UPLIFT

Final Evaluation Report 2023

by

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Summary

Executive Summary – Evaluation UPLIFT programme 2023

The UPLIFT programme was evaluated using a mixed qualitative-quantitative approach to measure its effectiveness and impact on Ukrainian refugee youth and host country youth. The data presented come from an analysis of questionnaires directed to youth participants in the programme and from focus groups organized with teachers/tutors/operators involved in the activities as supervisors. Overall, the UPLIFT programme effectively improves life skills, entrepreneurial skills, and future orientation in young people, particularly Ukrainian refugees. It facilitates inclusion and empowers refugees, but improvements in flexibility, context adaptation, and pre-program preparation are recommended.

Quantitative findings:

- Life skills: high levels of LifeComp skills in participants (>90%), with Ukrainian refugees showing similar results as locals. Average score for LifeComp index is 3,9 and 3,7 out of 5 for locals and ukrainians.
- Entrepreneurial skills: positive average ratings in EntreComp, particularly teamwork and initiative. Like LifeComp, refugees improved with participation. Average score for EntreComp index is 3,8 and 3,6 out of 5 for locals and ukrainians.
- Future orientation: positive outlook for the future (44% aiming for high confidence and career goals). Refugees showed lower confidence but similar aspirations.
- Inclusion: refugees felt welcomed (average inclusion index 3.7 out of 5), with higher activity participation leading to stronger inclusion.

Qualitative findings:

- Context: the program's reach and effectiveness varied across countries due to specific contexts.
- Participation: high interest and involvement, especially from local students. Initial skepticism was overcome with program engagement.
- Activities: participation in the activities helped youth to improve team working, communication, and presentation skills.
- Impact on refugees: Provided a sense of purpose, empowered refugees, facilitated social integration, and offered new skills (entrepreneurship).
- Strengths: Inspiring content, entrepreneurship introduction, exchange opportunities.
- Weaknesses: Limited time, insufficient pre-program preparation, lack of context adaptation.

Suggestions:

- Increase flexibility.
- Improve pre-program training.
- Introduce regional adaptation.
- Provide financial support for promising projects.

1. UPLIFT programme

1.1 Context

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which began on February 24st, 2022, claimed civilian victims and destroyed the country's infrastructure, leading to an immediate exodus to neighbouring countries As the conflict escalated, many found themselves forced to leave their homes, families, and jobs to seek safety, security, and assistance abroad. In March 2022, in response to the crisis and emergency, The European Union implemented the mechanism outlined in the temporary protection directive, an EU emergency regime that is used in exceptional circumstances of massive influx of people. European countries welcomed refugees promptly by arranging temporary housing and activating medical care and psychological support services. According to Eurostat, on October 31st, 2023, more than 4.2 million non-EU citizens from Ukraine benefited from EU temporary protection, which provides the following rights: residence permit, access to the labour market and housing, medical care, and access to education for children equaled to the population of each European Union country. The highest number of total temporary protection beneficiaries per thousand people at the end of October 2023 was observed in the Czech Republic (33.7), Estonia (26.3), Poland and Bulgaria (both 26.1), and Lithuania (25.8), while the corresponding figure at EU level was 9.5 per thousand people. As of October 31st, 2023, Ukrainian citizens accounted for more than 98% of the beneficiaries of temporary protection. Adult women made up nearly half (46.4 percent) of temporary protection beneficiaries in the EU, children accounted for nearly one-third (33.4 percent), while adult men comprised just over one-fifth (20.2 percent) of the total. Referring to the countries where the UPLIFT programme has been implemented, according to Eurostat data on the presence of Ukrainian beneficiaries of temporary protection, there are 111.615 people in Slovakia, 960.620 in Poland, 364.450 in the Czech Republic, 142.340 in Romania, 168.300 in Bulgaria, 33.325 in Hungary, 43.330 in Latvia, 73.715 in Lithuania, 35.855 in Estonia, and 112.811 in Moldova (UNHCR source as of December 3st, 2023) and 4.130 in Serbia (UNHCR source as of November 30st , 2023). The situation presents extreme fragility and uncertainty and mainly involves children, adolescents, and young adults. When they arrive in the host countries, they often face significant challenges: many of them suffer from physical and mental health problems due to the violence and discomfort experienced. The health emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict crisis in Ukraine have brought a new set of social and economic challenges facing children and youth to the European scenario. The UPLIFT programme aimed to improve the employability of refugee and host-country young adults and adolescents, as well as increase their civic involvement within communities The mission of UNICEF and Junior Achievement (JA), through the implementation of the UPLIFT programme, has been to engage young people and help them develop the skills and mindset needed to improve their self-confidence as well as resilience by supporting them in planning and building a promising future filled with greater opportunities. The partnership between JA and UNICEF has also

set out to support the capacity of the youngest population to cope with the complexity of the contemporary situation and the rapid changes occurring in the global, political, and economic context, intending to strengthen resilience and their skills.

The evaluation model adopted for the UPLIFT programme took into account two main frameworks:

- The European framework for personal, social, and learning to learn key competencies, **"LifeComp"**.
- The European framework for entrepreneurial skills, **"EntreComp"**.

1.2 LifeComp

The LifeComp framework focuses on the skills needed to effectively deal with the changes and challenges that occur in a person's life, both personally and professionally. In an ever-changing world, this framework identifies specific capabilities that foster adaptability, resilience, and recovery from difficulties, enabling people to better handle complex situations and face challenges successfully. The goal of the LifeComp conceptual framework is to establish a shared understanding and common language on "Personal, Social, and Learning to Learn" competencies. LifeComp is divided into 3 areas: "Personal space", "Social", and "Learning to learn"; each area is divided into three skills (See Fig. 1), which correspond to the "awareness, understanding, action" model.

The first area, **Personal Space**, includes:

- Self-regulation (Awareness and management of emotions, thoughts, and behaviours),
- Flexibility (Ability to manage transitions and uncertainty and to face challenges),
- Wellness (Seeking life satisfaction, and caring for physical, mental, and social health and adoption of a sustainable lifestyle).

The second area, **Social**, includes:

- Empathy (Understanding the emotions, experiences, and values of another person and knowing how to give appropriate responses),
- Communication (Use of relevant communication strategies, codes, and specific tools depending on the context and content),
- Collaboration (Engagement in group activities and teamwork in which they recognize and respect others).

Finally, the third area, **Learning to Learn,** includes the following skills:

- Growth mindset (Believing in one's own and others' potential to continuously learn and progress),

- Critical thinking (Ability to evaluate information and arguments to support reasoned conclusions and develop innovative solutions),
- Learning management (Planning, organizing, monitoring, and reviewing one's learning).

LifeComp considers "Personal, Social and Learning" competencies as skills that apply to all spheres of life and can be acquired through education and training at every level. As a rule, the definition of 'competence' includes knowledge, skills, and attitudes. However, a holistic perspective, which includes the interdependence between elements of the framework such as a complex ecosystem, may be more effective.
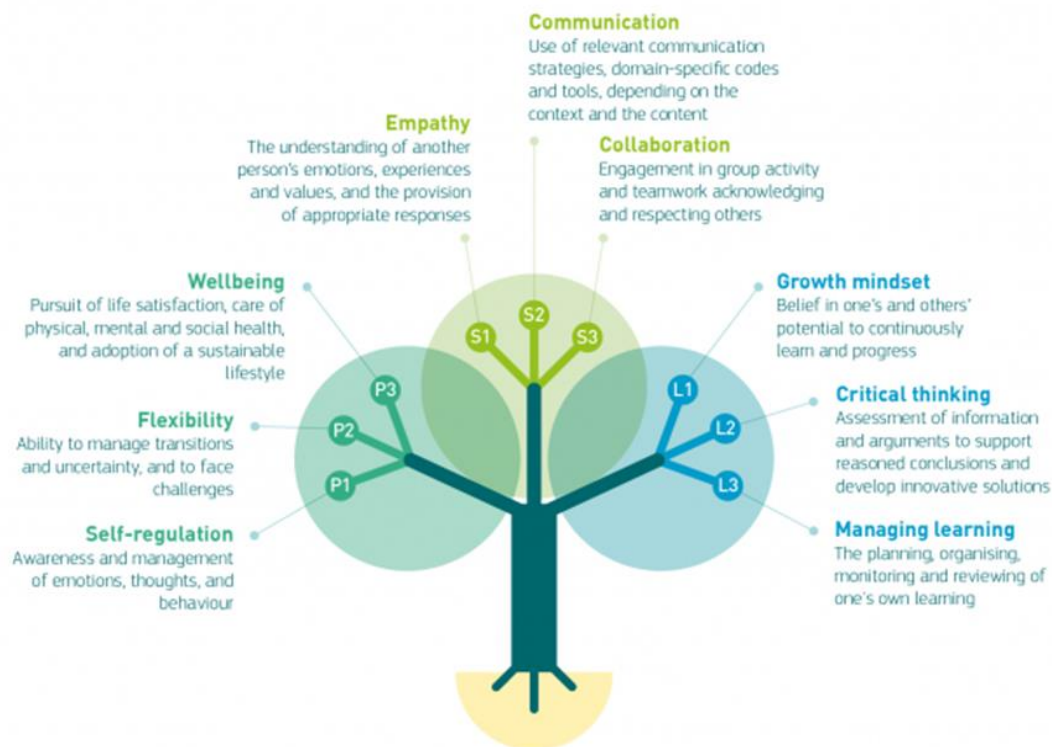
Fig. 1 LifeComp conceptual framework

1.3 EntreComp (Entrepreneurship Competences)

The EntreComp is a framework designed to understand the definition of entrepreneurship as a key competency for lifelong learning and to be used in one's work. The EntreComp is divided into three main areas: "Ideas and Opportunities," "Resources," and "In Action." Each of these areas is further divided into five competencies, for a total of 15 competencies, distributed over 8 levels (See Fig. 2).

EntreComp's first area, **Ideas and opportunities,** can be summarized in the following competencies:

- **Recognize opportunities.** Use imagination and skills to identify opportunities and generate value by analysing the social, cultural, and economic context. Recognize the needs and issues to be addressed. Create new connections.
- **Creativity.** Thinking originally and proactively, testing new models and approaches. Combine skills and resources to improve quality of life.
- **Vision, imagine the future.** Create a perspective to translate ideas into reality. Visualize future scenarios to help guide effort and action.
- **Giving value to ideas.** Judge what value is in social, cultural, and economic terms. Be able to evaluate the value that an idea can bring and identify the most effective tools to maximize its results.
- **Ethical and sustainable thinking.** Evaluate the consequences of ideas that can bring value and the effect that entrepreneurial actions have on the target community, the market, society, and the environment. Reflect on how sustainable the social, cultural, and economic objectives, together with the choice of the course of action, are in the long term. Act responsibly.

The second area**, Resources,** is divided into:

- **Self-awareness and self-efficacy.** Reflect on your own needs, aspirations, and desires in identifying and assessing your individual and group strengths and weaknesses. Believe in your ability to influence the course of events, despite uncertainty, setbacks, and temporary failures that you may encounter along the way.
- **Motivation and perseverance.** Be determined to turn ideas into action and satisfy your need to achieve. Be persistent and keep trying to achieve your goals. Be resilient under pressure, adversity, and temporary failure.
- **Mobilizing resources.** Get and manage the material, non-material, and digital resources needed to turn ideas into action, making the best use of resources. Obtain and manage the necessary skills at any time (technical, legal, tax and digital).
- **Economic and financial knowledge.** Estimate the cost required to turn an idea into a value-creating business. Plan, implement, and evaluate financial decisions over time. Make strategic decisions to ensure that the value-producing business can last in the long run.
- **Mobilize others, inspire and enthuse.** Getting the support needed to achieve valuable outcomes demonstrates effective communication, persuasion, negotiation, and leadership skills.

The third area, **In Action**, is, instead, the one that concerns concrete commitment:

- **Taking initiative.** Initiate actions that generate benefits, address challenges that arise, act autonomously to achieve goals, maintain consistency with intentions, and complete necessary tasks.

- **Planing and management.** Set long-, medium-, and short-term goals. Define priorities and action plans to adapt to unexpected changes.
- **Coping with uncertainty, ambiguity, and risk.** Make decisions when the result of that decision is uncertain, when the information available is partial or ambiguous, or when there is a risk of unintended outcomes. Use structured approaches, such as experimenting with ideas and prototypes from the earliest stages, to reduce the risks of failure and make more informed decisions. Be able to adapt quickly to changes and change strategies or actions accordingly.
- **Working with Others**. Work together and co-operate with others to develop ideas and turn them into action. Online and networking. Resolve conflicts and deal with competition positively.
- **Learning from experience.** Use any value-creation initiative as a learning and growth opportunity. Learning with others and from others. Reflect and learn from both success and failure.
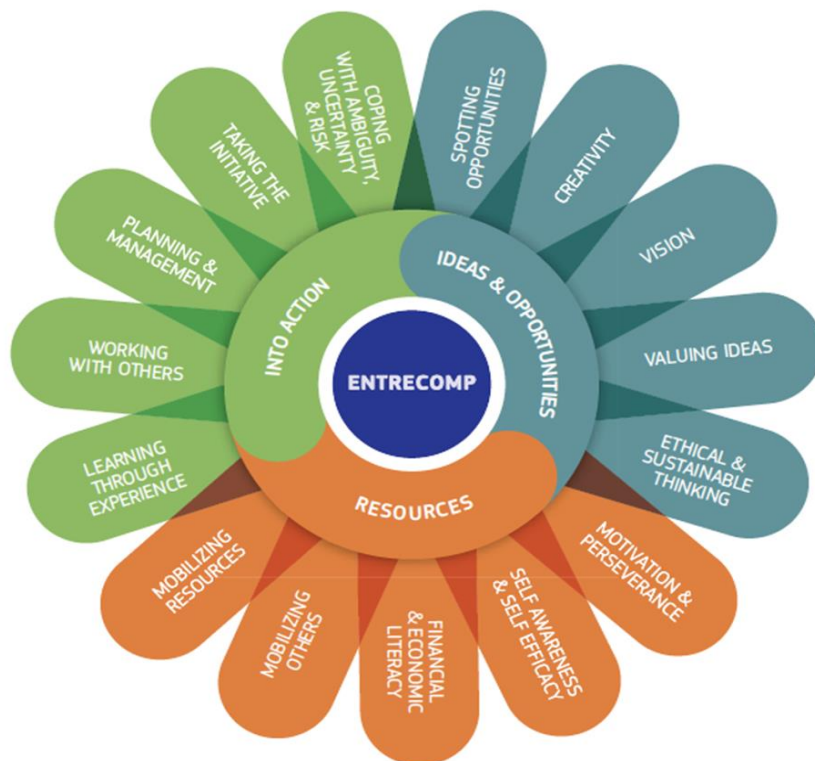

Fig. 2 EntreComp conceptual framework

1.4 UPLIFT's objectives

The crisis in Ukraine has created a humanitarian emergency, forcing many young people to escape from their homes and seek shelter in other countries. The UPLIFT programme focused on promoting

youth entrepreneurship among Ukrainian refugees and young people from host countries, offering them greater opportunities for development and self-determination. The UPLIFT programme aimed to support the ability of children and young people to respond with resilience to crises and contemporary challenges from a social, political, and economic point of view. Specifically, the UNICEF and JA mission aimed to support the response to the Ukrainian crisis by engaging young people and supporting them in acquiring the skills and mindsets needed to improve their self-esteem and resilience, supporting young Ukrainians and their European correspondents to not only imagine but actively build their future. The programme sought to combat social exclusion by offering young Ukrainian refugees the opportunity to develop their talents and set out to support the skills and employability of young Ukrainian refugees seeking to remain in Europe, as well as those seeking to return to Ukraine and contribute to recovery efforts. The intervention also contributed to building better social cohesion between young Ukrainian refugees and young people from the host country.

Specifically, the **UPLIFT objectives** were:

- enhance the **sense of community belonging**, citizenship, and civic responsibility in young Ukrainian refugees and their European peers,
- support young Ukrainian refugees in the **process of socio-economic integration**, promote their empowerment through the creation of support networks, mentorship, and partnerships with local and international organizations, promoting social inclusion in the local community,
- improve the level of **employability and entrepreneurship** of young adolescents, transmitting awareness and skills in the new sectors required by the transformations and challenges of contemporary society (for example in green and digital),
- provide training and support for the **development of entrepreneurial skills** among young Ukrainian refugees, to promote autonomy and economic resilience,
- **develop soft skills** such as teamwork, collaboration, empowerment, motivation, self-esteem, creativity, etc.,
- **motivate continuous training**, to resume studies if they have been interrupted, or to found their own company,
- raise awareness among the public and key actors about the benefits of youth entrepreneurship for Ukrainian refugees, highlighting their potential contribution to economic growth and the strengthening of local communities,
- promote gender equality through the inclusion of young Ukrainian refugee girls in the youth entrepreneurship programme, ensuring equal opportunities and accessibility to resources.

1.5 UPLIFT's components

The UPLIFT programme has developed in different phases, which have been implemented specifically depending on the characteristics of the context in which the programme is carried out.

The capacity building support from JA Italy and JA Greece was crucial to enhance the delivery of the programme in this initial phase. All participating countries developed a sourcing methodology that consisted of a sequence of steps and included a structured and comprehensive approach to identifying Ukrainian refugees. The search for beneficiaries took place through the activation of contacts with schools and universities, international NGOs and UN Agencies, cultural and sports centres, NGOs working with Ukrainian refugees, public sector institutions (ministries), and private sector (volunteers, recruitment agencies).

The phases of the programme were as follows:

1) Inspire Session

Average hours of learning per young person: 1h.

Total Learning Hours: 300,000

The goal of the inspire part of the project was to create a first point of learning that would motivate young people and adolescents and encourage them to follow a JA programme. The applied methodology was the creation of a digital educational campaign, relying on third party voices (i.e. content creators from Ukraine and the neighbouring countries) who are familiar with the target audience (youth), the issues to be highlighted (following one's dreams, learning how to create and manage a business.

2) Orient Session

Average hours of learning per young person: 1-3h.

Total hours of learning: 55,500.

18,500 children and young people were involved, the objective was to connect young people to the local culture, language, educational system, public system, and labour market of the host country, through meetings with local communities, associations, and NGOs. The goal was to familiarize Ukrainian refugees with the local culture and to start a process of knowledge and integration with the young people of the host country. The implementation of this phase of the programme varied according to the context of the host country and its similarity to Ukrainian culture.

3) Activate Session

Average hours of learning per young person: 5-10h.

Total hours of learning: 259,000.

37,000 children and young people were involved, the objective was to show them possibilities and opportunities through short workshops (5-10 hours), in which young people could develop self-awareness of their talents, values, and interests and could begin to outline their professional career

path. For example, JA Lithuania has proposed social hackathons and innovation labs; the labs and interactive sessions are also a great idea for the integration of young refugees. Refugees will face various practical activities in an unfamiliar environment, often with limited knowledge of the language of the host community. JA Poland has proposed design thinking camps, economic board games & simulations.

4) Prepare Session

Total hours of learning per young person: 40h.

Total hours of learning: 493,333.

The objective was to offer practical learning experiences to develop skills for employment, self-employment, or entrepreneurship, through workshops and training of longer duration (specific training programmes on business management, marketing, accounting, and other key skills necessary to start and manage an entrepreneurial activity). The activities of this phase of programme implementation were aimed at enabling young people to better understand the surrounding community, analyse problems and turn them into business or social ideas. Creativity skills, learning by doing, teamwork, managing, economic-financial skills, civic skills, and ethical and sustainable thinking were the expected outcomes for this phase. Students received direct support from entrepreneurs, mentors, and professionals, to develop their own ideas, realise them and later on present them at a final event. At this stage of the programme, young people were able to take part in JA Innovation and/or Entrepreneurship Camp, JA Company Programme, JA Job Shadow. Each participating country had the opportunity to decide which activities to carry out, drawing from a pool of interventions already validated and implemented by JA in various contexts. In particular, the activities were: Innovation Camp, School Company Lessons, Leadership Camp, Company Programme (and similar ones), Student Company Programme, Personal Finance Course, Job Shadow Day.

5) Succeed Session

Total hours of learning per young person: 25h.

Total hours of learning: 61,667.

2,467 young people were involved in the sessions. The objective was to support young people in the transition "from learning to earning", through activities that helped and supported young people to obtain an internship or employment or to become entrepreneurs. The activities were for example: volunteering as a moment that can help young people learn new skills, gain experience, and obtain necessary qualifications for their future; incubation and mentoring sessions on social innovation; training on planning, project drafting, fundraising, networking, communication; participation in trade fairs; visits to companies, factories and companies; training sessions with professionals; Job

Shadow Week. As the last step of the programme, in recognition and celebration of the experience, some of young people who took part in UPLIFT were invited to participate in the "Gen-E online competition", the largest European festival on entrepreneurship, in which a session was dedicated to UPLIFT and the successful mini companies that have been developed. At this stage, the Social Cohesion Award was added to the competition to recognize student mini-companies that have developed solutions that address pressing social issues and make a significant contribution to social cohesion in an innovative and effective way.

2. Evaluation drawing

2.1 Evaluation Approach

"The evaluation approach is a general framework for observing, exploring, and reworking some aspects of the social reality that are of interest for evaluation – from the point of view of the clients, policymakers, beneficiaries, evaluators – and which, in the practice of evaluation research, is oriented by how the value is attributed to the intervention to be evaluated and its results and results in a reasoned series of procedural choices of a technical-methodological nature and, therefore, in a specific modus operandi that is "tailored to the programme to be evaluated" (Rossi, Freeman and Lipsey, 2003) and that has the purpose of answering the evaluation questions formulated." (LVD, 2017).

The evaluation activity within the Third Sector is a concept that has gone through and has had to be confronted with the transformations experienced by welfare policies since the post-war period, and that is becoming increasingly important.

In these premises, the current evaluative exercise has adopted a mixed approach, blending theoretical and constructivist perspectives, guided by the notion that the most suitable evaluative method depends on the specific objectives and subjects of evaluation (Stame, 2001), rather than a predetermined preference.

The theory-based approach is based on the definition of the Theory of Change, precisely identifying the changes that the intervention intends to produce, the indicators necessary for the detection of such change, the enabling factors, and the assumptions according to which the introduced actions must produce the expected results (Weiss, 1997). This approach focuses on how and why the intervention has generated or not the desired effects and, for the present evaluation, it was functional to the mapping of the outcomes, to the construction of the interpretative framework of the evaluation, and to the setting of the techniques of analysis of the empirical basis.

The constructivist approach, on the other hand, focuses on the process and the social context in which the intervention being evaluated is carried out (Guba, Lincoln, 1989) and allows us to understand the relevance and significance of the changes for the beneficiaries of the intervention itself. This approach was functional to the definition of the Theory of Change, to the setting of the methods of data and information collection, to the organization in an empirical matrix, and to their interpretation.

2.2 Evaluation Questions

The priority objective of the evaluation was to understand and measure the impact generated by the UPLIFT programme.

The purposes of the evaluation activities implemented within the programme were to understand and measure the changes generated by the activities and analyse them concerning the main target groups on which the intervention focused.

The research project aimed to answer the following evaluation questions:

- understand and map the overall change generated by the UPLIFT programme for the beneficiaries involved (Ukrainian and local students and young people who participated in the Prepare Sessions),
- how much the UPLIFT programme has helped to increase 21st-century skills for the beneficiaries involved (Ukrainian and local students and young people who participated in the Prepare Sessions),
- to comprehend and investigate the strengths and weaknesses of the interventions as a group and identify recommendations to strengthen the former and mitigate the latter with a view to overall programme improvement at both the management and operational levels.

The research questions listed above were investigated through some evaluation criteria that fall under the OECD definitions:

Relevance:

To understand the significance of the changes for the beneficiaries of the intervention and the experiences of change generated by the project actions. It intends to verify whether the objectives of the intervention are consistent with the needs of the beneficiaries and the other actors involved

Efficacy:

To understand and measure the achievement of project objectives. It intends to verify how and how much the programme has achieved the changes it intended to generate.

Impact:

To understand and measure the value generated by the intervention. It intends to verify what part of the intervention is generated thanks to the activities implemented.

2. Methodology

The evaluation method was built on the development of a Theory of Change (TOC) based upon the analysis of the reference literature and studies already conducted by the Human Foundation on the beneficiaries of the programmes promoted by Junior Achievement Italy in collaboration with UNICEF. The Theory of Change will examine just how through the provision of resources (inputs) programme implementation is successful in generating outcomes (social changes) for the stakeholders involved. The TOC will also serve to synthesize the complexity of the impact on the beneficiaries of the project actions within an initial theoretical and strategic framework consistent with the research objectives.

Figure 1: Outcome Chain
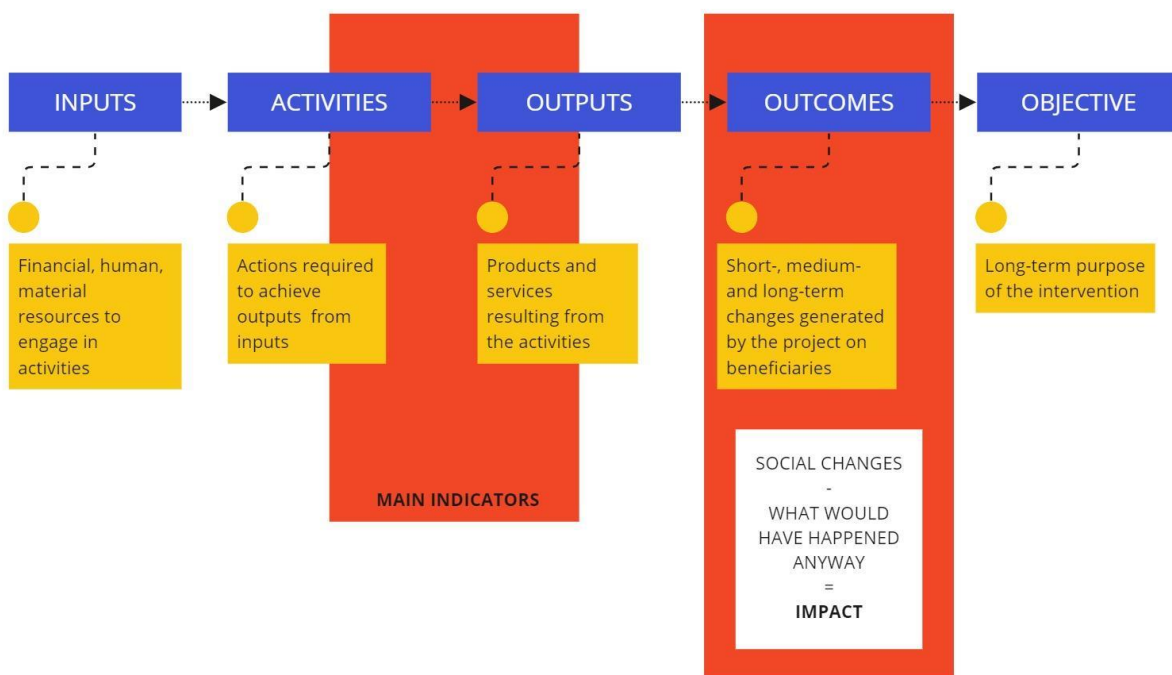
The evaluative research design is based on a mixed method that combines two methodological approaches in a single study: quantitative and qualitative (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Choosing to integrate the two approaches, rather than treat them as two separate alternatives, allows us to overcome the limitations and combine the strengths of each methodology and enables a more

profound and multifaceted comprehension of the phenomenon studied. The mixed method is especially useful in the case of complex research questions, such as in the present case, and increases the reliability of the results found. A mixed-method approach makes it possible to measure the effectiveness and impact of the programme, but also to understand the context of the intervention and its peculiarities.

Specifically, the quantitative approach is employed to measure and explain the changes generated by the programme, while the qualitative approach is adopted to understand them deeper.

2.4 Assessment Tools

The evaluation used both primary sources, data collected through the direct involvement of the programme stakeholders, and secondary sources, data collected through the analysis of the programme documents and the bibliography relating to the context and the object of the intervention.

Bibliographic research

Bibliographic research is an activity that allows the mapping and study of public and scientific documents through search engines and databases. It was used to observe the framework of competence/skills examined, elaborate the Theory of Change, understand the context of intervention, and interpret the data.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire is a structured set of questions and answer options, where the respondent is asked to identify the answer that comes closest to their position. It has been used to collect standardised information useful for describing stakeholders and measuring outcomes.

It was decided to structure a self-assessment questionnaire on skills (self-report) for the students involved in the project. Building upon previous research (Autio et al., 2001; Chen, Greene, & Crick, 1998; Kolvereid, 1996a, b; Kolvereid et al., 1997; Krueger Jr & Brazeal, 1994; Krueger Jr et al., 2000; Krueger et al., 1993; Linan et al., 2009; Tkachev et al., 1999), questions and methods of measuring constructs have been identified through scaling techniques related to the topic of entrepreneurship. For the measurement of entrepreneurial skills, reference was also made to the EntreComp (Entrepreneurship Competences) framework of the European Commission. For the dimension of life skills, reference was made to different theoretical models (who, 1994; USAID, 2015; Hadiyanto et al., 2017; Hoskins & Liu, 2019; LifeComp 2020) and the following questionnaires found in the literature were considered: Social-Emotional Competence Questionnaire (SECQ) (Zhou & Ee, 2012); Social Skills Improvement System Rating Scales (SSIS-RATING SCALE) (Gresham & Elliot, 2008); Self-Awareness Outcomes Questionnaire (SAOQ) (Sutton, 2016); Employability Assessment Tool (Dershem, 2016; Save the Children, 2017); Adolescent Measure of Empathy and Sympathy (AMES)

(Vossen et al., 2015); Creative Personality Test (TPC) (Williams, 1994); California Critical Thinking Dispositions Inventory (CCTDI) (Facione et al., 2001).

It was decided, in agreement with JA Europe, to include participation in the Prepare Session as a precondition for completing the questionnaire as it is the phase that involves the greatest number of beneficiaries in terms of both participants and learning hours. Logically, it also involves attendance in the preceding sessions. From a methodological point of view, the activities of the Prepare Session are those that allow the achievement of the outcomes mapped by the Theory of Change (ToC) and are intended to achieve the change and objectives that the UPLIFT programme aims for.

Questionnaire's questions were adapted considering both the training objectives of the UPLIFT programme and through a reformulation that allowed its comprehensibility and greater methodological adherence to the evaluation research system. The questionnaire was implemented on the LimeSurvey platform and completed online by the students with the support of teachers from any device between mid-May and the end of October 2023. Compared to the method of collecting data through an online questionnaire, although the problem of statistical representativeness is raised with respect to the reference population, this presents a series of positive effects on the fidelity and quality of the data collected (Mauceri, Faggiano, Di Censi, 2020).

Focus groups

The focus group is a survey technique for social research, based on the discussion between a group of people, in the presence of one or more moderators, focused on a topic that you want to deepen (Corrao, 2000, 2013; Morgan 1988). In the context of the UPLIFT project, it was used to grasp the relevance and significance of the outcomes and understand the effects of the implementation process.

The main purposes of the focus groups were:
- Comprehend the context of programme intervention.
- Comprehend the outcome dimensions that emerged in the children and the level of effectiveness of the programme.
- Understand the perspective of practitioners and teachers on the programme.
- Identify the strengths and criticalities of the intervention and useful recommendations for future implementations of the programme.

Study Sample

At the conclusion of the questionnaire administration, a total of 1601 surveys were collected. Countries that did not meet the previously indicated minimum number of responses (50) were excluded from the survey, as this threshold was deemed necessary to achieve a statistically relevant sample.

The focus groups were held in June and July 2023 and involved each member country concerned by the survey. Teachers and operators most in contact with the young people were able to provide their point of view on the development of the project actions and the outcomes they observed in the direct beneficiaries. In total, 9 focus groups were conducted, one for each participating country that agreed to the interviews. Specific data about the study sample is included in Chart below.

Chart 1: Study Sample specifics

	Number of questionnaires collected	Number of Focus Group participants
Bulgaria	54	5
Czech Republic	210	5
Estonia	296	5
Hungary	86	5
Latvia	151	6
Lithuania	127	6
Moldova	126	5
Poland	219	
Romania	160	5
Serbia	/	5
Slovakia	172	

2.5 Theory of Change

Through the study of the academic literature of the sector, the collection of primary data, and the study of the previous evaluations carried out by the Human Foundation on the programmes of JA Italia in collaboration with UNICEF, the Theory of Change relating to the UPLIFT programme, the object of the evaluation activity, was elaborated.

The path described by the tool can be considered as the sequence of the relationship between the benefits generated by the programme in Ukrainian youth and local youth through a graphical mapping of the connection between resources, activities, results, and changes. The dimensions of analyses taken into consideration can be considered as necessary preconditions for the occurrence of subsequent outcomes in a cause-effect logic based on temporal development. The priority purpose of the ToC was to provide a timely description of the changes, subsequently measured through the use of detection tools, to demonstrate the effectiveness of the programme in generating benefits through the implementation of specific activities. The ToC was created through a participatory process divided into four main stages:
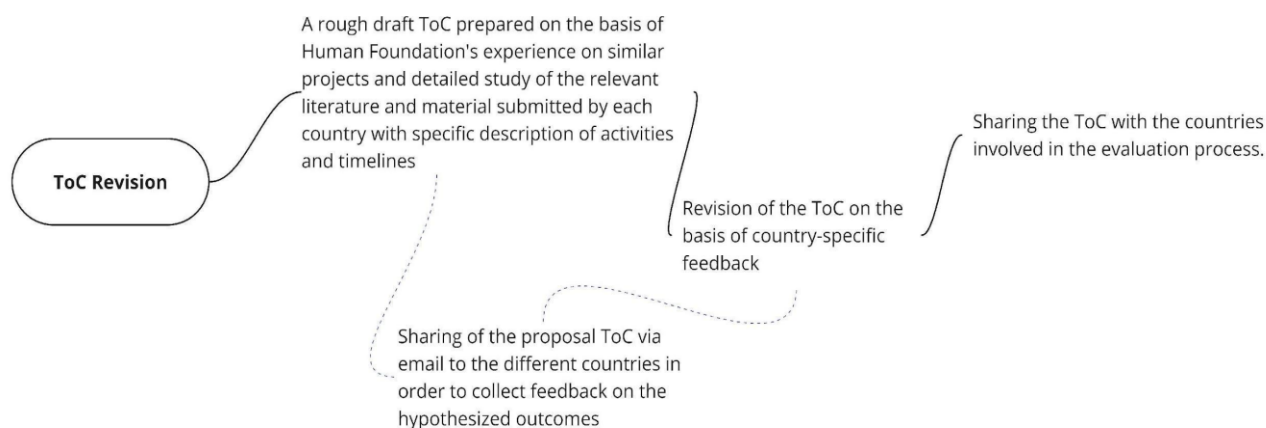
The Theory of Change considered the changes that emerged in young Ukrainian refugees and those from host countries as a result of participation in the activities envisaged by the individual phases of programme implementation (Inspire Session, Orientate Session, Activate Session, Prepare Session, Succeed Session). Reconstructing backward the causal links that are formed to reach the objectives, it is emphasized that participation in the different phases and activities of the programme can be divided into objectives:

- in the short term (development of critical and creative thinking, self-awareness, improvement of communication skills);
- medium and medium-long term (problem-solving skills, self-esteem, teamwork, economic-financial/entrepreneurial knowledge, confidence in one's professional future, improvement in relationships with people of different backgrounds, integration into the peer group).

The social impact and the main long-term objectives of the UPLIFT programme, regarding the Theory of Change that we want to outline, were the following:

- Promote the response to the Ukrainian crisis by actively involving young people (stakeholders) and offering them support in strengthening their skills and mentality, to promote an improvement in self-esteem and personal resilience.
- Develop the skills and employability of young Ukrainian refugees, both those seeking to remain in Europe and those seeking to return to Ukraine.
- Contribute to developing better social cohesion between young Ukrainian refugees and those from host countries.
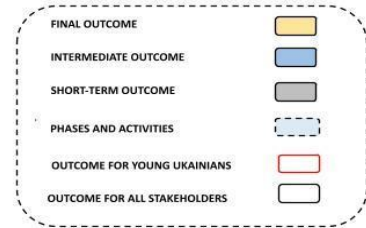
The main benefits of the programme for students are also divided into three areas which, for this Theory of Change, can be divided as follows:

- Knowledge: the "hard skills" that represent the basic technical knowledge in the corporate, economic, and financial field: the financial and business management skills;
- Skills: the "soft skills" that represent the set of skills acquired through the training path and the potential of the student to apply them in a practical context;
- Aptitudes: the predisposition towards a certain behaviour or the performance of certain activities; in this case, the aptitudes the student acquires are the indispensable foundation for the entrepreneurship he or she progressively develops during the course.

To identify the outcomes to be mapped in Theory of Change, reference was made to the European theoretical framework LifeComp (personal, social, and learning to learn key competencies), a conceptual framework of 3 key competencies: personal, social, and learning to learn. Skills that "can help people become more resilient and manage the challenges and changes in their personal and professional lives in an ever-changing world". In addition, EntreComp (Entrepreneurship Competences) was considered, a framework for entrepreneurial skills proposed in 2016 by the European Commission (New Skills Agenda): key skills required in the 21st century, to be introduced in the school and training curricula of all participating countries. Bridge between the worlds of education and work, divided into 3 macro-areas composed of 15 key skills. This framework was used for the identification of outcomes concerning the specific activities of the programme.

Theory Of Change

Stakeholders
Local children and /or youth
Young Ukrainian refugees

Legend	
FINAL OUTCOME	(yellow)
INTERMEDIATE OUTCOME	(blue)
SHORT-TERM OUTCOME	(grey)
PHASES AND ACTIVITIES	(dashed)
OUTCOME FOR YOUNG UKAINIANS	(red border)
OUTCOME FOR ALL STAKEHOLDERS	(white)

Building youth resilience through that inform, inspire, activate and empower youth

Long-term goals and social impact

- Increased propensity for entrepreneurship
- Increased spirit of initiative
- Increased inclusion in the community
- Improved interpersonal relationships

Medium/long-term goals

- Increased knowledge of financial and business management
- Increased confidence in one's educational and/or professional future

Medium-term goals

- Improved problem solving skills
- Increased self-confidence
- Improved relationship with people with different backgrounds
- Improved integration with peer group
- Improved teamworking skills

- Development of critical thinking
- Development of creative thinking
- Improved awarness of self, means and abilities
- Improved communication skills

LifeComp ⬍ EntreComp

- Networking activities to connect beneficiaries with local culture, language, education system, public system
- Training programmes that provide hands-on learning experiences to develop skills for employment, self employment or entrepreneurship
- Activities to support beneficiaries to the transition from learning to earning
- Short workshops to expose different possibilities and opportunities
- Digital campaign to create a first learning point and inspire the targeted youth and adolescents

Inspire Session | Orient Session | Activate Session | Prepare Session | Succeed Session

2.6 Evaluation Activities

The evaluation process required the performance of the following activities:

- Desk review of documentary materials.
- Evaluation Drawing Processing.
- Participatory definition of the Theory of Change.

- Development and validation of outcomes.
- Development and validation of indicators that will be used for evaluation.
- Preparation of measuring instruments (structured questionnaire, focus group track).
- Application of measurement instruments and implementation of focus groups.
- Quantitative and qualitative analysis of empirical material.
- Drafting of the final report.

The research phases were shared through meetings with JA Europe and the network of member countries involved in the project. The meetings were essential to validate the tools and to organise the research activities through a participatory process.

3. Evaluation Results

3.1 Quantitative Analysis

This summary outlines the quantitative findings from the evaluation of the UPLIFT programme, designed to enhance life skills, entrepreneurial skills, and future orientation among young people, notably Ukrainian refugees. The analysis involved 1601 completed questionnaires from youths who participated in the "Prepare" phase of the programme.

Key findings:

- **Life skills (LifeComp)**: Over 90% of participants demonstrated a "high" or "medium-high" level of LifeComp, indicating proficiency in critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving. While Ukrainian refugees scored slightly lower than local youths in some aspects, their skills improved with programme participation.

- **Entrepreneurial skills (EntreComp)**: Participants showed positive ratings across all skills, with teamwork and initiative scoring highest. Like LifeComp, Ukrainian refugees scored slightly lower but exhibited improvement with programme involvement.

- **Future orientation**: Overall, participants expressed optimism about the future, with 44% aiming for a "medium-high" level of confidence and pursuing goals such as higher education or entrepreneurship. Ukrainian refugees showed lower confidence levels but shared similar aspirations.

- **Inclusion**: Ukrainian refugees felt positively welcomed and supported in their host countries, with an average inclusion index rating of 3.7 out of 5 (Likert scale). Increased participation in programme activities correlated with stronger feelings of inclusion.

The programme was effective in achieving its objectives, benefiting both local youths and Ukrainian refugees. Greater engagement in programme activities resulted in improved outcomes across all dimensions. While some disparities existed between local youths and Ukrainian refugees, the programme helped narrow the gap in various areas. The evaluation offers valuable insights for future programme development and interventions aimed at supporting young people, particularly refugees. Overall, the UPLIFT programme appears to be a valuable tool for enhancing life skills, entrepreneurial skills, and future orientation among young people.

The proposed evaluation design involved assessing the outcomes identified for youth who actively participated in the activities during the "Prepare" phase of the UPLIFT programme, utilizing a youth questionnaire. This analysis focused on 1601 responses to the questionnaire. To return a complete and consistent analysis, the responses of the nations that collected enough responses during the quantitative detection phase were analysed to compose a relevant   sample.

PERSONAL DATA AND PARTICIPATION

The origin of the young people who filled out the questionnaires is distributed almost equally between young people of Ukrainian origin and young locals born and raised in the countries of implementation of the programme: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. 793 responses were received from youths born in Ukraine, 794 from those born in UPLIFT-affiliated countries, and 14 from youths with origins not listed. Regarding the gender of the young people taken into consideration, the majority identify with the female gender (57.9%), 40.1% with the male gender, and the remaining 2% prefer to indicate the "Other" option as shown in graph 1. According to graph 2, 90.6% of respondents declare to be in the 13-19 age group, 4.5% declare to be over 19 years of age, and 4.9% to be under 13 years of age. Additionally, in graph 3 it can be seen that 65.2% of the young people who answered the questionnaire participated in two of the activities planned for the "Prepare" phase, 25.3% participated in three or more activities planned for their country, and 9.5% participated in only one of the organised activities.
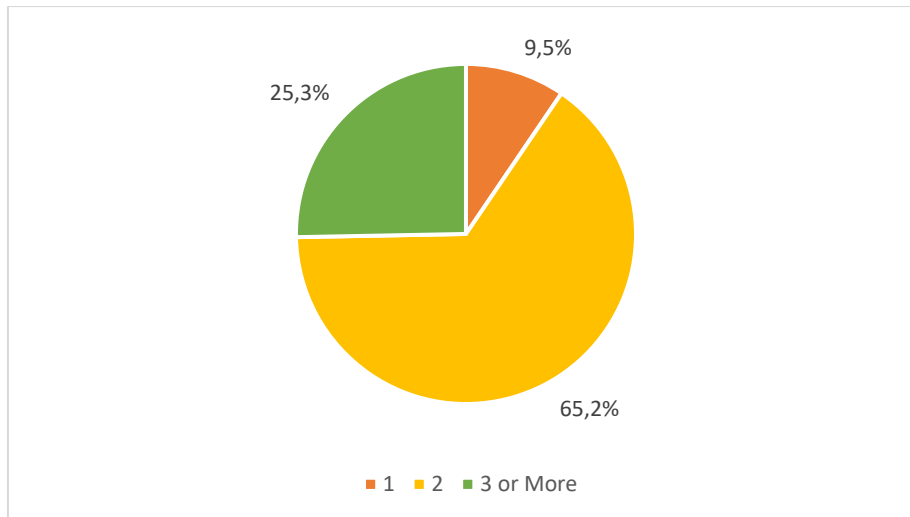
Graph 1: Study Sample participants' age
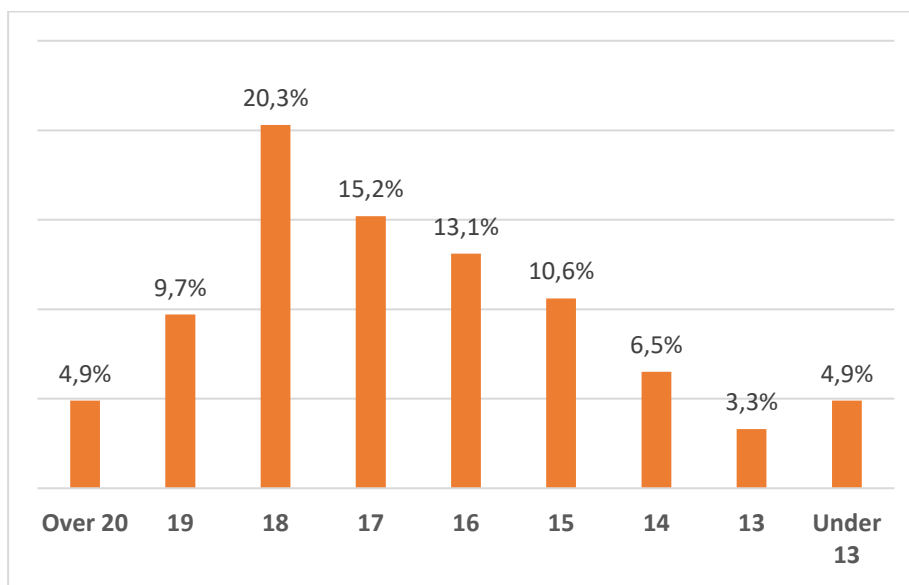
Graph 2: Study Sample participants' gender
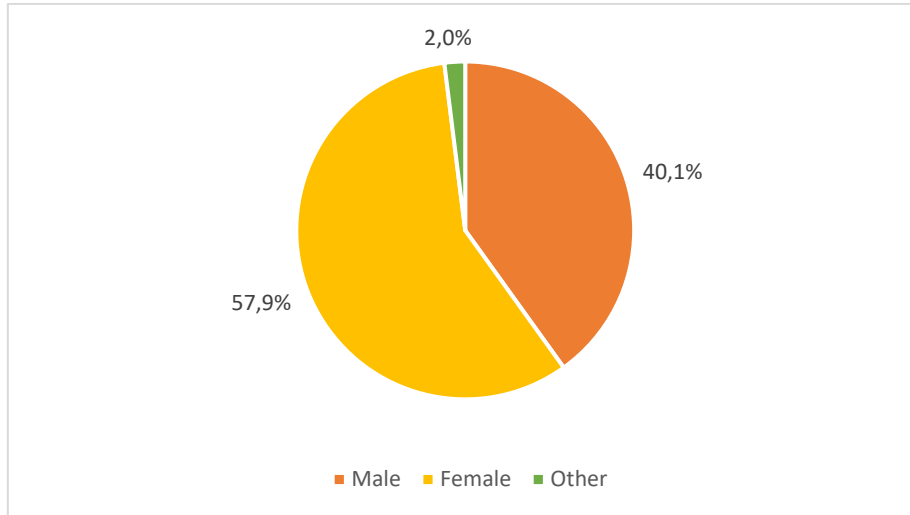
Graph 3: Study Sample participants' participation in the activities

LIFECOMP

One of the outcomes mapped through the Theory of Change described in the previous paragraphs is the strengthening of LifeComp, skills that "can help people become more resilient and manage the challenges and changes in their personal and professional lives in an ever-changing world". Referring to the theoretical framework and structuring of the UPLIFT programme for young people, the subconstructs considered in the analysis referred to the following specific skills: critical thinking,

creative thinking, communication skills, problem-solving, self-confidence, interpersonal relationship, peer group collaboration, integration with people with different backgrounds. Considering all the questionnaires collected, all the dimensions record an average rating higher than 3.4 on the reference scale used (Likert from 1 to 5) as can be seen in Chart 2. However, the dimensions that obtain a higher average rating are "Creative thinking", "Communication skills", and "Self-confidence", all three with a rating of 3.9. On the other hand, the dimension with a lower rating, but still placed on the positive end of the scale used, is "Integration with people with different backgrounds" with a rating of 3.4. This data is consistent with what has been analysed by several studies (Bianchi et al., 2021; Guo et al., 2019) concerning the difficulty of integrating refugee children into the countries and schools of the country of arrival.

Chart 2: LifeComp

Dimensions	Average rating (Likert from 1 to 5)
Critical thinking	3.8
Creative Thinking	3.9
Communication Skills	3.9
Problem-Solving	3.8
Self-confidence	3.9
Integration with People with Different Backgrounds	3.8
Peer Group Collaboration	3.4
Interpersonal Relationship	3.6

It is a different matter if we observe the data divided by local young people and by Ukrainian refugees (hereinafter referred to as "LG-Local Group" and "UG-Ukrainian Group"). Analysing the two distinct categories differences can be seen in the average ratings referring to the individual dimensions investigated. Local youngsters have slightly higher average ratings than their Ukrainian peers. The difference is found in the case of dimensions such as Critical Thinking, Creative Thinking, Communication Skills, Problem-Solving, and Self-confidence, where the difference between the two groups is minimal but not negligible: 0.2 points. Peer Group Collaboration and Interpersonal Relationships obtain the same average rating in both groups, while the gap between local young people and those of Ukrainian origin is significant for the dimension that investigates integration with people from different backgrounds; in this case, it is young Ukrainians who rate 0.4 points higher than their local peers (respectively 3.6 and 3.2 average ratings).

The analysis confirms the findings of studies by Alivernini et al., 2019; Bianchi et al., 2021; Guo et al., 2019; Lintner et al., 2023, which suggest that Ukrainian refugees in a school context tend to receive fewer friendships from local peers. Likewise, again Lintner et al., 2023 point out that the results of Ukrainian students can be linked to a greater effort on the part of the same in trying to integrate and make friends since building good relationships with peers at school becomes an essential part of the success of a refugee's psychosocial adaptation to a new country, their mental health and school performance. These data can explain a situation in which pre-established local groups are less open to including new friendships quickly, whereas for Ukrainian youths whose circle of friends is still developing and continuously evolving, they tend to form relationships more easily and strive to identify initial connections as "friendship." Furthermore, given the differences in programme implementation across different countries, some of the local youths who completed the questionnaires and participated in the activities did so solely within the school context, which, in some cases (e.g., Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria), did not initially involve the integration of Ukrainian refugees, who were assigned to separate and autonomous classes.

Graph 4: Differences of average rating between Local Group and Ukrainian Group per LifeComp dimensions
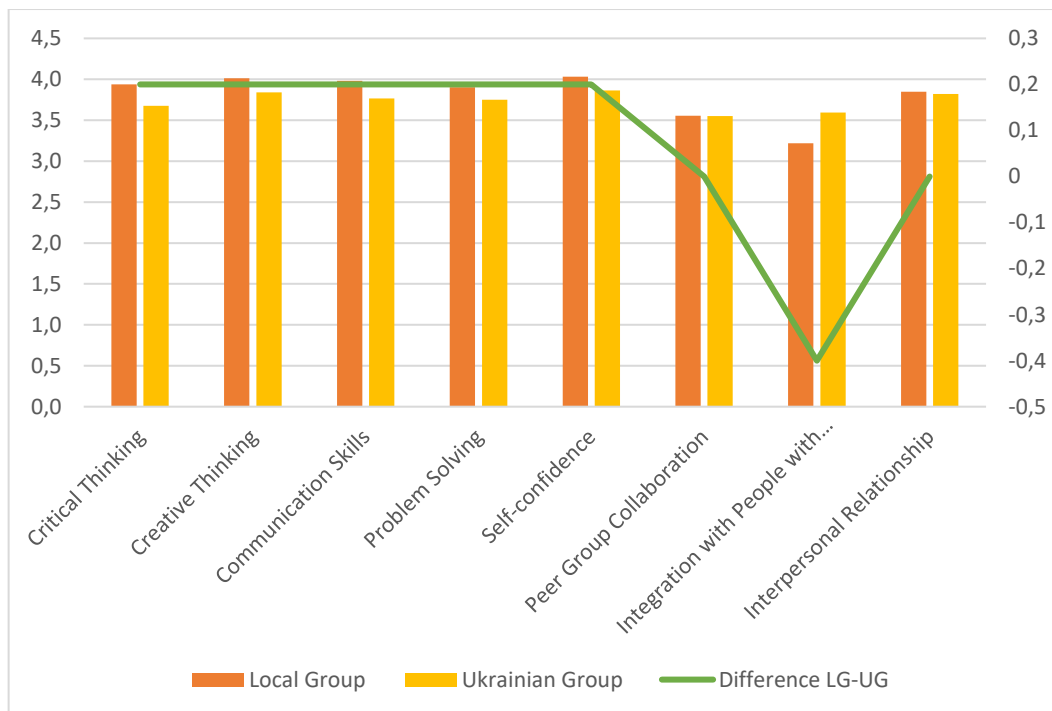

Based on the dimensions investigated as described, an overall index[1] was constructed to present the LifeComp data in a comprehensive manner, categorizing the children into 5 different level

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[1] Index: A type of composite measure that summarizes and rank-orders several specific observations and represents some more-general dimension. An index is constructed simply by accumulating scores assigned to individual indicators. Thus, a survey respondent's score on an index or scale of, for example, religiosity is determined by the responses given to several questionnaire items, each of which provides some indication of religiosity (Babbie, 2021).

groups based on the ratings provided in response to specific questions. The overall index, depicted in graph 5, provides valuable insight into the proficiency levels of the youngsters in LifeComp: over 90% of youth exhibit a High or Medium-high level, with only 0.1% classified as having a low level and 0.5% at a Medium-low level.

Graph 5: LifeComp Index
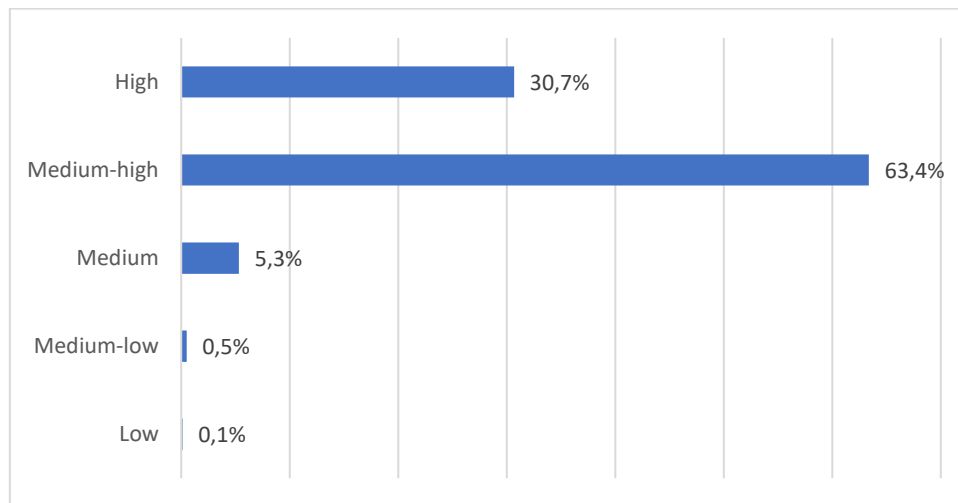
Once again, a comparison was conducted between the groups of young people who participated in the UPLIFT activities. While the analysis of the divided groups (graph 6) reveals very encouraging and highly positive data, there are still disparities in the percentages associated with the identified levels. Specifically, the proportion of local young people reaching a high level exceeds that of Ukrainians, and the percentage of young people at the highest level of positivity is slightly higher: 94.9% of local young people compared to 93.1% of young people of Ukrainian origin. It is also worth noting that no Ukrainian participants scored at a low level of LifeComp, unlike a small portion of the local group (0.2%).

Graph 6: LifeComp Index per Group

Ukrainian Group   Local Group
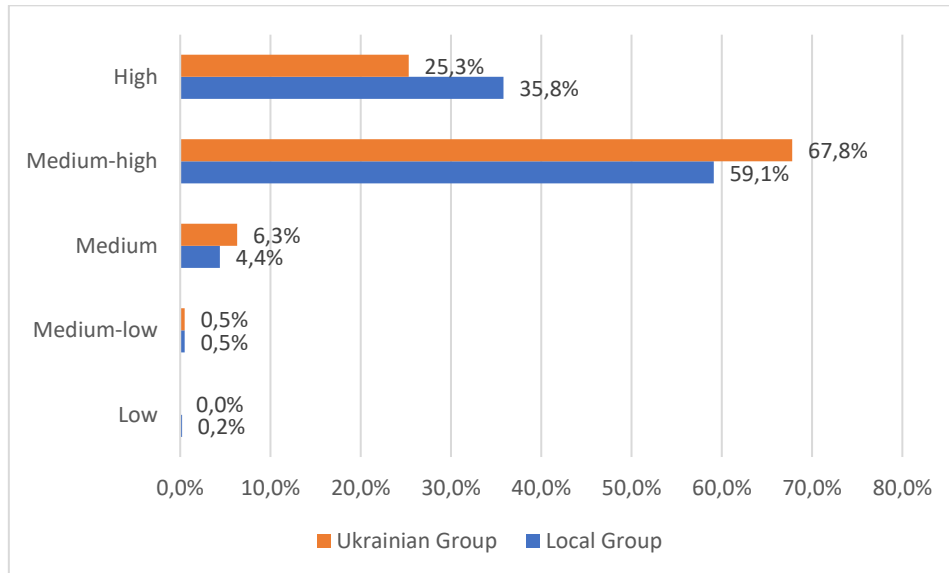
ENTRECOMP

Regarding the strengthening of EntreComp, or entrepreneurial skills useful for building a training bridge between the school and the workplace, the following dimensions were investigated: Awareness of Self and Means, Teamwork, Knowledge of Financial and Business Management, Spirit of Initiative, Propensity to Entrepreneurship. To understand how much and if the UPLIFT programme has influenced the strengthening of these skills, a series of attribution questions have been formulated to assess the change experienced by the youth. The average rating of the sub-constructs all rank on the positive end of the reference scale (Likert from 1 to 5) demonstrating the effectiveness of the work carried out through UPLIFT activities in strengthening key skills for the 21st century. The dimensions that register the highest average ratings are Teamwork and Spirit of Initiative with 3.9. These indications are consistent with the studies by Morselli and Gorenc (2022) according to which "teamwork" is the competence that is most developed within participation in programmes and activities based on the use of EntreComp; and with what Paniagua and Istance (2018) found that teaching based on experiential learning and problem-solving increases commitment and motivation and, consequently, pushes young people to take the initiative. A shown in Chart 3, all the dimensions investigated obtain a good average rating, and Knowledge of Financial and Business Management registers a lower average rating; This is because, despite the programme's commitment, it is complicated to saturate children's knowledge of economics with activities alone.

Chart 3: EntreComp average rating per dimensions

Dimensions	Average rating

|	(Likert 1 to 5)
Awareness of Self and Means	3.7
Teamwork	3.9
Knowledge of Financial and Business Management	3.1
Spirit of Initiative	3.9
Propensity to Entrepreneurship	3.5

Also in this case, the average ratings of the two different groups considered in this analysis were compared and the results, as well as for LifeComp, give a picture in which local children obtain slightly higher average ratings in some of the dimensions investigated. As can be seen in Graph 7, it is precisely the dimensions that obtained a higher overall average rating that registers a discrepancy between the two groups; however, for the other dimensions there is no substantial difference.

Graph 7: Differences of average rating between Local Group and Ukrainian Group per EntreComp dimensions
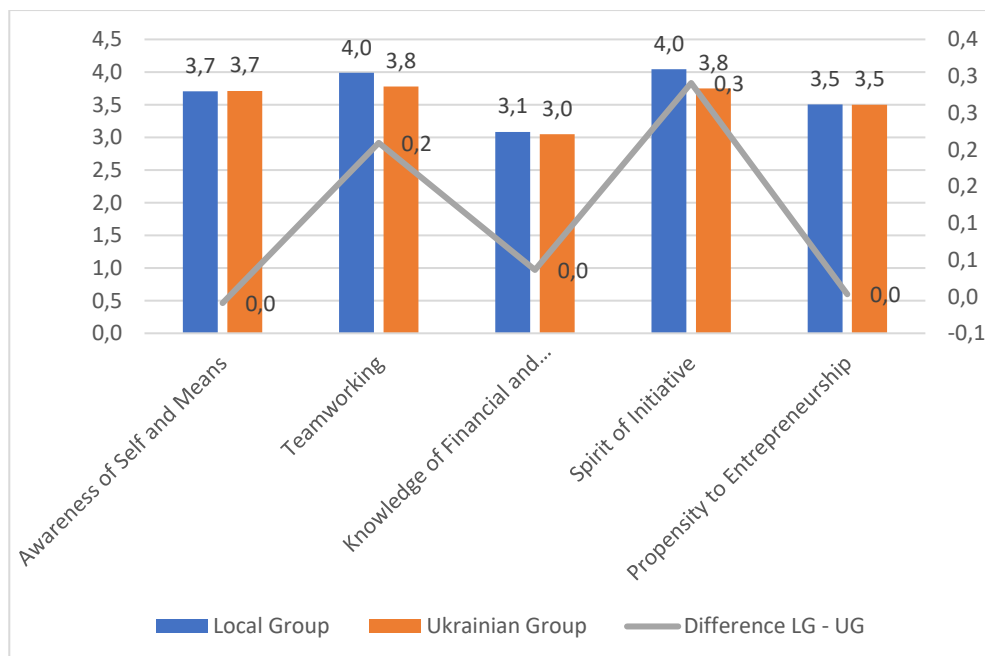
Following the construction of an overall index also for EntreComp, the average rating found is 3.7, and in the subdivision by levels, a clear prevalence can be seen for the "medium-high" level (61.8%) and a good percentage of the "high" level (26.1%). It is interesting to note that the percentages concerning the negative extreme of the classification used, "medium-low" level and "low" level, are negligible, as shown in graph 8.

Graph 8: EntreComp Index Range
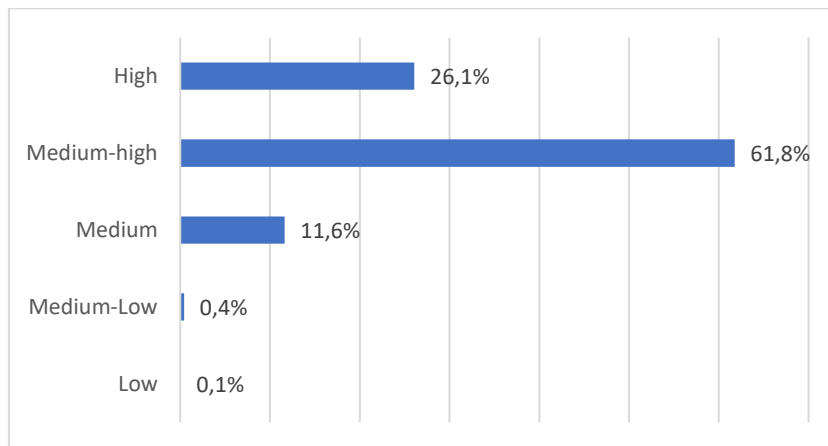
The EntreComp index was also analysed, starting from the distinction between groups of local students and young Ukrainian refugees. Graph 9 shows once again that the level achieved by the children of both groups is remarkable, in fact, in both cases more than 85% of the total recorded a "medium-high" or "high" level of the EntreComp index; again, the numbers are in favour of the local population. Discreetly higher is the percentage of young people of Ukrainian origin, which stands on an average level. However, even in this analysis there are some considerations regarding the lowest levels of the index, as already noted for LifeComp, also for EntreComp there are irrelevant percentages of local young people who have a low or medium-low level of skills.

Graph 9: EntreComp Index Range per Group
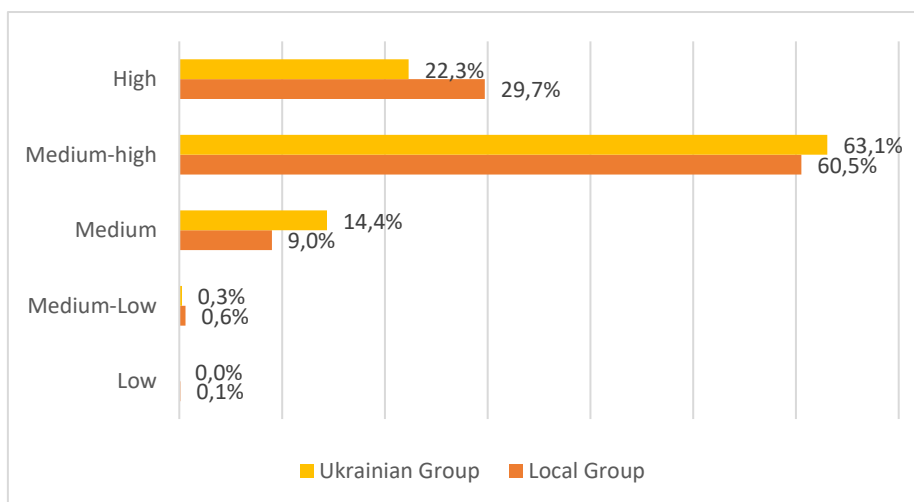
Chart 10 shows the average EntreComp Index scores for the Key LifeComp   Index levels; as can be seen, there is a significant interconnection between the two dimensions, and as key life skills increase, they correspond to high entrepreneurial skills values. This is in line with the studies of (Suryanti, 2012; Consolini, 2016; Rukanda et al., 2020; De Marco, 2020; Santanicchia, 2023) which found a positive correlation between key life skills and entrepreneurship. For example, they found

that individuals with strong communication, problem solving, and teamwork skills are more likely to start and grow successful businesses.

Additionally, it is evident that individuals with a high or medium-high level of LifeComp tend to exhibit high scores in entrepreneurial skills, while conversely, those with a medium-low level of key life skills tend to have a correspondingly low level of entrepreneurial skills. This indicates that key life skills may play a crucial role in the development of entrepreneurial skills

Although it is not possible to fully understand the causal direction between the two dimensions, it is nevertheless important to emphasize their correlation. This suggests that educational and training programmes should aim to develop both key life skills and entrepreneurial skills. For example, a programme could incorporate activities that help students develop communication, problem solving, and teamwork skills, as well as basic entrepreneurial knowledge and skills.

Graph 10: EntreComp Index average rating per LifeComp Index Range
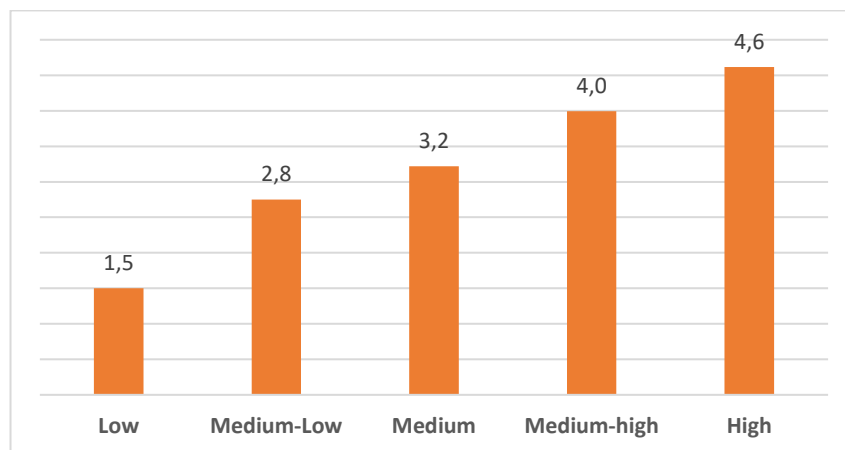
A further analysis demonstrating the effectiveness of the UPLIFT programme's activity in allowing an effective improvement of entrepreneurial skills is shown in Chart 4. If the average rating of the overall index for EntreComp is compared with the number of activities carried out by the students, it emerges that those who have carried out a greater number of activities also register a higher average rating.

Chart 4: EntreComp average rating per Number of Activities

| Number of Activities	EntreComp average rating
1	3.6
2	3.7

More than 3   3.8

FUTURE

One of the mapped outcomes referred to greater orientation and planning for the future; it was, therefore, asked students to indicate if they had a clear idea of the career they would want to undertake in the future, how they felt about their future in terms of positive or negative attitude and, finally, in what position they saw themselves 5 years in the future. With the first two dimensions, an index was created to identify orientation and confidence toward one's future; the results related to this index show a very positive trend, and the average rating, is 3.7. Compared to the composite index built on these dimensions, as can be seen in graph 11, the youth are positioned equally around the medium and high levels, and a clear prevalence is detectable for the medium-high level (44% of the total).

Graph 11: Future Index range
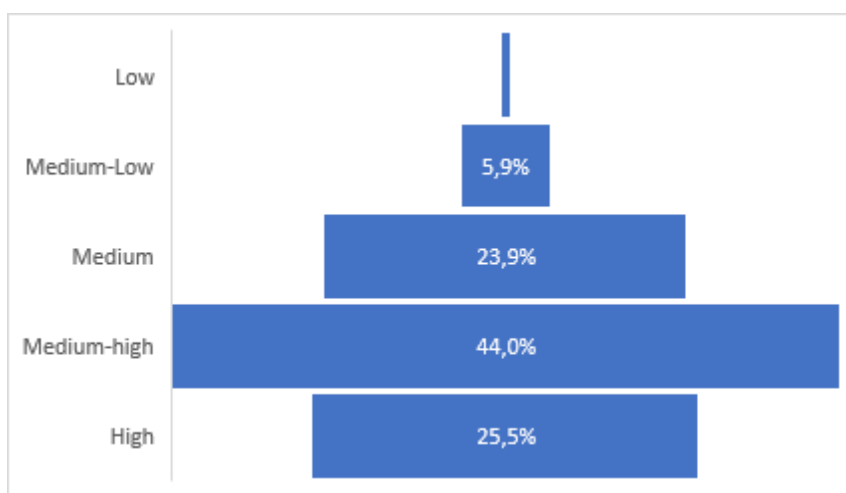
Not surprisingly, in the comparison between the different groups identified there are slight differences, the situation of young Ukrainians, does not allow them to be fully confident about the future. It is useful, however, to note that the levels reached by the group of Ukrainian youngsters who participated in the UPLIFT programme are in line with those of their local peers; there is only a negligible difference between the two groups regarding the "high" level. Moreover, as Brücker (2022) points out, the situation of the Ukrainian refugee population is surrounded by great uncertainty, since the potential outcomes of the war are still completely open and could remain so for long periods. Despite this, the data presented in Graph 12 are encouraging and partly reflect the excellent work prepared by UPLIFT's activities in allowing young people of Ukrainian origin to have hope for the future.

Graph 12: Differences of Future Index Range between Local Group and Ukrainian Group
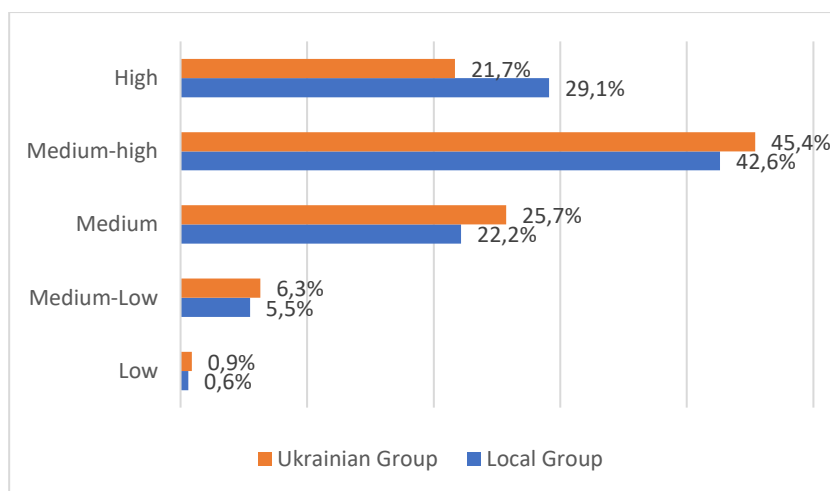
Regarding, on the other hand, the possible job position imagined five years from the time of completing the questionnaire, the students were given six response options: University student, Trainee, Worker, Entrepreneur, Unemployed, I don't know. In Chart 5 it is possible to analyse the results of the group of respondents, particularly most young people projecting toward a university future (41.1% of the total), but it is useful to highlight that there is a fair percentage of young people who imagine themselves as future entrepreneurs (22.7% of the total). Risky is the percentage of those who expect to be unemployed (1.9%), while the most substantial is the portion of young people who do not know how and where they will be in their future (15.6%).

Chart 5: Career prospects

Where do you envision yourself in five years?	Percentage
University student	41.1%
Trainee	4.5%
Workers	14.3%
Entrepreneur	22.7%
Unemployed	1.9%
I don't know".	15.6%

Relating the data associated with the macro-dimension linked to the future, you can see that those who have a low level of confidence in the future are more skeptical about their careers and, on the contrary, those who reach a high or medium-high level are more likely to imagine themselves as university students or entrepreneurs. Chart 6 present the data of this analysis and shows that for the low level the highest percentage of answers is "Unemployed", for the Medium-low level mode

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is "I don't know" despite a good percentage of young people who intend to attend university; from the medium level up fashion becomes the "University student" answer but it is useful to note that for the High level, there is a significant percentage (37.7%) of young people who imagine themselves entrepreneurs. For the Medium-High and High levels, then, the percentages fall compared to the "I don't know" answers and there are few cases of those who indicate that they will be unemployed in the future.

Chart 6: Confidence toward the future per career prospects

	Low	Medium-Low	Medium	Medium-High	High
University student	16.7%	26.3%	39. 9%	43.8%	41.6%
Trainee	16.7%	5.3%	3.4%	4.8%	4.6%
Workers		15.8%	14.0%	16.3%	10.9%
Entrepreneur	8.3%	10.5%	10.4%	22.7%	37.7%
Unemployed	41.7%	10.5%	2.3%	0,4%	0.7%
I don't know".	16.7%	31.6%	30.1%	12.0%	4,4%

Once again, the results are different if local young people and Ukrainian refugees are considered: in Chart 7 the two distinct groups show some substantial differences, especially regarding the possibility of being a future university student and the dimension linked to uncertainty and not knowing in which of the indicated roles to imagine oneself. Higher are the percentage of Ukrainian youth who imagine themselves as working employees and trainees, similar are percentages regarding unemployment, and slightly higher is the portion of local young people who lean towards becoming entrepreneurs.

Chart 7: Differences in Career prospects between Local Group and Ukrainian Group

Where do you envision yourself in five years?	Local Group	Ukrainian Group
University student	46%	35.9%
Trainee	2.4%	6,7%
Workers	11.7%	16.9%
Entrepreneur	24.2%	21 2

Unemployed	1.7%	2%
I don't know".	13.9%	17.3%

Finally, by crossing the data relating to EntreComp and those regarding the dimension of trust in the future, it is possible to note that as the level of entrepreneurial skills grows, the average rating also grows (Chart 8).

Chart 8: EntreComp Index Range per Future Index average rating

EntreComp Level	Average rating (Likert 1 to 5)
Low	1
Medium-Low	2.7
Medium	3,2
Medium/High	3.8
High	4.3

INCLUSION

Only the young people of Ukrainian origin submitted two questions aimed at investigating how hospitable they considered the country in which they settled because of forced emigration due to the conflict that began in February 2022, and how much they felt supported and welcomed by the people of the reference community. The overall average rating of all Ukrainian children compared to a composite index built for the inclusion dimension is 3.7; very positive considering the reference scale (Likert from 1 to 5) and confirming how participation in the UPLIFT programme has stimulated and fostered the inclusion of young Ukrainian refugees. Again, as for the EntreComp (and for each of the macro-dimensions investigated), greater participation in activities also positively influenced the result of the average rating related to inclusion (Chart 9).

Chart 9: Inclusion Index average rating per Number of Activities

Number of activities	Average rating (Likert 1 to 5)
1	3.5
2	3.7

It was interesting to observe the data divided by host country: Chart 10 shows the average ratings of the inclusion index divided by the countries that took part in UPLIFT. The level of inclusion and perceived reception is positive for all countries, but the average rating of Latvia and Lithuania is very high, 4.1 and 3.9 respectively.

Chart 10: Inclusion Index average rating per Country

Country	Average rating (Likert 1 to 5)
Bulgaria	3.4
Czech Republic	3.5
Estonia	3.6
Hungary	3.6
Latvia	4.1
Lithuania	3.9
Moldova	3,2
Poland	3.6
Romania	3.4
Slovakia	3.8

The data also show that a higher level of life skills corresponds to a higher level of inclusion; in fact, Chart 11 shows the average ratings related to inclusion divided by levels of LifeComp.

Chart 11: Inclusion Index average rating per LifeComp Index Range

Life Comp Level	Average rating (Likert 1 to 5)
Low	-
Medium-Low	3.1
Medium	3.3
Medium/High	3.6
High	4.1

ANALYSIS BY COUNTRY

Below is a summary chart that outlines the average ratings of each of the indices presented above, divided by the countries that took part in the UPLIFT programme and were able to collect a statistically enough questionnaires necessary for the evaluation. All the countries taken into consideration express very good average ratings, always higher than 3 in all the macro-dimensions investigated; despite some countries registering higher ratings, others slightly lower the trend remains positive. Chart 12 provides a concise summary of a programme that, based on the quantitative analysis presented here, promoted learning and the development of 21st-century skills, proving effective in achieving its intended goals. It is useful to note once again that the programme has been structured differently in the various participating countries, and that differences in scores could be influenced by both the different activities in which the students participated, and the specific challenges encountered by young people in various (both national and local) contexts, as well as by national regulations and the diversity of organization in educational systems, and policies for reception and integration[2].

Chart 12: All the Index per Country

Country	Life Comp Index	Entre Comp Index	Future Index	Inclusion Index
Bulgaria	3.7	3.7	3.8	3.4
Czech Republic	3.8	3.7	3.6	3.5
Estonia	3.8	3.7	3.6	3.6
Hungary	3.6	3.4	3.3	3.6
Latvia	3.8	3.7	3.7	4.1
Lithuania	3.7	3.7	3.5	3.9
Moldova	4.0	3.9	3.9	3,2
Poland	3.8	3.7	3.7	3.6
Romania	3.8	3.6	3.8	3.4
Slovakia	3.8	3.7	3.7	3.8

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[2] For a more in-depth look at the various specifications compare the section on qualitative analysis in the next chapter.

3.2 Qualitative analysis

This chapter provides a qualitative summary of the evaluation of the UPLIFT programme, focusing on insights gathered from focus groups conducted in nine European countries, involving educators who participated in the programme as facilitators.

Context:

- Implemented in medium-large cities across nine European countries, the UPLIFT programme aimed to support young Ukrainian refugees.
- The unique context of each country, encompassing refugee backgrounds, school systems, and reception procedures, influenced the programme's reach and effectiveness.

Participation and activities:

- Programme participants, particularly local students, demonstrated high interest and engagement, overcoming initial skepticism.
- Tailored approaches were necessary for Ukrainian and local students due to cultural and language barriers.
- Programme activities contributed to the enhancement of teamwork, communication, and presentation skills.

Impact on refugees:

- The programme instilled a sense of purpose and empowerment among refugees, fostering their ability to shape their future.
- It facilitated social interaction and integration with local communities.
- Opportunities to acquire new skills, especially in entrepreneurship, were provided.
- Refugees continue to grapple with feelings of displacement due to complex emotional and psychological factors.

Strengths and weaknesses:

- Strengths: Inspirational programme content, exposure to entrepreneurship, and opportunities for collaboration.
- Weaknesses: Time constraints for activities, inadequate pre-programme preparation, and a lack of adaptation to regional contexts.

Suggestions for improvement:

- Enhanced flexibility in timing and activity design based on contextual considerations.
- Improved pre-programme training and a greater focus on regional specificities.
- Provision of financial support for promising student projects.

The evaluation activity of the UPLIFT programme, based on voluntarily participation, included a focus group with teachers, operators, and tutors who took part in the UPLIFT programme in the following countries: Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Moldova, Romania, Czech Republic, Serbia, and Hungary. The focus groups were organised to deepen the reference context in which the activities were carried out, whether and how the activities of the country programme were adopted, the level of participation of young people in the activities, the changes experienced by the beneficiaries and by the subjects participating in the focus group, as well as investigating any critical issues and weaknesses and identifying suggestions and proposals for changes.

The focus groups also made it possible to highlight the differences or similarities between the various perspectives, both within each specific group of respondents, and by comparing the different groups and, consequently, the different countries. Each focus group saw the participation of teachers and operators (from 5 to 6) who played a central role in guiding, supervising, or supporting young people during the implementation of the programme's activities[3].

Intervention context

Regarding the implementation context of the programme, it is useful to highlight that UPLIFT was generally carried out in medium-large cities, in schools where Ukrainian refugee children/adolescents were present. In some countries, it has been more complicated to reach and involve young Ukrainian refugees and a process of mapping and communication with local associations and reception centres dealing with the crisis in Ukraine has been useful. Crawford et al. (2015) pointed out that people on the move or forced displaced people clearly have their own strategies and priorities for achieving self-reliance and building livelihoods and it can be difficult to reach out with them and try to include them in activities and programmes. Ukrainian refugees, in this specific context, present distinct challenges due to their transient nature. Many countries they pass through may view them as merely transit points rather than final destinations, complicating efforts to provide adequate support and assistance. It is also important to note that each country has had different methods of involvement and particular difficulties related to the school system, national regulations, and the different methods of reception and integration. As reported by Betts et al. (2017) refugees traverse various countries in search of safety and stability, they often find themselves in transition countries that may lack the resources or infrastructure to adequately support their needs. These countries, facing their own socio-economic and political challenges, may view refugees as temporary residents rather than long-term stakeholders, complicating efforts to provide comprehensive assistance and protection. Legal and policy frameworks in transition countries may also pose barriers to refugees' access to essential services such as education, healthcare, and employment, further exacerbating their vulnerabilities (Cannon, Twigg, 2003). Moreover, the fluid nature of displacement can hinder the establishment of sustainable interventions and community support networks, making it difficult to address the long-term needs of refugees and PoM effectively (Kury, Redo, 2018). Despite these challenges, programmes like

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[3] For specifics see Chart 1 at page 17

UPLIFT are crucial in ensuring that refugees receive the support and protection they need to rebuild their lives and contribute positively to their new environments.

The situation of Ukrainian refugees in Bulgaria stood out within the research:

> "Bulgaria is very different from other European countries in the type of Ukrainians who come here. Firstly, obviously, there are mostly moms with kids everywhere, but here, there are even more kids than in other countries. So these are women and kids and there are lots of people who are elders, who can be grandmothers, grandfathers. And those are people who have some, many of them, have some Bulgarian background. They have some relatives here, they know something about Bulgaria. And firstly, they came here to be like for a couple of months just to spend time here with their friends and family, and they were sure they would come back to Ukraine soon".

Similarly, in Serbia and Latvia, difficulties have been identified concerning the issue of Ukrainian refugees:

In Serbia:

> "The main thing in Serbia is that we don't have large numbers of Ukrainian refugees in total, also we're a transit country for them, they're here only for 10 days, and they're leaving for the EU because they realize that they've better opportunities there. We have around 70 kids in total, but they're changing all the time. "

In Latvia:

> "Ukrainian high school students started dropping school in September because they realized it was too difficult for them since they don't know the language, due to this they started attending on-line classes from Ukrainian schools and since this happened it was very difficult to catch them, because they were not in schools. There's a Ukrainian support centre and that's where we could reach all these students".

Ukrainian Refugees and integration

The recurring theme of the focus group held in Bulgaria was the context and background of people of Ukrainian nationality who took refuge in the country, who showed difficulty and reluctance to integrate into the new life context because they were convinced that they would soon return to their country of origin, unlike what happens in other countries more distant not only geographically but also socio-culturally, where people have resigned themselves to a long – if not definitive – stay in the country of arrival. The choice of Bulgaria as a destination was also dictated by linguistic reasons, being the Bulgarian language closest from a lexical and grammatical point of view to the Ukrainian language. Similarly, in the focus group with Serbia, the difficulty of engaging young Ukrainian refugees who consider the country only as a transit zone, the first access to the European Union, constantly emerges. This belief affects the participation of young people of Ukrainian origin

in UPLIFT activities and does not allow the programme to take place constantly and continuously, reducing the programme's ability to have a long-term effect on participants.

In Serbia:

> "It's hard to engage Ukrainians in every activity in Serbia because they're waiting for visas, so they don't really integrate, and they don't have the need to do that and they don't want to participate because they see Serbia as an opportunity to go elsewhere. Most of the people who participated in the first part of the programme have already left".

Participation

On the contrary, in other countries, there is a high level of interest and involvement of the children and young people who took part in the programme. As in each programme, there were initially some difficulties, especially concerning the skepticism of young people regarding this type of activity and the specificities of issues such as economics, business, and entrepreneurship. Despite this, there is a high rate of enthusiasm for the participation of young people in the focus groups.

Czech Republic:

> "Our children were involved one hundred percent in this programme, and it was very interesting for them to feel like grown-ups, they can create their own business, and it's good that they already have a plan, how to make it. And they were so much inspired that they even made their project real, [...] they were very involved in this, and it was very interesting for all of them."

In Estonia:

> "[…] But students were still very happy about the activities. They were very active, and participating, and results were made with them… Like for the workshops, they needed to think about the idea and present it; and those presentations were very impressive. I did not work a lot with them, they were short workshops. And students, I felt, were very interested. And after that, they started thinking about what they could do more. "

In Romania:

> "At first they couldn't understand what they needed to do, but after they started to understand, and now they're realizing that this could be useful for their future. But I must say it was interesting for those who were interested in their future. Some people do not care about their future and the knowledge that you need to be successful in your life and sustain yourself".

In Lithuania:

> "Firstly I saw that children were apart, you know, Lithuanian from Ukrainian children. But after, after the quest, after almost two hours, when they had to present their answers it was

amazingly good, they were talking, chit-chatting and laughing, so I think the involvement of Ukrainian, Lithuanian children, those 42 children were really involved in this activity, and also it helped not only for soft skills but this activity helped to know and see history and also culture of this new city for Ukrainian, and also Lithuanian".

Level of involvement

The programme took place in several phases, and it was highlighted within the focus groups that the level of commitment increased during the progress of the programme, especially when it passed to the inventive-creative-practical moment of the activities. Teachers and practitioners reported that an initial skepticism by a minority of students was largely eliminated, and the group of those who were little interested gradually decreased.

In Bulgaria:

"What I saw from Ukrainian kids, not only Ukrainian but Bulgarian as well of course, as I said there is always a group of active, with ideas, they want to do stuff, but there is a group of kids who are not interested and this is a larger group but then till the end of the event this group becomes smaller".

In Hungary:

"The children liked the programme, they were very interested in the activities and always asking questions. I think it is good for both local and Ukrainian children because it is not just fun, but also they can learn something, and it is good for their future. They get it, and that's the most important thing".

In Serbia:

"Majority of them were really interested in the programme and wanted to be part of that and some of them were suspicious at the beginning, but later they became more and more interested and were motivated to do more".

There was a different approach to activities by local students and Ukrainian students. It has become necessary for teachers to be more attentive and flexible to the needs of young refugees.

In Hungary:

"We know that teachers struggled to introduce Ukrainian children to Hungarian children and vice versa, and they were constantly asking for help, because it was very difficult for them to do class, this programme helped them a lot".

In Serbia:

"It was my first opportunity with people from different backgrounds, and I have to admit that I was very frustrated at the beginning because I didn't know what to expect and how to

communicate with them correctly. Some of them were also not in the mood to talk and some of them weren't really open to communicate".

In Estonia:

"[...] people were very involved and very enthusiastic, and would like to do something. […] Maybe usually, you know, working in Estonia...very calm... […] But with Ukrainian students, it was the opposite. You need to try to get their attention. And now I understand after we talked with colleagues also, because students had experiences in schools in Ukraine different from our schools. We need to use other methods now, working with them".

Ukrainian refugees' involvement

During the implementation of the programme, the physiological fragility of Ukrainian children and young people was highlighted. From Bulgaria, as has already been observed, it emerged that "Local youth are more flexible for me, more motivated, they have time, they have a different life, normal life. I think that all Ukrainian people, all people from Ukraine, are broken people. " Precisely for this reason, UPLIFT was designed as a possible response to an absolute emergency, taking advantage of the opportunity of the activities to help Ukrainian refugees face the challenges of their daily lives and those of the future. In addition, the programme's goals include presenting itself as a building block for the integration and inclusion of young Ukrainians in the target countries, as well as providing knowledge and structured foundations of entrepreneurship and business. The essential purpose of the programme was to help this wounded population, these "broken people", to rediscover a sense of personal fulfilment and to make them understand that they can aspire to something, and build something (Appadurai, 2004).

From Estonia:

"They [Ukrainians] feel like they can do something and they are participating in trade fair and so on... they feel better because of those activities and the other people they support, they all had trauma and have problems with mental health but it helped them".

From Moldova:

"With this programme, the [Ukrainian] students were able to make new friends, they liked the activities and wanted to do more and more. And they also became more active in school and during lessons, they became more confident and we noticed an improvement".

From Lithuania:

"They start making better not only soft skills but also empower skills like team management and presentation skills, and it's a big change of our students because they are understanding, they're in another country, they're not home, they just... they need making something better, something new and this project is also a change of our students about what they can do".

OUTCOMES

Teamwork, communication skills, self-confidence

The students found themselves deeply captivated by the professional treatment they received, which in turn instilled them with a profound sense of responsibility. Engaging with practical aspects, along with encountering diverse details and concepts distinct from the classroom setting yet closely intertwined with it, heightened the students' awareness of their capabilities and the array of opportunities in the workforce or academia awaiting them. According to the teachers, this experience also fostered greater self-confidence and a more methodical cultivation of entrepreneurial skills among the students. By actively participating in hands-on activities, student teams were exposed to novel collaborative approaches, necessitating effective communication, cooperation, and the consolidation of ideas into cohesive proposals. Notably, teachers emphasize that teamwork emerged as the most prominently refined dimension among the students. In confirmation of what has already emerged from the quantitative analysis, presented in the previous chapter, the dimension of change that improves thanks to the participation of the students in the programme is that of team working.

From Hungary:

> "I think the main change was the teamwork that I observed, children with different backgrounds had the chance to become friends through the activities, working together".

From Moldova:

> "There were many changes, but in general they were more open to communication, they are more open, and they want to be part of a team. They were mixed with Moldovan students, and I think some of them are trying to fully integrate with the locals".

From the Czech Republic:

> "In our group we had both students from Ukraine, and students from the Czech Republic. And they are from one class, but during this programme they started to communicate much more and developed their language skills. It was very nice that Czech children tried to help Ukrainian children translate and understand all the materials. And I know that they learned a lot during this project. And now they even start to do another school project together. So during this programme they made new groups that helped them do work in the future".

Regarding this topic, in the focus groups, it was possible to understand how the training and mentoring activities helped the students acquire the necessary skills to start and manage their own business. It emerged that local and Ukrainian refugees acquired hard skills, including language skills (interfacing with people of different nationalities at fairs and presentations) and entrepreneurial and economic-financial skills. Other skills acquired that were reported during the focus groups are communication and presentation skills, team management, cooperation, independence, and responsibility.

Teachers reported also that they appreciated the interest and commitment shown by the children, who behaved as adults. It was also pointed out that through the programme in all the countries where it was implemented, a dense network of collaborations and new knowledge was created, a source of inspiration and motivation, which allowed the exchange of experiences and ideas. Concerning the integration of young Ukrainians, it has generally emerged that the programme has guaranteed an opportunity for meeting, communication, and the possibility of making friends between local children and adolescents and Ukrainian refugees. Local students showed a great propensity to support their Ukrainian classmates and try to help them understand the language. According to the interviewees, UPLIFT has had the merit of having started an alternative training path that has positively surprised the students, creating a basis on which they can build a future in line with their aspirations and abilities.

Educator's changes

The activities of the programme have constituted a challenge not only for the students but also for the teachers, who have been able to measure themselves with a different way of being in the classroom, which has not only provided frontal lessons but also an exchange and continuous collaboration with the students.

Each operator and teacher, with a view to lifelong learning, also turned out to be "like a student with students" (Czech Republic) and reported having learned a lot from the activities and from the students themselves during the implementation of the programme, also obtaining the possibility of actively contributing to the crisis caused by the conflict.

From Estonia:

> "And actually the students have taught me a lot. It is difficult to point out everything at once sometimes... I even wonder how the students came up with some brilliant ideas. They taught me how to combine teamwork or time planning and even how to produce some products..."

From Latvia:

> "It was a challenge at the beginning to work with Ukrainians in class because of the language, but I enjoyed it, and it was an occasion to go out of my comfort zone. I enjoy new challenges. And also it was my personal help to the crisis that the war started, I found with this programme the chance to give my support to Ukraine".

Participation in the programme also showed teachers a new way of experiencing teaching activity. The material produced for the programme was useful for some teachers in their daily work in schools, many of whom report having used what they learned through the programme in their regular lessons. As Castells (2010) argues, lifelong and transversal learning is essential to allow people to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to face the new challenges of society, including at the social level.

From Estonia:

> "Second thing for me was the challenge of working with Ukrainian students. If you work a lot with students and teachers, you think, "okay, I can do everything". And so you have a group of students who acted differently, and you need to find another methodology to try other things to get their attention to work with them. And for me, it was challenging and interesting to deal with it and to understand what can help and what is interesting for them and offer them those things. "

From Hungary:

> "I gained experience, knowledge and techniques, and I'm using them on my regular job with my other students not involved in the programme. I'm also using these skills with my volunteer job with other refugees from Afghanistan, and it's a pity that they don't have similar programmes for them here, but I'm glad that I can share my knowledge with them".

Inclusion

The focus groups revealed the desire to cooperate and help as a natural and spontaneous characteristic of children and young people. The activities of the UPLIFT programme were a starting point for the integration and therefore the inclusion of Ukrainian refugees: they were able to understand their potential and the fact that they can affect their future and society concretely.

In Hungary:

> "This programme is also very important for inclusion, for example, it helped Ukrainian children to integrate into Hungarian society, helped them to know better Budapest and Hungary, the language and the culture, the history..."

> "[A Ukrainian teacher and mother of a participant speaking] My daughter, when we arrived in Budapest, was very sad, she didn't speak the language, and she was isolated, but with this programme she started to smile again because she was finally to feel accepted".

From Estonia:

> "What they decide to do, they can do it. It doesn't matter in Estonia, when they go back to Ukraine or to other countries...but to give them an understanding that they can do something that they would like. And I think it has integrated them into the society a lot, to give them an understanding that they have a choice".

It emerges from this brief section that the essence of the individual is their unfettered choice and that the development of a society goes hand in hand with individual freedom (Sen, 2001). Through the choices that are made, you can create a sense of identity and existence, which allows you to be part of a community. However, it has emerged from each country that, despite satisfactory results, it is difficult to argue that Ukrainian refugees can feel at home. The emotional and psychological condition of refugees depends on many individual variables and contexts. It is plausible that they

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may feel disoriented, frightened, and anxious because of their experiences and uncertainties related to flight and instability.

in Lithuania:

> "All of those activities helped to communicate and make new friends and communicate with Ukrainian, and Lithuanian children. I think these activities helped to build new relationships between youths and maybe build new ideas", although "if they feel more at home...I don't know, I think they miss home".

Although it is generally pointed out that the programme has promoted the inclusion and integration of Ukrainian children in the reception realities, some contexts, such as Romanian and Serbian, have presented some difficulties.

in Romania:

> "Romanians and Ukrainians are not mixed in the activities because we have different schools for Ukrainian youths, they are not included in our system and a lot of people are complaining about this. This is the main problem in Romania right now, even because the school system is not so good and it's not helping in this way".

Following Bourdieu (1979), who argues that access to cultural capital is fundamental to the presence of the individual in society. In this sense, the UPLIFT programme represented an important step for the integration of Ukrainian children and young people into the educational process; on the other hand, a reluctance emerged on the part of teachers and operators to consider this integration process in terms of effective social inclusion. As has already been observed, in the unique situation of Bulgaria:

> "Yes definitely, it's not such a crazy success, like they feel at home, absolutely, but there are steps".

Social inclusion occurs through the concomitant of multiple phenomena and events, including integration. It follows that certainly a programme like UPLIFT can lay the foundations, but the activities implemented alone are not enough to ensure full social inclusion of refugees in a short time.

Strengths and weaknesses

Each focus group ended with a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the programme by those who took part in the activities. As has already been pointed out, a particularly positive opinion emerged from the teachers and operators who took part in the activities of the programme, which was of considerable inspiration for students, in fact, in the Czech Republic "the enthusiasm and how the assistants also praised and inspired the pupils" was highly appreciated; the programme was also an opportunity for meeting and exchange between teachers, associations, organizations, etc. However, the main strength of the programme was to introduce the theme of entrepreneurship

and basic economic concepts to such young people, allowing them to acquire new skills useful for future employment. As an interviewee in Moldova points out, the importance of the activities is also understood by one of the entrepreneurs called to bring their testimony to a meeting with the youth:

> "Also entrepreneurs were impressed by the programme because when they were in school there were no projects like this and there was not any opportunity to do such things and be connected with entrepreneurs and start to develop an idea during such activities. My students had the idea that they couldn't be businessmen, but after this programme they now realize that they probably have a chance, and they want to try at least".

Suggestions

However, several critical issues have been identified, the resolution of which would be deemed beneficial for a potential future iteration of the UPLIFT programme. Three overarching areas have drawn criticism and elicited suggestions:

- **Involvement and activities**: the need for more exhibitions and fairs in which students can participate and more opportunities for local and Ukrainian children and young people to meet was highlighted, "there should be more events or joint Lithuanians and Ukrainians maybe training, where they could do things together for a long term". It should be noted that in some schools (for example in Estonia and Romania) only local students were present. In addition, it has been suggested to involve as many institutions as possible, and therefore to extend the programme widely at the national level. As it was pointed out in the focus group with Latvia, it would also be useful to involve parents and families of the children, especially in the most demonstrative parts of the activities, to fully immerse the children in the spirit of the programme. The involvement of the parental figures of Ukrainian refugees can allow better communication and greater inclusion for both children and adults. Finally, in several focus groups, was advanced the hypothesis of providing financial support for the most relevant ideas and projects that could be developed and produced; the hypothesis of a reward or a funding possibility could increase the level of engagement of students.
- **Time**: Overall, there was a perceived need for additional time to implement the activities. Despite the programme was built in an ever-changing situation where Ukrainian refugees were not prepared to stay long term in the host countries, the persistence of the war changed everything, and the need of more time emerged. Both in Estonia and Romania, it has been suggested to divide the activities of the programme over several years, thus making it a "step-by-step" programme. In Bulgaria, on the other hand, concerning the specific social context of Ukrainians present in the country, was outlined the need to have short-term projects. In Moldova, otherwise, it was proposed to organize activities during the summer holidays or during periods when children are less busy with school loads. Another determining factor was the difficulty in some countries in hiring teachers, often reluctant to dedicate their free time to following the activities. In general, therefore, there is a need for greater flexibility about the specific characteristics of the implementation context. Of course

- **Organization**: it was proposed to provide more basic knowledge of economics and business to students before implementing the programme and to involve different age groups. During the focus groups, it was stressed how the programme should better address the regional and socio-cultural specifications of each country, thus structuring a more detailed and comprehensive analysis strategy in the initial stages of the programme.

From Bulgaria:

"But I think in the beginning we should think about the strategy that we will have to focus, which areas, which cities, which organizations...would be the most resentful because considering as said before the specifics of the Bulgarian society and refugees, Ukrainian refugees here, sometimes we are trying to reach everyone, and it doesn't make sense because some groups of people are not willing to participate, they don't need it, and we may focus on them".

The need for greater flexibility concerning the context and the target population to be involved therefore emerges. A wider promotion of UPLIFT as a brand is also encouraged, to make it better known, to make its aims and objectives known, and to encourage participation.

The final judgment for UPLIFT is, therefore, extremely positive and stands as an excellent example to be enhanced in the panorama for refugee interventions. However, being a first attempt, it is not free from weaknesses and critical issues; some changes and interventions may allow for greater adherence of activities in various contexts in which the programme has been introduced.

4. Conclusions.

In conclusion, the evaluation analysis carried out on local young people and refugees of Ukrainian origin welcomed in the 11 member countries participating in the programme, provided a detailed overview of the impact of the UPLIFT programme on the development of 21st-century skills, with particular attention to the differences between local and Ukrainian youth.

While the programme significantly boosted teamwork and communication skills, Ukrainian refugees initially faced language barriers that impeded full participation. One interviewee highlighted the programme's language workshops as crucial in overcoming this hurdle and enabling her to effectively collaborate with local peers on a successful student-run market initiative. Though young participants, regardless of nationality, expressed positive career aspirations, further research is needed to assess the programme's long-term impact on entrepreneurial ventures, particularly considering the age factor. Interestingly, program implementation varied in some countries, focusing on digital entrepreneurship, while Poland emphasized social entrepreneurship. This highlights the need for context-specific adaptations while maintaining core programme values. Lastly, teachers reported using the programme's collaborative activities to enhance classroom management, demonstrating the positive spillover effect on professional skills.

The analysis of life skills related to LifeComp showed medium-high ratings, with particular emphasis on creative thinking, communication skills, and self-awareness. Outstanding results were seen among both groups surveyed, with slight differences in some of the dimensions, confirming the obvious physiological difficulties encountered and experienced by Ukrainian youth in participating in activities in contexts and languages other than their own, but also demonstrating how the programme was able to make a decisive impact despite these obstacles.

Regarding entrepreneurial skills (EntreComp), the results were generally positive, with medium-high ratings in all dimensions. The most developed skills were Teamwork and the Spirit of Initiative, while the Knowledge of Financial and Business Management dimension was slightly less accentuated. Again, the differences between the two groups, local and Ukrainian, are minimal. Further confirmation of the programme's validity was provided by the observation that young people who participated in more activities performed better in entrepreneurial skills.

The analysis of future orientation has shown the UPLIFT programme's positive influence. 70% of young people are positive or very positive concerning the future and have a clear idea of which path to take in the immediate post-school future. UPLIFT seems to have positively influenced young people also for the type of career to be pursued in the future; most young people, imagine themselves as entrepreneurs or university students in the next 5 years. In this case, the differences between local and Ukrainian young people reflect the instability and uncertainty of the situation

linked to the conflict still present between in Ukraine. Additionally, factors such as the age of the students and their relative position within the educational path could influence the overall data. According to Johnson et al. (2014) since future orientation is a developmental process, it is expected that it will increases with age, as there are greater opportunities for planning and anchoring. However, it is still important to emphasize how uplift can provide insights and facilitate orientation options.

As for the inclusion section of the analysis, which focused exclusively on the perception of young people of Ukrainian origin, the results are once again positive and encouraging. From what emerges from the answers to the questionnaires, UPLIFT has allowed young refugees to enter not only the various territorial contexts but also the social contexts, feeling welcomed both by their peers and by the territorial community of reference. Again, it was useful to point out that, among young people, those who participated in a greater number of activities perceive themselves as more included and accepted. The quantitative data are confirmed by the results of the focus groups, in which teachers and operators report a generally active and proactive involvement of Ukrainian young people in the activities, a propensity of local young people to welcome and help them, and, therefore, a perceived integration.

Analysis of focus groups conducted with teachers and practitioners who participated in the activities confirmed the positive results attributable to the UPLIFT programme. The programme enabled the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills and the strengthening of young people's competencies, particularly teamwork skills, social-relational and communication skills, organizational and strategic planning skills, and problem-solving skills. In the focus groups emerged the differences in the implementation of the programme in the various national contexts also. As already described, there were also organizational difficulties and structural obstacles that made it more complicated to carry out the activities. From the testimony of the participants in the focus groups, the programme was also effective in promoting an increase in professional skills, allowing them to get to know their students better and to acquire new educational and involvement methodologies.

In summary, the UPLIFT programme has proven to be effective in promoting students' life skills and propensity for entrepreneurship, also helping to support young people in orientation and planning for the future, and, above all, it has been fundamental in providing a possibility of integration and inclusion to young people of Ukrainian origin.

5. Recommendations

Considering the results obtained, some recommendations are suggested to improve the effectiveness of the programme and for future intervention design and implementation activities.

Intensify efforts in communication and inclusivity, especially to ensure the participation of young people from vulnerable backgrounds such as Ukrainian refugees. It is necessary to identify and address specific cultural barriers that could hinder their participation, such as:

- Linguistic difficulties: Targeted multilingual communication strategies could be implemented, such as translating materials and using interpreters during activities.
- Cultural differences: Initiatives could be organized involving other members of the Ukrainian community who are not direct beneficiaries of the programme, fostering mutual understanding and sharing of experiences.
- Distrust or lack of familiarity with the system: Specific informational meetings and individual mentoring sessions could be organized to facilitate integration into the programme.

Targeted multilingual communication strategies and initiatives to overcome any cultural barriers could be implemented, involving other members of the Ukrainian community who are not direct beneficiaries of the programme. Another recommendation is to try to make the two groups interact more, especially in extracurricular contexts where local and Ukrainian young people do not easily come into contact. It is also suggested to promote the development of supportive networks and communities among programme participants; this could facilitate the interchange of experiences, challenge sharing, and collaboration among young people from different backgrounds.

In terms of implementation, it would be useful to adjust training activities more according to the specific needs of participants in different national contexts. This could involve a more in-depth analysis of the local skills required in the labour market and an adaptation of learning activities accordingly. This could be achieved through:

- In-depth analysis of the skills required by the local job market: Surveys could be conducted with companies operating in the area or meetings could be organized with industry experts to identify the most demanded skills.
- Adaptation of content and teaching methodologies: Based on the identified skills, specific modules with practical activities and relevant simulations for the local work context could be developed.
- Use of local educational resources: Local trainers could be involved or company case studies could be used to make the training more concrete and relevant.

Strengthen collaboration with companies and local communities to ensure better integration of the skills acquired in the real world. This could involve activating closer partnerships with local businesses to develop practical projects and targeted internships. At the same time, it would be

useful to provide funding or support for the best ideas developed by the students; the hypothesis of a reward could increase the level of participation and encourage competition and the development of innovative projects. Several methods could include:

- Partnerships with local businesses: establishing working groups to develop practical projects that meet the concrete needs of companies, involving young participants in their realization.
- Targeted internships: organizing training internships at partner companies, aligned with the professional aspirations of young people and the profiles required by businesses.
- Funding or awards for the best ideas: establishing a fund to support the realization of the best entrepreneurial ideas developed by young people during the programme, incentivizing creativity, and innovation.
- Establish post-participation follow-up programmes to monitor the progress of young people over time.

Regarding integration, intensify efforts in communication and inclusiveness, especially to ensure the participation of young people from vulnerable backgrounds such as Ukrainian refugees. These programmes could include ongoing support for career guidance, access to the labour market, or assistance in setting up new businesses.

Despite the positive experience of the evaluation and the excellent results achieved, to further enhance the impact generated, for any future implementations of the programme or similar projects, it would be desirable to conduct a longitudinal study to understand the changes to an even more in-depth extent, the most effective methods, and approaches. Regarding quantitative measurements, as an alternative to the longitudinal study, it is also suggested to apply a quasi-experimental "before-after" design to only one group (Corbetta, 1999) to highlight the results more clearly. The longitudinal study to be implemented is prospective in nature, where data are initially collected from a sample of individuals at a specific time (baseline) and then followed over time (with intervals that could be annually) to monitor changes. The advantages of longitudinal studies include identifying and understanding the causes and consequences of changes over time. Furthermore, they provide more accurate information than cross-sectional studies because data are collected from a sample of individuals over time, rather than at a single point in time. However, the disadvantages may include high costs and lengthy timeframes as data must be collected repeatedly from a sample of individuals over time. Additionally, the sample mortality rate could be high and influence the results. Nevertheless, this type of study can provide valuable information on factors influencing changes over time and can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. In conclusion, it is suggested to set up the evaluation research before the start of the activities and continue it throughout the intervention, a significant aspect that would also allow the ongoing verification of the achievement of the objectives, the validity of the Theory of Change, the possibility of allocating resources for implementation and making changes and adjustments during the programme. For the qualitative phase, it is suggested to:

- Structure the focus groups to encourage active participation from all young people and gather feedback on both positive and negative experiences.
- Plan observation sessions to cover a variety of programme activities, observing interactions between young people and trainers, as well as participation and overall interest.
- Analyse the data collected through focus groups and observations together to obtain a more comprehensive view of the programme's impact on young participants.

Finally, it would be useful to combine participant focus groups with observation sessions by the evaluation team during the implementation of activities to have a greater ability to understand the context and the level of youth involvement and participation in the intervention pathways. Participative observation is suggested because it offers several advantages in understanding the dynamics and effectiveness of the programme:

- Insight into Real-Time Interactions: Participative observation allows researchers to witness interactions between participants and facilitators/trainers as they naturally occur during programme activities. This firsthand observation provides valuable insights into the actual dynamics of the programme, including communication patterns, group dynamics, and levels of engagement.
- Contextual Understanding: By observing programme activities in context, researchers can better understand how participants respond to different aspects of the programme within their real-life environment. This contextual understanding helps in interpreting the significance of observed behaviours and responses.
- Triangulation of Data: Combining participative observation with other data collection methods, such as interviews or focus groups, allows for triangulation of data. This means that researchers can cross-validate findings from different sources, enhancing the reliability and validity of the study.

Overall, participative observation is suggested because it offers a holistic understanding of the programme's impact by capturing real-time interactions, providing contextual insights, enabling rich data collection, facilitating data triangulation, and empowering participants in the research process.

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