

Situation analysis

**of early childhood education and care (ECEC) services in support
of Ukrainian refugees across EU member states**

Summary of the First Synthesis Report | October 2022

Study overview

In May 2022, UNICEF commissioned Ecorys to carry out a Situation Analysis of early childhood education and care (ECEC) services in support of Ukrainian refugees across EU member states. Over eight months and three cycles, the research aims to provide strategic and operational insights to country level responses to the crisis, and to inform ongoing actions regarding ECEC provision for Ukrainian refugee children. The work is being carried out in close cooperation with the European Commission (DG EAC) and the EU Working Group on ECEC, who have provided invaluable support.

About this report

This report summarizes the interim findings following the first cycle of data collection and analysis from the 27 EU member states and Moldova between June and August 2022, guided by an Analytical Framework examining ECEC in the context of the Ukraine crisis response (see Appendix 1). Research was carried out by native language speakers in each country, before undergoing a thematic synthesis. In total, 93 interviews were carried out, and 580 documentary sources were reviewed. The findings provide a snapshot of the situation in August 2022 and should be interpreted in that context.

The report includes the Analytical Framework (**Appendix 1**) and a summary of factors supporting effective transitions and integration of refugee children, from a review of the literature (**Appendix 2**).

Background context to the ECEC response in Europe

ECEC responses to the Ukrainian refugee crisis across the EU27 and Moldova have developed in response to the specific characteristics of the conflict. The ongoing war and situation of martial law has seen disproportionate numbers of women and young children among the displaced persons, many of whom have arrived expecting to return to Ukraine in the belief that the conflict will soon end, contributing towards delays in applying for residency, asylum or temporary protection.

The flow of refugees has also been geographically uneven and dynamic¹. While disproportionate numbers of refugee families are located in the countries bordering Ukraine, others are in transit. Distal EU countries, including Mediterranean countries, tend to receive smaller numbers of refugees and are more likely to be final destinations. Views towards permanency have also shaped Ukrainian refugee families' capacities to engage with ECEC services, while supply and accessibility of ECEC services have moderated the extent to which ECEC services have been available when needed.

In Europe, many countries reported over-subscription for ECEC services and were facing staffing shortages even prior to the current crisis. The influx of Ukrainian refugee children and their families has therefore met with significant supply-side issues – a phenomenon that has been more pronounced at municipal level, where demand for ECEC provision is often concentrated in urban centres. The migration has also precipitated a demand for ECEC professionals and volunteers with knowledge of the Ukrainian language, and additional expertise to address the diverse psychosocial needs of migrant and refugee children in the context of fleeing conflict in Ukraine.

¹ FOR EXAMPLE, IN POLAND, 1.1 MILLION UKRAINIAN REFUGEES APPLIED FOR REGISTRATION, REPRESENTING 3% OF THE TOTAL POPULATION. IN GREECE, 16,668 APPLIED FOR REGISTRATION, REPRESENTING 0.15% OF THE TOTAL POPULATION.

Key dimensions of ECEC responses at a country level

Legislative responses

The research finds that host countries have invariably strived to give Ukrainian refugee children the same entitlements to ECEC as their local resident populations, although this has been achieved to a varying degree.

The conditions for this eligibility, especially relating to asylum, residency, or temporary protection status, health and vaccination requirements, and/or employment or training status, have sometimes created barriers to access. Many countries have responded with emergency legislation to provide exemptions, additional subsidies or financial support, and by offering alternative forms of 'open' ECEC where parents can accompany their children, which can help 'bridge' children's transitions into formal ECEC settings.

The Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382 of 4 March 2022 led new legislation to be introduced in all countries within the EU27 and Moldova through the Temporary Protection Directive². While the Directive has set a common foundation, some countries have introduced additional legislation aimed at young child refugees and their families.

Despite the promising nature of these responses, many challenges have been encountered in their implementation. These include procedural delays, where new laws are legislated quickly; communication gaps; and a lack of adequate policies and programs focusing on the inclusion of Ukrainian children into ECEC settings specifically, meaning that even where places are secured, the suitability of measures and interventions to fully include them is not assured.

Programmatic responses include:

- ▶ **Developing materials** for staff in ECEC centres.
- ▶ **Introducing additional activities and classes** for Ukrainian children, aiming to facilitate inclusion.
- ▶ **Providing in-facility translation services** for Ukrainian parents of children in ECEC, mainly through volunteers within ECEC settings.
- ▶ **Providing support and information** to engage Ukrainian teachers, scaling-up recruitment and simplifying application and recognition processes.
- ▶ **Organising free transportation and meals** at ECEC settings for UA children and families.
- ▶ **Providing support to Ukrainian parents** with identifying and registering for ECEC services.
- ▶ **Providing targeted psychosocial interventions**, including parenting programmes.

² EUR-LEX - 32022D0382 - EN - EUR-LEX (EUROPA.EU). [HTTPS://EUR-LEX.EUROPA.EU/LEGAL-CONTENT/EN/TXT/?URI=CELEX%3A52022XC0321%2803%29&qid=1647940863274](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/txt/?uri=CELEX%3A52022XC0321%2803%29&qid=1647940863274)

Programmatic responses

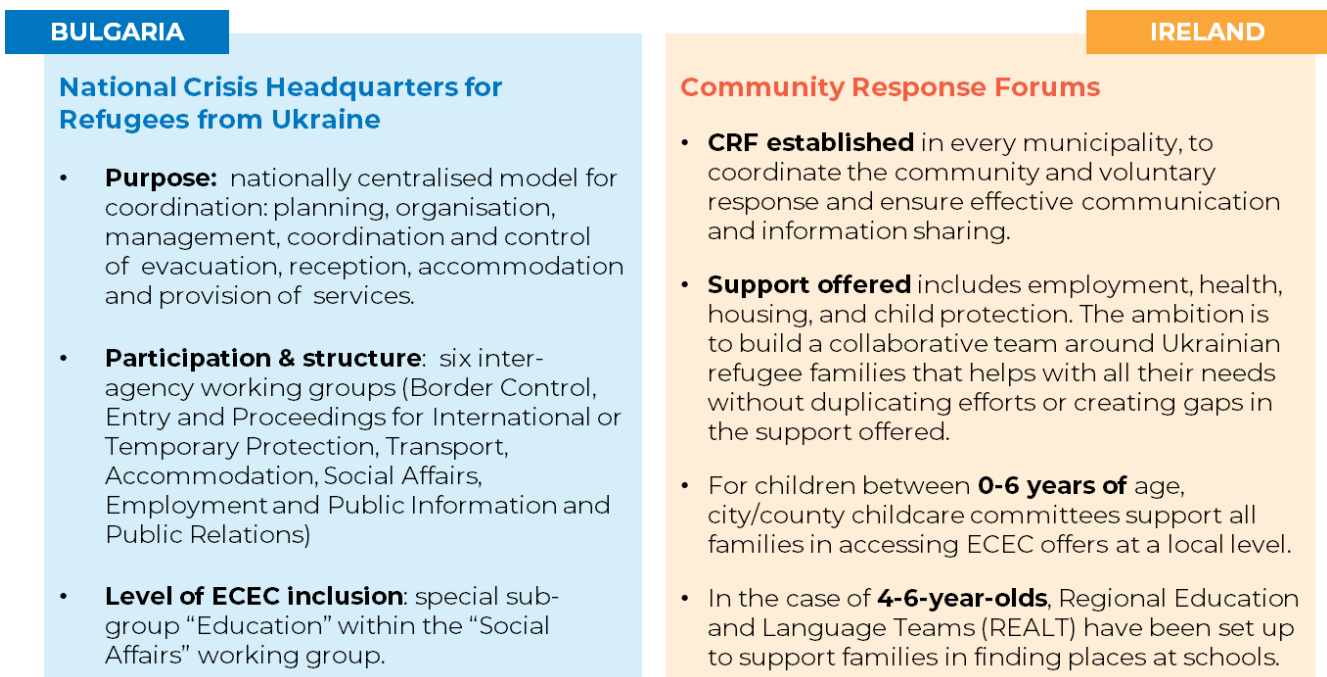
Most programmatic efforts by actors at national and local levels, including public authorities and civil society organisations, have focused on addressing staff shortages, promoting the skills and resources necessary to integrate children into ECEC settings, providing information services, and mobilising provision.

Provisions for psychosocial support for young children and their families have sometimes been overlooked amid the efforts to secure access to education and employment. There is a similar mixed picture for other specialist services³.

Non-profit, non-governmental, and civil society organisations have also played a key role in delivering support to young Ukrainian refugees and their families, aligned with public efforts to a greater or lesser degree, and often covering unmet needs. This includes human rights monitoring, disseminating knowledge, expertise and best practices, providing information services, counselling, care, psychological help, recreational and sport activities, and coordinating fundraising campaigns.

Challenges noted include the decentralisation of governance and education systems in some countries, including the administrative separation of arrangements for 0-3 and 3-6 ECEC provision, which can be a barrier to effective cooperation horizontally between ministries, and vertically between national and sub-national levels; the lack of existing comprehensive infrastructure and mechanisms for the successful reception of refugees, and the short timeframes to act, which have placed extreme pressure on the development of effective and well-planned organisational structures.

Figure 1: Coordination of the national response – country examples



³ SPECIAL PROVISION (INFORMATION, ACTIVITIES, PROGRAMS) TO INTEGRATE UKRAINIAN CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS WAS IDENTIFIED IN AUSTRIA, ESTONIA, FRANCE, LUXEMBOURG AND SWEDEN. CARE SERVICES FOR CHILDREN FROM UKRAINIAN ORPHANAGES WERE IDENTIFIED IN SOLVENIA AND SPAIN. PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT SERVICES IN ECEC FACILITIES FOR WERE IDENTIFIED IN 11 COUNTRIES DURING CYCLE 1.

Financial responses

The study shows that countries and organisations have mobilized funding at an unprecedented level. However, there is a lack of systemic data collected and reported on funding allocated to refugees in general, and ECEC in particular (total amount, targeting & distribution), and a lack of clarity regarding sources (national, regional budgets, EU funds, fundraising and international support). This will be a focus for cycle 2 of the data collection.

Table 1: Examples of ECEC funding mechanisms

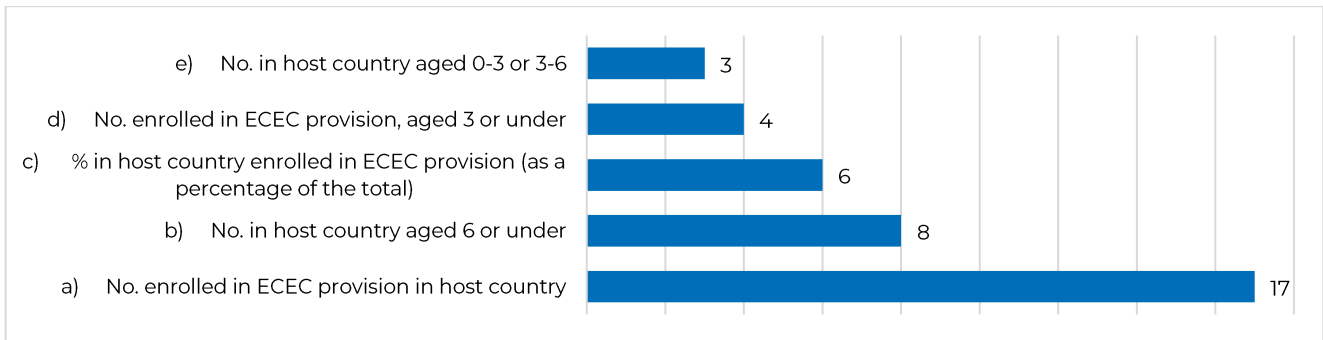
Type / measure	Countries (examples)
a. ECEC dedicated funding from national budget	AT, FI, CZ, IE
b. Special allowance to cover ECEC needs	EE, IE, LT, NL, SK, SI, PL, ES
c. Special solutions, drawing on EU funds	HU, ES, MT, BG, HR, CY
d. Significant allocation of funds at municipal level	SE, BL, FI, IE

Monitoring and evaluation

The research to date has underlined a range of gaps in available data, evidence and information, both on the number, distribution and enrolment of Ukrainian refugees, and on the responses enacted to welcome them at national and local levels. Specifically, the study suggests that:

- ▶ **there is substantial variation in the type, granularity and reliability of data available on Ukrainian refugee families and subsequently young children between and within host countries.** Countries have employed a diverse range of counting mechanisms, ranging from the number of residence permits, to national identification numbers, asylum certifications, and temporary protection statuses granted. This is likely to result in underestimates, compounded by data lags, and the fact that some Ukrainian refugee families avoid or delay formally registering. Furthermore, Schengen arrangements mean that Ukrainian refugees may register their arrivals in host countries and move on to other countries without announcing their departures.
- ▶ **the extent to which host countries are able to gather and/or publish data according to age group also varies considerably, as do the classifications.** Accurate data on the population of Ukrainian children aged 0-3 and 3-6 is seldom available in the statistics gathered at national level, and there are often also within-country irregularities in the type of data gathered. Furthermore, the decentralisation of data collection, ECEC provision, and refugee responses across municipalities within highly federalised countries has meant that in some cases, statistics on the number of Ukrainian refugees or their ECEC enrolment are not aggregated at the national level⁴.

⁴ IN COUNTRIES WITH ESTIMATES FOR ECEC ENROLMENT RATES AMONG ELIGIBLE UA CHILDREN, VALUES VARY BUT ARE GENERALLY LOW: **10%** IN GREECE; **19.1%** IN CZECHIA, **23%** IN SPAIN; **33%** IN SLOVAKIA; **40%** IN LITHUANIA.

Table 2. Availability of data on young Ukrainian migrant and refugee children (No. of countries)

BASE: 28 COUNTRIES (EU27 & MOLDOVA)

The unreliability of these data has implications for understanding the enrolment of young Ukrainian children in ECEC. Also of concern is that categories of vulnerability are rarely identifiable. The inconsistencies in recording the numbers and status of children with special educational needs, including developmental difficulties and disabilities is particularly concerning from a welfare perspective, while data gaps on the psychosocial needs among young child refugees and their families are also potentially significant, in view of the likely exposure of young children and families to conflict and toxic stress in the conflict zone.

Key messages

The research to date elaborates the steps undertaken by EU Member States and Moldova, to mobilise and respond to secure access to high quality ECEC services for Ukrainian refugee children and their families. The crisis has seen unprecedented mobilisation at European and national levels.

An impressive range of ECEC programmes, frameworks and tools has been developed across Europe, with strong cross-sectoral collaboration. The situation has presented opportunities by:

- ▶ challenging public authorities and NGOs to collaborate and to ‘think outside of the box’ in their approach towards planning ECEC provision, initiating new partnerships and delivery models.
- ▶ stress-testing national ECEC systems and prompting action on pre-existing capacity issues.
- ▶ leveraging additional investments for ECEC, with potential benefits for the wider system.

The research provides insights to factors that have enabled the ECEC response. It shows that:

- ▶ no one-size-fits-all, and solutions must be tailored to the circumstances in each country, according to refugee numbers and status, system capacity, and the organisation of decision-making between national and sub-national levels and between 0-3 and 3-6 age ranges.
- ▶ countries adopting a whole-system approach towards the inclusion of migrant children and families in ECEC provision reported adjusting more rapidly. Similarly, those taking prior systemic actions on access and inclusion (e.g. during the Syrian refugee crisis) were often better prepared.
- ▶ hallmarks of effective refugee education are present among the 28 countries. These include multiagency and cross-sectoral solutions to meet refugee families’ housing, health and education needs in tandem; intercultural education and language learning, and workforce development measures alongside the primary focus on access and enrolments in ECEC.

Despite best efforts, however, the scale of the ongoing challenge is clear:

- ▶ the situation remains in a state of flux, and the degree of permanency is not known. Many families are still holding out to return to UA, and this has already been possible in some cases.
- ▶ despite a strong legislative response at EU level, driven by the Temporary Protection Directive, gaps exist between policy and practice in many countries. This is due to a lack of available ECEC services, proof of status requirements, and timescales for implementing emergency legislation.
- ▶ reflecting these issues, the inclusion of Ukrainian children in ECEC systems is currently uneven across Europe, and enrolment rates are reported to be low at the time of writing.

A central message is that long-term preparedness must be the end goal. Recognising and value the cultural and linguistic diversity of refugee children and their families and the skills and expertise they contribute is essential to prevent stigmatization and to look beyond the emergency context.

Priorities for action

The research identifies number of key actions that should assume priority status. They include:

At a national level:

1. **achieve a deeper understanding of ECEC needs and priorities among displaced Ukrainian young children and their families**, by improving monitoring and evaluation arrangements and amplifying the voices of children and families within ECEC planning responses (UNCRC Art. 12).
2. **strengthen needs assessment tools and approaches, and the consistency with which they are implemented**, with a focus on welfare and harm prevention, and specialist provision e.g., psychosocial support, parenting programmes, and services for children with disabilities, developmental delays/difficulties and other special needs..
3. **develop a cross-sectoral and whole systems approach for implementing ECEC provision in response to the crisis**, ensuring that arrangements for 0-3-, and 3–6-year-olds are synchronised between ministries to support with continuity, transitions, and transparent financing.
4. **initiate a long-term strategic planning approach at a country level**, looking beyond emergency arrangements under the Temporary Protection Directive and preparing national ECEC systems for future migration events, with an emphasis on access, quality, and inclusion.

At a regional, European level:

5. **identify, collate and disseminate promising examples of policies and practices** from across Europe, improving access to research, data, programmatic guidance, tools and frameworks.
6. **facilitate peer learning between countries and organisations** by establishing synergies between transnational networks and forums for ECEC, including those that are currently managed by the European Commission, the OECD, and the Council of Europe.

Appendix 1: Analytical framework for the review (first cycle)

Subject area	Information	Methods/source
<p>Context</p>	<p>Ukrainian refugees in numbers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ per country, with a break-down by age. ▶ eligible for ECEC, with a breakdown by age and ECEC type. ▶ enrolled in ECEC, with a break-down by age and ECEC type. <p>In addition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ the geographic spread of the refugees and children eligible and enrolled in ECEC, noting which national actors/regions have been particularly affected (mobilised to respond). <p>ECEC challenges related to Ukrainian refugee reflux, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ lack of funds or constraining rules around funds allocation. ▶ lack of expertise in Ukrainian language, inclusive education, working with children who have experienced trauma. ▶ administrative bottlenecks, e.g. lack of human resources to process recruitment of Ukrainian professionals. ▶ organisational challenges, e.g. separation of Ukrainian ECEC participants from others. 	<p>Desk review:</p> <p>national or local policy and legal documents; academic and grey literature; statistical data; websites of central and local authorities, agencies and NGOs involved in ECEC response</p> <p>Consultation with the WG</p> <p>Stakeholder consultations</p>
<p>ECEC-related responses</p>	<p>Regulatory measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ types of legislative and policy initiatives related to ECEC and implemented to address the needs of young Ukrainian refugees. ▶ ECEC services available to Ukrainian children between 0 and 6 years of age. 	<p>Desk review:</p> <p>national or local policy and legal documents; academic and grey literature</p> <p>Consultation with the WG</p> <p>Stakeholder consultations</p>

Subject area	Information	Methods/source
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ emergency funds mobilised to respond to the Ukrainian refugee influx, including from EU funds. <p>Other forms of response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ types of programming responses not necessarily connected to any specific laws and policies. 	
Future prospects	<p>Emerging ECEC-related plans and responses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ expectations as to the number of Ukrainian refugees eligible for ECEC. ▶ information on the planned (but not yet adopted and implemented) ECEC responses. ▶ comment on the ongoing national debates in relation to ECEC responses to the Ukrainian refugee crisis. ▶ promising practices and positive solutions to challenges and opportunities for the effective ECEC response. 	<p>Desk review:</p> <p>academic and grey literature</p> <p>Consultation with the WG</p> <p>Stakeholder consultations</p>

Appendix 2: Factors supportive of effective transitions and integration of refugee children in ECEC

- ▶ **A whole system approach** towards ECEC, aligning resources and strategy at all levels - individual, group, inter-institutional, and governance, follow the principle of ‘competent systems.’⁵
- ▶ **A cross-sectoral and multi-disciplinary framework**, valuing the involvement of NGOs as partners⁶ and promoting continuity between ECEC and primary schooling to provide supportive transitions.
- ▶ **Investment in holistic professional development programs** that aim to enhance relational practice with refugee children and their families, building reflexive competences, intercultural competences, foundational linguistic competences.⁷
- ▶ **Adopting strength-based approaches** and avoiding the risk of stigmatizing refugee children and their families and underestimating their competence; focus on nurturing agency and resilience.
- ▶ **Attention to institutional climate** and environments that promote equality and a ‘sense of belonging and place’ for children and families from a migrant background.⁸
- ▶ **Scaling-up trauma-informed programs**⁹ and wholesale investment in psychosocial support training of trainers, alongside cultural awareness.
- ▶ **Amplifying voices** of children, families, and professionals, through the use of participatory assessment and evaluation,¹⁰ and creating spaces for children’s voices to be heard.¹¹
- ▶ **Addressing legal dimensions** of inclusion and access, so that children with a refugee background and their families know their rights and have access to justice and legal representation, including legal aid, outreach, and building capacity for ombudspersons.

5 URBAN, M., M. VANDENBROECK, J. PEETERS, A. LAZZARI, AND K. VAN LAERE. (2011) *COMPETENCE REQUIREMENTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE*. CORE RESEARCH DOCUMENTS. BRUSSELS: EUROPEAN COMMISSION.

6 LAZZARI, A., AND M. VANDENBROECK. (2012) *LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE PARTICIPATION OF DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN ECEC SETTINGS IN EUROPE*.

7 BOVE AND SHARMAH (2020), *OP. CIT.*

8 GUERRA, R., RODRIGUES, R. B., AGUIAR, C., CARMONA, M., ALEXANDRE, J., & LOPES, R. C. (2019). SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT AND WELL-BEING OF IMMIGRANT CHILDREN: THE ROLE OF ACCULTURATION ORIENTATIONS AND PERCEIVED DISCRIMINATION. *JOURNAL OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY*, 75, 104-118.

9 PARK, M., AND C. KATSIAFICAS (2019). *MITIGATING THE EFFECTS OF TRAUMA AMONG YOUNG CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES: THE ROLE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS*. WASHINGTON, DC: MIGRATION POLICY INSTITUTE.

10 BOVE, C., B. JENSEN, O. WYSŁOWSKA, R. L. IANNONE, S. MANTOVANI, AND M. KARWOWSKA-STRUCZYK. 2018. “HOW DOES INNOVATIVE CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPD) OPERATE IN THE ECEC SECTOR? INSIGHTS FROM A CROSS-ANALYSIS OF CASES IN DENMARK, ITALY AND POLAND.” *EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF EDUCATION* 53: 34–45.

11 OLIVEIRA-FORMOSINHO, J., AND J. FORMOSINHO. 2012. “PRAXEOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN EARLY CHILDHOOD: A CONTRIBUTION TO A SOCIAL SCIENCE OF THE SOCIAL.” *EUROPEAN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION RESEARCH JOURNAL* 20 (4): 471–476.

- ▶ **Making intercultural education central to ECEC**, respecting diverse beliefs and values, celebrating minority languages, and avoiding practices of ‘assimilation.
- ▶ **An emphasis on parental engagement in children’s learning** in ECEC, and community engagement through social and cultural events; supporting connectivity between home, ECEC setting and community services, and co-education with parents, cultural negotiation.¹²
- ▶ **Harnessing digital tools and infrastructure** to allow for distance learning of Ukrainian children, to support pedagogical practices, home-setting communication, family reunification processes and communication with separated families in Ukraine.
- ▶ **Continuous monitoring and evaluation** to check for unintended negative consequences of measures, avoiding segregation or inadvertently deepening existing inequalities.¹³

SOURCE: RAPID REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE (ECORYS)

12 [TOBIN 2016]

13 BOVE AND SHARMAH (2020), OP. CIT.