

Best Practice:

Integrated Model for Ensuring Access to Early Childhood Education Through the Organisation of Educational Logistics at the Hromada Level



Project: “Strengthening Child-Oriented Budgeting at the Subnational Level”

This document has been prepared to inform and share with partner hromadas of the Project an example of a managerial decision that can be used to improve access to early childhood education services. The practice described herein does not constitute an assessment of the effectiveness of any specific hromada’s policy and does not include an analysis of the adequacy of service coverage, trends in attendance at early childhood education institutions, or detailed financial calculations. The primary purpose of this document is to enhance the awareness of local self-government bodies regarding possible managerial and budgetary approaches used across hromadas that may be adapted in accordance with local conditions.

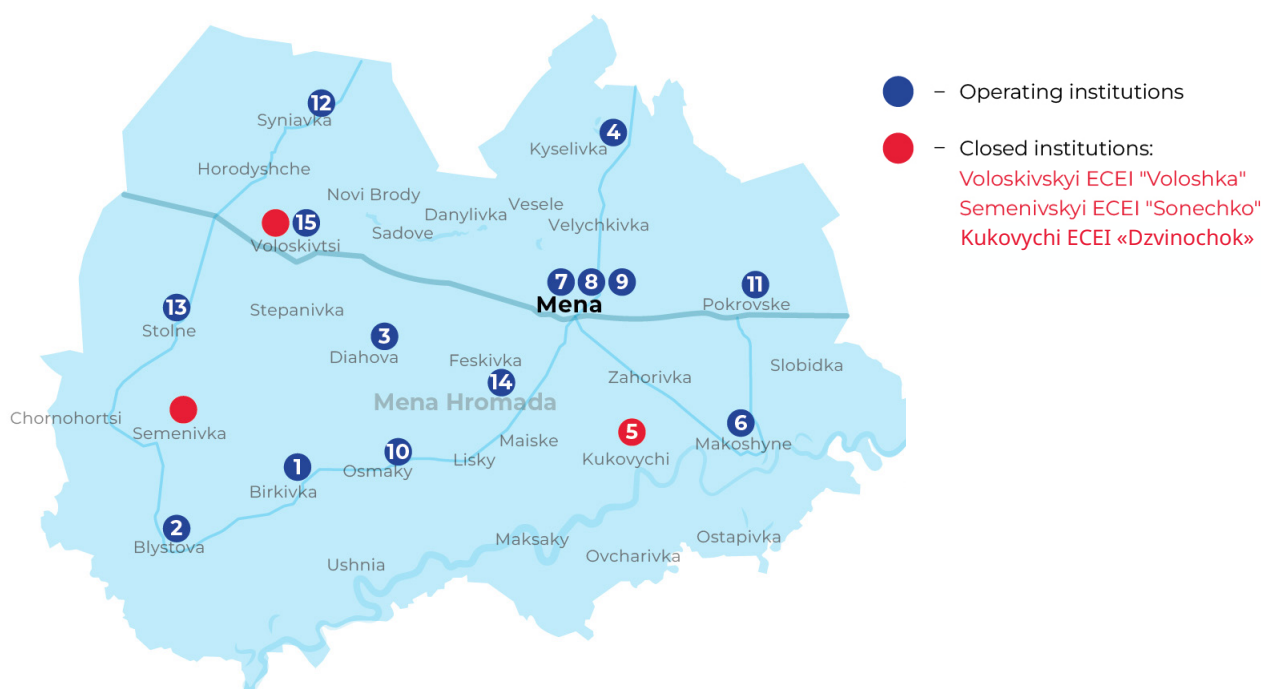
1. Context and Rationale for the Practice

The state of access to early childhood education in the Mena Territorial Hromada of Chernihiv Oblast (hereinafter — the Mena Hromada) in 2021–2024 is primarily determined by the spatial organisation of the network of early childhood education institutions and by the settlement patterns of children of preschool age across the hromada.

Functioning early childhood education institutions in the Mena Hromada are concentrated mainly in the city of Mena and in several designated hub settlements (Fig. 1), while a number of rural settlements do not have their own early childhood education institutions (hereinafter — ECEIs) or lost them as a result of network optimisation measures.

Fig. 1

Location of ECEIs in the Mena Hromada as of 01.01.2025



Under these conditions, for children of preschool age living in remote settlements, the key determinant of access to early childhood education services is not the availability of places in the institutions, but the feasibility of physically reaching them.

- *ECEIs are currently attended by 74.6% of children aged 0–6 years (505 children out of 677).*
- *The ECEI capacity within the hromada allows for 79.8% coverage (540 ECEI places / 677 children).*
- *The design capacity of ECEIs is utilised at 93.5% (505 enrolled children out of 540 design places of ECEIs).*

Separate ECEIs within the hromada operate below their design capacity, creating opportunities for more efficient use of existing infrastructure and for ensuring children's access to early childhood education services without additional capital expenditures.

7 ECEIs (50%) are utilised at 50–90% of their design capacity:

- *Osmaky ECEI (preschool) “Kapitoshka” — 50%*
- *Early Childhood Education Branch of Voloskivtsi Gymnasium — 63%*
- *Mena ECEI (nursery–kindergarten) of combined type “Children’s Academy” — 70%*
- *Kyselivka ECEI (preschool) “Veselka” — 76%*
- *CEI (preschool) “Dzvinochok” — 86%*
- *Pokrovske ECEI (nursery–kindergarten) “Kapitoshka” — 87%*
- *Diahova ECEI (preschool) “Veselka” — 89%.*

Per-child budget expenditures differ significantly across the hromada’s ECEIs (from UAH 39,256 in the Stolne ECEI “Sonechko” to UAH 85,653 in the Mena “Children’s Academy” in 2024). These differences are driven by varying group sizes as well as territorial, organisational, and operational characteristics of each institution. Combined with the spatial configuration of the network, these factors reinforce the need for managerial decisions aimed at equalising access to early childhood education services across the entire hromada.

In this context, organising transportation for preschool-age children to and from operational ECEIs is considered a practical tool to ensure equitable access to early childhood education services for all children in the hromada, regardless of their place of residence. It also serves as a means of using available education financing resources more efficiently.

2. Core Elements of the Best Practice: Transporting Preschool-Age Children by School Bus

The practice of transporting preschool-age children has been implemented in the hromada since at least 2019 and forms part of the hromada’s educational logistics system. In response to identified territorial disparities, the Mena Hromada introduced **the practice of organising transportation of preschool-age children to seven functioning ECEIs and back using school buses**. A total of 13 buses are used for this purpose, operating 21 routes of varying length on a daily basis. During the period of martial law, routes may be promptly adjusted to ensure the uninterrupted and safe transportation of children.

This practice is grounded in the following prerequisites, confirmed by analytical and graphical materials:

- the presence **of functioning ECEIs with available capacity**, concentrated in central and selected hub settlements;
- the absence or closure of ECEIs in several rural settlements;
- the availability of school buses in the hromada, already used for transporting students of general secondary education institutions;
- available seats on **school buses** that can be used for transporting preschool-age children.

Transportation of preschool-age children is organised from settlements within the hromada that are not covered by the ECEI network to functioning institutions (and back), taking into account institutional operating schedules, school transport routes, and safety requirements. Preschool-age children are accompanied by educators. On routes where no teaching staff are present, accompanying staff positions have been introduced

School buses are also used to transport education personnel, which helps ensure the staffing capacity of institutions and supports employment among workers residing in various settlements of the hromada.

To synchronise the time children spend in early childhood and general secondary education institutions, after-school groups have been arranged in schools. After classes conclude, children remain under adult supervision until the departure of the school buses, which simultaneously transport both schoolchildren and preschool-age children back home.

Parents are informed about the availability of transportation for preschool-age children through educational institutions, starosta districts, teaching staff, and during regular daily communication. Due to the long-standing operation of this practice, hromada residents are generally well aware of the possibility of using the transportation service.

Thus, the hromada utilises its existing infrastructure resources to address the issue of access to early childhood education without establishing new institutions or incurring additional capital expenditures.

3. Focus on Early Childhood

Organising transportation for preschool-age children is an important condition for ensuring access to services for children under age 3 years in hromadas where the population is not concentrated in settlements with existing ECEIs. This practice includes children of nursery age.

Within the hromada, 4 nursery–kindergarten institutions operate (5 nursery groups), attended by children from the age of 1 year and 2 months. A total of 65 children (27% of all children under age 3 years) attend nursery groups.

However, the hromada has been experiencing a declining birth rate:

↗	2021 — 121 children,	↗	2023 — 77 children,
↗	2022 — 114 children,	↗	2024 — 64 children.

The distance to the nearest ECEI and the absence of organised transportation often become key barriers to engaging young children in the educational environment. This limits opportunities for early socialisation and access to care and development services, especially in rural settlements.

The introduction of organised transportation creates preconditions for expanding access to early childhood education services for the youngest children, including through:

- ensuring regular and safe transportation of children to and from the institution;
- reducing the burden on parents who are unable to transport their children independently (children are accompanied by educators);
- utilising available places in nursery groups of functioning ECEIs.

In the long term, this approach to transportation contributes to equalising children's opportunities at the start of schooling, reducing territorial and social disparities, and creating conditions for early childhood development regardless of place of residence.

4. Recommendations for Hromadas on Implementing the Practice of Transporting Preschool-Age Children by School Bus

4.1. Managerial and Analytical Steps

Before introducing the practice, hromadas are advised to conduct a **comprehensive analysis of needs and available capacities**, which should include:

- determining the number of preschool-age children **by settlement and by age groups (1–3 and 3–6 years)**;
- identifying **social groups at increased risk of limited access to services** (children with disabilities, internally displaced persons, children from low-income families, etc.);
- correlating these data with the territorial distribution of ECEIs, their enrollment levels, and design capacity;
- surveying parents of preschool-age children in settlements without ECEIs to assess their interest in having their children transported by school bus;
- calculating the availability of free seats on school buses and assessing whether current resources are sufficient to organise transportation for preschool-age children; if additional resources are needed, conducting an analysis of the feasibility of increasing the number of routes and calculating needs for additional resources (buses, funding).

4.2. Formalising the Managerial Decision on Transporting Children by School Bus

The decision to organise transportation for preschool-age children should be **institutionalised** by incorporating the relevant measures into the **local education development programme** or another targeted programme in the education sector.

Formalisation of the decision includes:

- defining the categories of preschool-age children who require transportation, taking into account the territorial accessibility of ECEIs;
- establishing procedures for recording the number of children covered by transportation, with the ability to disaggregate data by age and sex;
- determining the volume and structure of local budget expenditures related to transporting preschool-age children;
- developing performance indicators that enable assessment of service coverage, efficiency of budget expenditure, and the impact on access to early childhood education.

When using indicators that involve measuring growth or coverage rates, it is advisable to determine the baseline value of the relevant indicators at the beginning of the reporting period.

An example of activity wording and recommended performance indicators is provided in *the annex*.

4.3. Delineation of Responsibilities Between the Main Budget Holder and the Financial Authority

The main budget holder in the education sector plays a key role in planning and implementing the practice of transporting preschool-age children. This entity is responsible for developing budget programmes, defining their goals, objectives, and performance indicators, as well as justifying the use of available transportation resources to ensure preschool-age children’s access to early childhood education services.

The financial authority of the hromada, in turn, provides methodological support and oversight to ensure compliance with budget legislation during the preparation of budget requests and budget programme passports. It also ensures the consistency of programme documentation within the programme-based budgeting framework.

Planning, approval, implementation, monitoring, reporting and publication of results for the respective budget programme are carried out in accordance with the requirements of budget legislation.

4.4. Registration of Children When Introducing School-Bus Transportation

When school-bus transportation for preschool-age children is introduced, hromadas must ensure a systematic registration of children covered by the service.

Such registration should be conducted both during transportation to and from ECEIs, with data disaggregated by age groups (2–3, 4–6 years), place of residence (by settlements within the hromada), and social categories (internally displaced persons, children in difficult life circumstances, children with disabilities, low-income households, etc.).

The collected data serve as the basis for formulating measures and performance indicators within local targeted programmes and budget programmes related to early childhood education, as well as for justifying managerial decisions regarding transportation arrangements.



5. Planning and Financing the Transportation of Preschool-Age Children by School Bus

Planning and financing the transportation of preschool-age children by school bus shall be carried out **in accordance with the applicable legislation of Ukraine** and the programme-based budgeting method.

Since the transportation of preschool-age children constitutes an integral part of delivering preschool education services, **all related activities, expenditures and performance indicators must be included within the preschool education budget programme defined in the hromada's local budget.**

If a local targeted programme (for example, the "School Bus" programme) is implemented and provides transportation for both students of general secondary education institutions (hereinafter – GSEIs) and preschool-age children, the financing of activities shall be carried out under the respective budget programmes according to the designated purpose of expenditures: under budget programme 1021 – for transportation of GSEI students; and under budget programme 1010 – for transportation of preschool-age children.

Regardless of the method used to organise transportation (procurement of transport services or use of a vehicle owned by the education executive body of the local council), **the planning and execution of expenditures must ensure alignment between activities, funding sources and performance indicators of the relevant budget programmes.**

This approach ensures the consistency of management decisions with budget legislation, helps avoid the risk of misuse of funds during audits, and improves access to preschool education through the use of existing hromada transport resources while optimising operating and capital expenditures within existing budget programmes.

6. Assessing the Effectiveness of the Practice of Preschool Transportation by School Bus

The effectiveness of implementing preschool transportation practices should be assessed based on the analysis of the dynamics of service accessibility indicators, budget expenditures and their performance. The assessment may include:

- determining baseline values of indicators at the start of implementation or expansion of the practice;
- assessing changes in the number of preschool-age children covered by transportation;
- calculating the proportion of children who require transportation and those who actually receive it;
- determining the average expenditures per 1 transported preschool-age child;
- analysing the impact of transportation on attendance rates at ECEIs.

It is advisable to conduct assessments using a “before implementation – after implementation” or “before expansion – after expansion of coverage” comparison format.

The results of the assessment shall be taken into account when preparing reports on the implementation of the relevant budget and local targeted programmes, in accordance with the legislation and decisions of the hromada council.

Recommended Performance Indicators for a Local Target Programme¹

Task / Activity	Performance indicators ²							
	inputs		outputs		efficiency		quality	
	indicator	units of measure	indicator	units of measure	indicator	units of measure	indicator	units of measure
<i>Task: Organisation of transportation of preschool-age children from settlements not covered by the ECEI network to existing early childhood education institutions of the hromada</i>								
Transportation of preschool-age children to ECEIs	Number of preschool-age children (from ___ to 6 years) residing in settlements of the hromada where ECEIs are not available and who require transportation to ECEIs, total, including:	persons	Number of preschool-age children (from ___ to 6 years) residing in settlements of the hromada where ECEIs are not available whose transportation to ECEIs is provided by a school bus, total, including	persons	Average expenditure per 1 preschool-age child (from ___ to 6 years) residing in settlements of the hromada where ECEIs are not available whose transportation to ECEIs is provided by a school bus, total, including:	UAH/ child	Share of preschool-age children (from ___ to 6 years) residing in settlements of the hromada where ECEIs are not available whose transportation to ECEIs is provided by a school bus, total, including:	%
	girls	persons	girls	persons	per 1 girl	UAH/ child	girls	%
	boys	persons	boys	persons	per 1 boy	UAH/ child	boys	%
							Increase in the number of preschool-age children attending ECEIs following the introduction/ scaling-up of transportation services	%
Transportation of preschool-age children to ECEIs	Additional local budget expenditures allocated to transportation of preschool-age children	thousand UAH	Number of preschool-age children actually covered by transportation services, total, including:	persons	Average expenditure for transportation of one preschool-age child, total, including:	UAH/ child	Share of children actually covered by transportation services among those planned to be covered, total, including:	%
			girls	persons	per 1 girl	UAH/ child	girls	%
			boys	persons	per 1 boy	UAH/ child	boys	%
	Total local budget expenditures for transportation of preschool-age children	thousand UAH	Number of preschool-age children actually covered by transportation services, total, including:	persons	Average expenditure for transportation of one preschool-age child, total, including:	UAH/ child	Share of preschool-age children actually covered by transportation services among the number of children identified as requiring transportation, total, including:	%

Transportation of preschool-age children to ECEIs			girls	persons	per 1 girl	UAH/ child	girls	%						
			boys	persons	per 1 boy	UAH/ child	boys	%						
							Increase in the number of preschool-age children attending ECEIs following the introduction of transportation services, total, including:	%						
Transportation of preschool-age children from settlements not covered by the ECEI network	Number of settlements where preschool-age children require transportation to ECEIs by school bus	units	Number of settlements where preschool-age children are covered by transportation services to ECEIs by school bus	units	Average cost of transporting children from one settlement	UAH / settlement	Share of settlements where preschool-age children are covered by transportation services to ECEIs by school bus	%						
Expansion of transportation coverage for preschool-age children ³	Amount of local budget expenditures allocated to expanding transportation coverage of preschool-age children	thousand UAH	Number of preschool-age children additionally covered by transportation services, total, including:	persons	Expenditure per 1 additional preschool-age child covered by transportation services, total, including:	UAH/ child	Share of preschool-age children who previously did not attend ECEIs but began attending early childhood education institutions due to the introduction of transportation services, total, including:	%						
									girls	persons	per 1 girl	UAH/ child	girls	%
									boys	persons	per 1 boy	UAH/ child	boys	%

Note:

¹ The wording of tasks, activities and performance indicators provided above is illustrative and may be further specified by a hromada taking into account baseline conditions, the structure of the ECEI network, the availability of transport routes and the organisation of the budget process.

² Performance indicators related to the number of children may also be disaggregated by age groups (1–3 years; 3–6 years), as well as by children with disabilities, children with special educational needs, and children from internally displaced families.

³ Applicable where transportation services are already in place and require scaling-up or optimisation. Where transportation for preschool-age children is introduced for the first time, the activity should preferably be formulated as “Introduction of transportation for preschool-age children...”, and the results chain should be constructed without reference to increase indicators.

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