many Ukrainian students have transitioned from tovs and newcomer education to regular schools. By October 2024, 80% of Ukrainian students in primary education attend a regular Dutch primary school. In secondary education, 41% attend a regular secondary school without an international bridging class (ISK) at that time. However, insufficient proficiency in Dutch often remains a barrier to following education at a level that matches their cognitive abilities and prior knowledge and skills acquired in Ukrainian education. This can be frustrating and demotivating for students.

Figure S.1 More students in primary education attend regular schooling than in secondary education



Source: CBS Microdata, edited by SEO (2025)

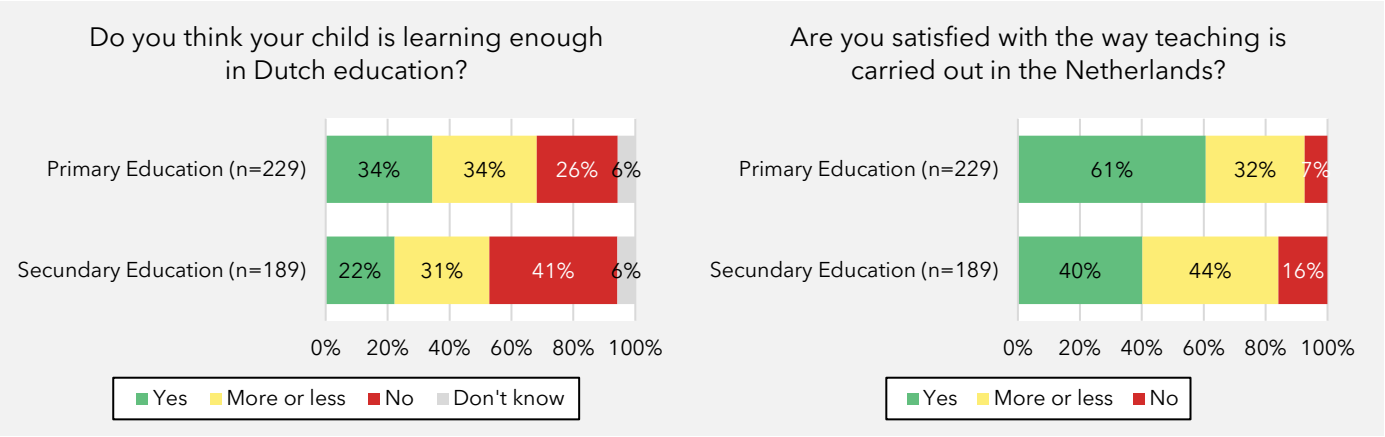
Between 30% and 53% of students leaving secondary education in the 2023/2024 school year enrolled in a vocational (mbo) or higher education (hbo and wo) program in the Netherlands in the following year. Yet, Ukrainian students face significant barriers in accessing vocational and higher education. They are not eligible for student financing or a student travel product, must pay high institutional tuition fees in higher education, and sometimes face unmet language requirements. Consequently, vocational and especially higher education are perceived as largely inaccessible.

Ukrainian refugees are not subject to the civic integration obligation. This poses risks, as 50–60% of secondary school leavers do not pursue further education. Secondary school diplomas are rare so far. Some of these students work (44%), but a larger proportion do not (56%). Respondents express concerns about social isolation, exploitation, and homelessness.

Conclusions regarding parents' perspectives

Ukrainian parents are critical of the low level of subjects, especially in secondary education. The school culture in Ukraine differs from that in the Netherlands, which also drives parental criticism. At the same time, Ukrainian parents do recognize the value of a Dutch diploma. There is a strong demand among parents for information about what happens in schools and what future opportunities the Dutch education system offers their children.

Figure S.2 Parents are critical of education in the Netherlands



Source: Survey among Ukrainian parents

Conclusions regarding absenteeism

Absenteeism and early school leaving are common among Ukrainian students. Although absolute absenteeism has decreased, the situation is better in primary education (from 17% not enrolled in October 2022 to 6% not enrolled two years later) than in secondary education (from 23% to 16%). Regarding authorized and unauthorized absenteeism, many respondents report a decline, although quantitative data on this subject is lacking. It is very likely that absenteeism among Ukrainian students is higher than currently visible. Reasons for the higher absenteeism include cultural differences, visits to the home country, and limited motivation to pursue a Dutch diploma.

Municipalities and schools have managed to reduce initially high absenteeism among Ukrainian students by strengthening information provision, fostering collaboration between reception centers and schools, bridging cultural differences, and aligning local absenteeism policies. Increased orientation of Ukrainian parents and children towards Dutch society has also had a positive effect. However, the absence of a clear national perspective on either return or civic integration is seen as an obstacle. Potential solutions include digital education, sufficient school places, and removing barriers to access further education.

The situation of students aged 15 and older is particularly concerning. Opportunities to reach and support these young people are limited. Education is no longer compulsory in the Netherlands form the age of 18, student financing is not structurally available, and there is no civic integration requirement. Large numbers of adolescents and young adults are neither working nor enrolled in education, leaving them falling through the cracks.

FOR FULL REPORT (IN DUTCH), SEE: *Van der Ven et al. (2025). Naar school in Nederland, de toekomst ongewis. SEO-rapport nr. 2025-124. Amsterdam: SEO Economisch Onderzoek*