PEOPLE FROM UKRAINE IN SLOVAKIA: From Acceptance to Integration

A Social Survey of Ukrainian Migrants in Slovakia

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Project Final Report

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The authors hereby declare that they are not aware of any conflict of interest.

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The research methods have been approved by the Ethical Committee of the Centre of Social and Psychological Sciences of the Slovak Academy of Sciences.

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Key findings

» *Ukrainian refugees exhibit a high degree of economic activity, with **67 % of them working**, often at the level appropriate to their qualifications.*

» *Those who have a **better command of Slovak** have a higher income. Acquiring the local language is a key aspect of integration at work. The refugees who do not speak Slovak or have a lower level of language competence work on temporary contracts more often.*

» *Being a caregiver for **children** or family members constitutes a significant barrier in a refugee's integration as the options of many parents from Ukraine, especially single ones, are limited in terms of job opportunities due to the insufficient offer of caregiving services.*

» ***Successful integration** includes coordinated state policies to ensure better access of refugees to education and employment, and to support their full integration in Slovak society.*

» *Most respondents from Ukraine plans to stay in Slovakia for a longer time. Of those, more than **75 percent are considering a stay of** five and more years.*

» *Although most Ukrainian refugees have experienced acceptance, some have, indeed, **experienced rejection** or ambivalence from Slovak society, which impacts their life satisfaction, their mental health as well as their ability to identify with Slovakia.*

» *Key integration challenges for refugees from Ukraine include lack of language support, lack of job flexibility and low availability of childcare services, which **limits their opportunities** to integrate in society on a long-term basis.*

Introductory note

»
*In the paper, we use the terms **refugees**, **respondents** and **participants** to refer to persons who came to Slovakia from Ukraine after February 2022.*

Introductory information and project methodology

On 24 February 2022, the troops of the Russian Federation invaded Ukraine, causing mass casualties and destroying civilian infrastructure. This forced many people to leave their homes and seek safety, protection and assistance in other countries. According to UNHCR data, a total of 6,863,400 people have left Ukraine due to the war as of 16 January 2025. Of those, 6,303,200 resettled in a European country. As for Slovakia, the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic has declared that as of 27 January 2025, 132 453 people from Ukraine have been granted temporary protection.

Statistical data show that most of the persons who have been granted temporary protection are women and children, with 41 345 being children under 18 (31% from the overall number) and 65 005 being women (71% of the adult 18+ population). Most of these persons live in the regions of Bratislava and Košice. Data from UNHCR's SEIS 2024 survey from November 2024 indicates that approximately 47% of refugees from Ukraine who live in Slovakia have completed higher education or specialisation studies, 25% have completed technical or vocational studies, and 21% have completed secondary education. However, data from the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family in Slovakia indicates a lower share of university-educated refugees; in October 2024, the share of citizens of Ukraine who were employed in Slovakia was just under 24%.

Significant support to Ukrainians fleeing the war-afflicted country has been provided by various actors in Slovakia, including the government, NGOs, national and local institutions, international organizations, as well as individual Slovak citizens. As the war continues and refugees are unable to return safely to their home country, it is important for the public in Slovakia and for all local actors to understand the refugees' living situation, as well as the dynamics of their interaction with people in Slovakia. Three years after the outbreak of the war, a thorough understanding of the life situation of refugees is essential for the formulation of effective and targeted integration policies. Without a deep understanding of the refugees' needs, challenges and adaptation strategies, there is a risk that such policies could be inadequate or that the realities of the refugees' daily lives

are not taken into account properly. Individual inclusion, as well as long-term social cohesion in Slovakia, must be supported by policies based on empirical knowledge and systematic analysis if these are to be successful.

»

The aim of this report is to map the experiences of people who came to Slovakia from Ukraine after February 2022 in order to help recognize factors that may facilitate (or hinder) their integration in society.

Report structure

The outcome section of the report consists of three chapters:

- **Work situation and economic activity of refugees from Ukraine**
- **Family, caregiving, social networks and community support**
- **Integration of Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia and its psychological context**

Each chapter describes and portrays the findings of the qualitative researchers, accompanied by statements/quotes from the testimonials of individual refugees, which have been acquired using a qualitative approach during focus group discussions. Each chapter concludes with a summary, providing an overview of key information and underlining significant findings.

Project methodology: "Social Survey of Ukrainian Migrants in Slovakia"

The research was conducted in two phases and consisted of qualitative (focus groups) and quantitative data collection (survey). The research design and the precise choice of methodological procedures were discussed within the project team consisting of male and female experts in social psychology, sociology and social anthropology, and the final choice considers interdisciplinary specificities, as well as the specificity and availability of the research population. The research design and methodology of the project have been approved by the Ethics Committee of the Centre of Social and Psychological Sciences of the Slovak Academy of Sciences [SAS].

Focus groups

During the first phase of the project (November and December 2023), four focus group discussions with a total of thirty-two participants were conducted by the SAS team in collaboration with selected research agencies. Both the selection of survey participants (based on research criteria and participant availability) and the recruitment for the focus group discussions were carried out by two polling agencies, AKO and KRAJINKA. The duration of the focus group discussions was approximately 90 minutes each. In the Bratislava region, we interviewed mothers with children aged under 15 years, who had previously lived in group accommodation (hostel, hotel or a shared flat/house), mothers living in individual

housing, and childless working women. In the Košice region we interviewed female and male high school and university students aged 15–18, after obtaining informed consent from a parent or legal guardian. This focus group discussion was conducted online. All focus groups were conducted in Ukrainian and led by experienced moderators. Each focus group was also attended by one to two researchers who observed the discussions. After the group discussions, the project team members conducted a debriefing session in the presence of the moderator, which allowed for a summary of observations about what had happened during the focus group.

Focus group 1 was conducted with childless women from Ukraine (n = 9) with work experience in Slovakia (about a half of them had a university degree).

Participants in focus group 2 were mothers of children under 15 who live in Slovakia, are supported by the refugee accommodation allowance, and have experience of collective housing in and near Bratislava (n = 7).

Focus group 3 was conducted with mothers of children under 15, both working and non-working, living in sublet accommodation in Bratislava (n = 7).

Focus group 4 was conducted with young people from Ukraine (aged 15 to 18) who arrived in Slovakia after February 2022 and currently live in and near Košice with members of their families (n = 9). In this focus group, we focused on young people who 1) do not attend any school in Slovakia and are studying remotely, 2) are studying simultaneously in both the Ukrainian and the Slovak system, or 3) have completed remote education in Ukraine and only started full-time education in Slovakia in September 2023. The aim of focus group 4 was to gather information about the integration of young Ukrainians and Ukrainian women into schools in Slovakia, the leisure activities of the participants, as well as the role of the extended family in the young people's adaptation to life in a new country. The participants received a financial reward for having participated in the focus group discussions.

Surveying

A questionnaire-based survey was conducted in November 2024 via the FOCUS polling agency. The agency approached 254 interviewers, asking if they knew a Ukrainian family in their surroundings who came to Slovakia after the beginning of the war in Ukraine. The intention was to reach as many unique households across Slovakia as possible. A total of eighty-one respondents from all regions of Slovakia participated in the data collection. Most often, the individual interviewers received about five to six completed questionnaires. The questionnaire, written in Ukrainian, was independently completed by respondents on tablets provided by the agency. No major language or comprehension problems were reported by the interviewers or the respondents themselves. No financial reward was given for completing the questionnaire.

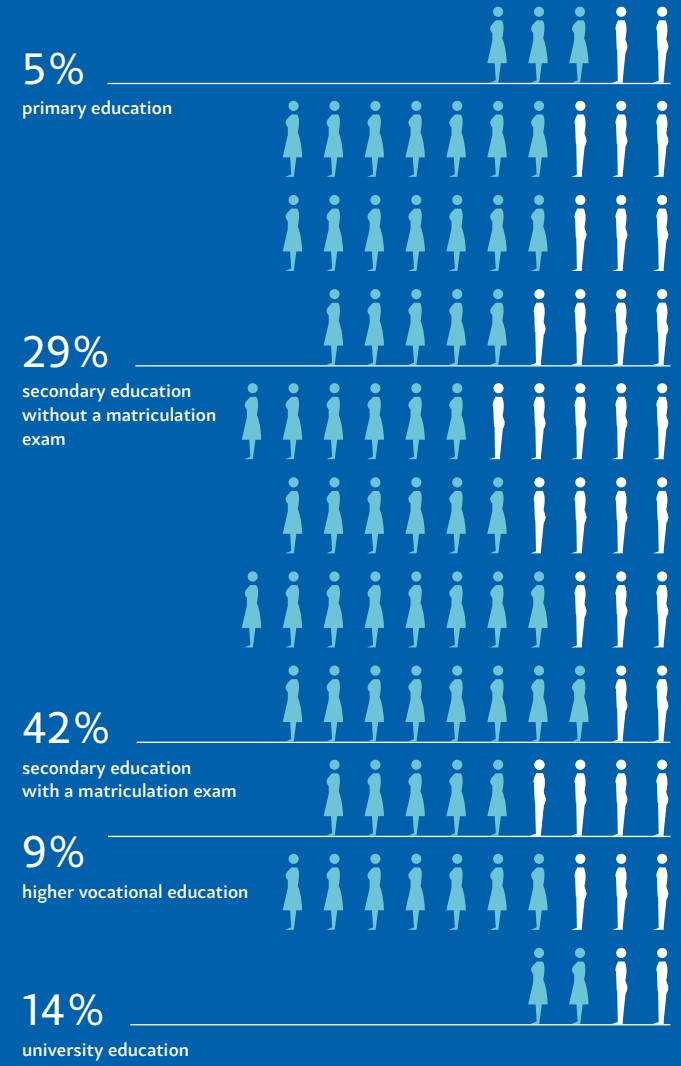
On average, the questionnaire took 33 minutes to complete. The questionnaire consisted of several questions mapping various characteristics and phenomena: the participants' socio-demographic profile, their work and working conditions, their household income and economic situation, the education

and leisure activities of their children, their identity and integration, their social ties (transnational dimension), their future outlook and plans for an eventual return.

Research sample

The research sample consisted of 503 respondents aged 18 to 81, of which almost two thirds (65%) were female and approximately a third were male (35%). The mean age of the female respondents was 40.88 years (SD=13.42) and that of the male respondents was 40.98 years (SD=14.59). In terms of the highest education achieved, 5% of the respondents had completed primary education, 29% had completed secondary education without a matriculation exam and 42% had secondary education with a matriculation exam. Higher vocational education was reported by 9% of respondents; 14% of all respondents had attained university education.

Percentage of male and female respondents by education



** the resulting total of 99% was due to rounding to whole numbers*

2 Work and economic activity of refugees from Ukraine

People from Ukraine who have been granted temporary protection status in Slovakia have free access to the labour market without the need to obtain a work permit. New arrivals overwhelmingly did not apply for asylum, but on arrival were received in centres where they were granted temporary refuge status, insurance and temporary accommodation, often provided by private individuals. European states – not only in Slovakia – thus relied on the assumed self-sufficiency of new arrivals supported by the Ukrainian diaspora living in the country before 2022, which was then supplemented by an unprecedented amount of assistance from individual citizens, NGOs and informal networks. However, despite the unprecedented nature of the situation and the significant humanitarian assistance, the arrival of people from Ukraine was framed by thousands of vacancies from the pre-invasion period. The newcomers thus filled gaps in sectors that were experiencing labour shortages, regardless of the professional background, gender and family situation of the temporary protection holders. Therefore, in addition to examining how forced migration and temporary protection shape the identity of its holders along different dimensions, we also focused on how it affects their labour participation. We pay attention to the individual factors behind labour trajectories. One of the main reasons for this focus was the fact that a large proportion of arrivals were women with young children, creating the need to combine childcare and paid work.

In the research, more than two thirds of the respondents (67%) reported that they were currently doing paid work in Slovakia. This represents a higher level of economic activity than for adult Slovak citizens, the main reason for

which is the lower proportion of old-age pensioners among refugees from Ukraine.

Table 1 provides an overview of the changes in the economic status of our respondents after their arrival in Slovakia. We can see that **among the people who were employed in Ukraine, 86.5% are also employed in Slovakia and 3% of them are entrepreneurs. In the case of those who were doing business in Ukraine, 32.5% were employed in Slovakia and 55.7% of them are still doing business.**

A significant proportion of refugees who were outside the labour market in Ukraine (housewives, unemployed, university students) were also employed in Slovakia. Conversely, a large majority of retired people are not economically active even after arriving in Slovakia.

A total of 30.2% of the respondents who are not currently working in Slovakia responded affirmatively when asked whether they were looking for a paid job in Slovakia. Another 30.9% answered that they are not looking for a job but would consider an offer. That said, 38.9% responded that they were satisfied with their current situation.

Table 1: Comparison of economic status before arrival in Slovakia with current economic status, %

		In Slovakia										*Note: Responses with a proportion greater than 30% are highlighted.*
	UA	Empolyed	Entrepreneur	Maternal/ parental leave	Unem-ployed	Retired	Secondary school student (SK)	University student (SK)	University student (UA)	Stay-at-home	Does not know/ no answer	Total
Employed	57.6	**86.5**	3.0	1.7	4.7	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.9	0.9	100.0
Entrepreneur	7.3	**32.5**	**55.7**	0.0	9.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.5	100.0
Maternal/parental leave	6.3	26.3	2.9	**49.8**	18.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.6	0.0	100.0
Unemployed	5.3	**34.5**	0.0	3.1	**50.8**	3.4	5.2	0.0	0.0	3.1	0.0	100.0
Retired	9.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.0	**90.5**	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.6	0.0	100.0
Secondary school student	4.7	6.0	3.5	3.5	10.3	0.0	**33.9**	**38.9**	0.0	3.9	0.0	100.0
University student	5.9	**31.7**	0.0	0.0	8.3	0.0	0.0	**57.2**	2.8	0.0	0.0	100.0
Stay-at-home	2.9	**38.6**	0.0	0.0	11.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	**50.2**	0.0	100.0
Does not know/no answer	0.6	0.0	28.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	**43.3**	0.0	0.0	0.0	28.3	100.0
Total	100.0	**59.0**	6.3	4.4	9.1	8.8	2.1	5.2	0.2	4.0	0.9	100.0

Table 2 compares the type of employment of the respondents in Slovakia and at the time when they lived in Ukraine. Such a comparison was possible in about half of our research sample, i. e. in the cases where we had information on the respondents' last occupation in Ukraine and their current occupation in Slovakia.

Refugees are significantly more likely to work in services and commerce, compared to the Slovak population. Overall, up to 30.5% of respondents from Ukraine work in services and commerce in Slovakia, which is almost double the representation of this type of employment in the Slovak economy. This difference could be partly attributed to the higher representation of women in our sample, as women in the Slovak population are also more likely to work in services and commerce. However, the male-female ratio is slightly more balanced (62% women, 38% men) among employed individuals in our sample, whose representation is outlined in Table 2.

The higher proportion of service and trade jobs can also be illustrated by the career paths of women who primarily sought jobs in non-manual positions upon their arrival given the lack of previous experience in the industrial sector. They either started working in services immediately (Ivana) or shortly after becoming acquainted with the new environment (Polina):

"In Ukraine, I worked in digital advertising [...] *[...] I never worked physically, [and] I didn't want to go to work in a factory. I wanted something similar in an office, similar to what I had in Ukraine. I realized that I needed to learn English for*

Table 2: Comparison of occupations in Ukraine and Slovakia

	Refugees from Ukraine		Slovak population*		
	Employment in Ukraine	Employment in Slovakia	Overall	Women	Difference between SK avg. and UA
Legislators, executives	0.4 %	.6 %	5.9 %	4.1 %	5.5 %
Specialists	22.8 %	15.1 %	17.0 %	21.3 %	-5.8 %
Technicians and professional staff	10.3 %	6.7 %	15.8 %	16.9 %	5.5 %
Administrative staff	7.8 %	6.3 %	10.1 %	15.9 %	2.3 %
Service and trade workers	26.9 %	30.5 %	17.3 %	24.4 %	-9.6 %
Quality. agricultural, forestry and fishing workers	1.0 %	.3 %	1.0 %	0.5 %	0.0 %
Skilled workers and craftsmen	17.0 %	17.5 %	14.5 %	3.9 %	-2.5 %
Operators and assemblers of machinery and equipment	6.3 %	9.0 %	12.3 %	6.1 %	6.0 %
Auxiliary and unskilled workers	7.5 %	13.9 %	6.2 %	6.8 %	-1.3 %

** according to the Labour Force Survey, average values for 2023*

that; I was on a [certain] level, but I worked towards fluency. I'd already managed to find a job here, but it was a helpline, a call centre. But it was a horrible job, very stressful. I completed the training in two months, worked on the calls for a month, and then I left. Then I managed to find [another] job. […] *It's much easier for me now, it's interesting, but mentally, it's still not easy. That's why I'm looking for another job now, because I've had enough."* (Ivana, age 33, childless)

"I have a friend in [name of Slovak town redacted] *who I'd been in touch with for a long time, she kept telling us to run away. There was very heavy shelling and somehow, we decided. And we arrived at the beginning of March, and I immediately started to work, thanks to the fact that this friend informed me that in* [name of Slovak town] *there was a medical device factory where you could work. The salary was quite normal, we got housing according to the programme, so that was a big plus in that respect. But the one thing I didn't think my life would still force me to do was hard work. It looks like sitting and it seems like easy work, but when you're [constantly] sitting in that position, it's not easy. And I've always tried to learn the Slovak language, to take all kinds of courses here. I thank the Labour Office for providing courses. I have completed these accounting courses."* (Polina, age 44, 1 child)

On the other hand, senior managers are not as well represented in the studied population as one might infer from research abroad, namely that in Poland and Austria (Kohlenberger et al., 2023; Aigner et al., 2024) or in France (Gorbach et al., 2024). In Ukraine, too, the Razumkov Centre's online survey from August 2022 found a higher proportion of executives (14% versus 1.5% of the entire Ukrainian population) and entrepreneurs (14% versus 4% of the entire Ukrainian population) among male and female refugees (2022). The number of artisans and unskilled workers from Ukraine was comparable to the national average, but their share is well above the representation of this category among women in Slovakia.

Generally, there does not seem to be a significant self-selection among those coming to Slovakia from Ukraine, as people with significantly higher average education and above-average qualifications in Ukraine did not come to Slovakia (or rather, they did not stay). **The results of our research thus seem to be consistent with the assumption that it is now already the case that the closer one is to Ukraine, the lower the divergence of a Ukrainian refugee's socio-economic status from the average in Ukraine** (Kohlenberg et al., 2023; Van Tubergen, 2024). For the time being, though, this conclusion can only be considered tentative given the non-representative nature of our research.

When asked about the satisfaction with their jobs in Slovakia, more than 84% of the refugees from Ukraine of them answered that they enjoyed their work and that it was enough to earn a living in Slovakia (78.2%), 71.5% saw it as stable and 70.7% thought that the job corresponded to their qualifications and skillset. On the other hand, 72.8% answered that their job could pay more and only 45.6% felt that their job allowed them to move up to a better position and get a better salary. Finally, only 53.7% said that their job offered opportunities for professional development and further improvement of their skills and

abilities. Some dissatisfaction with their current job is apparent from the response of 28.1% of the respondents, who report that in order to continue working, they are forced to accept substandard or unsatisfactory working hours.

On average, our respondents had been working in their jobs for more than a year (14 months), while the average length of stay of the people from Ukraine employed in Slovakia at the time of the research was more than two years (24.7 months).

Table 3: **What form of a job agreement do you have in Slovakia?**

Employment contract – a longer-term standard contract with various guarantees, including paid leave (holidays)	62.5 %
Work agreement – a simplified contract that may take three forms: work performance agreement, work activity agreement or a temporary student work agreement	22.3 %
Trade or self-employed – working as a self-employed person	9.0 %
Cash payouts, no formal contract	3.3 %
I work without financial remuneration, e.g. in exchange for housing	0.2 %
I don't know/don't want to say	2.6 %

Based on the 2021 Labour Force Survey data, we know that of all workers in Slovakia, only 1% carry out their work duties within the framework of "agreement work". In the population sample studied by this paper, the number of workers from Ukraine having an agreement-based job is an order of magnitude higher than the share of such workers in the Slovak population. After having factored in any potential influence of multiple variables, it appears that the only statistically significant predictor of agreement work in Slovakia is knowledge of Slovak. **Respondents with a poor command of Slovak are more likely to perform "agreement work" than those with a better command of the language.**

Only a small proportion of the respondents stated that they had a side job or permanent work in Ukraine. Approximately 5% of them stated that they have other/secondary jobs in addition to their main job, and 3.5% indicated that they also work remotely in Ukraine or elsewhere abroad.

The following job characteristics were presented to the respondents to determine their work activity:

- I work through an employment agency – I have an employment contract or agreement with the agency, which "lends" me as an employee to other companies
- I work through an informal job broker – he receives money from the employer and pays me for it, while keeping a part of the earnings
- I change jobs frequently (e.g. more than once every three months)
- I need to have multiple jobs to make a living

- I work weekends or until late in the evening
- I only know on short notice if I might get to work. Alternatively, my job might be terminated anytime.
- My employer doesn't pay for my health insurance – I have to pay it myself, or I don't pay it at all.
- I work in very difficult conditions – extreme temperatures (cold, heat), polluted or dirty workplace etc.
- My salaries are often late.
- I get paid less than other people (say, Slovaks) who work with me in the same position.
- I am not entitled to holidays.
- I am not a direct employee of the employer for whom I work (I work on a contract, through an agency or informally), but I would like to become their direct employee.

Respondents were most likely to say that they also work weekends or late in the evening (48%). Both the first and the last response were most common – indirect work through agencies, with a 16.6% and 16.5% of respondents (respectively) indicating that they were in such a situation. General statistics for 2023, the latest available data in this area, indicate that there are only 5.6% of agency workers in Slovakia (Eurostat, 2024b). In contrast, late pay, frequent job rotation and working through an unofficial intermediary were mentioned least frequently, with less than 4% of respondents mentioning such occurrences.

Table 4: Model explaining negative work-related phenomena presence in Slovakia (0 to 9), current workers only, multiple linear regression

	Beta	Sig.
Man	.041	.482
Respondent age	.071	.226
Education (categories)	.033	.699
Knowledge of Slovak	-.091	.145
Presence of children under 14 in the household	.210	.000
Length of stay in SK (months)	.091	.127
Employment status in Ukraine (ISEI)	-.299	.001
R^2	0.144	
N	268	

Our model, which explains the presence of negative work-related phenomena in Slovakia, shows that they are significantly less experienced by respondents who had worked in jobs connected to a higher socio-economic status in Ukraine. Conversely, respondents who live in Slovakia in households with children under 14 years of age experienced them more frequently. On a scale of 0 to 9 used by the model, the presence indicator shows that on average, the value is higher by 0.7 in the case of respondents who live in households with children under 14.

Income from employment in Slovakia

The net income of just under a third of refugees in Slovakia fits the 601–1200-euro bracket. 22% of them have a higher income, while the income of 15% is lower.
The average net income was approximately 980 euros, which is about 15 percent less than the net average wage in Slovakia for Q3 2024. However, this figure may be distorted by the relatively high number of respondents who refused to answer (24.7%).

Table 5: Model explaining the income level of refugees employed in Slovakia, only currently working, multiple linear regression

	B	Beta	Sig.
D_Male	379.533	.403	.000
Respondent age	-.396	-.010	.857
Education (categories)	226.453	.243	.000
Knowledge of Slovak	89.574	.170	.003
Presence of children under 14 in the household	-13.847	-.015	.784
Length of stay in SK (months)	1.608	.028	.611
Other Ukrainian employees at the workplace	161.907	.135	.010
Work agreement contract type	-312.266	-.294	.000
Respondent was applying for a job formally	25.425	.022	.676

Significantly lower income was reported by respondents with a work agreement contract (a difference of about 300 euros). On the contrary, higher income was reported by men (about 380 euros), people with higher education and with a better command of Slovak. An interesting factor is the relationship between the income level and the presence of other people from Ukraine at the workplace – the income of respondents who worked in a place with Ukrainian colleagues was higher by about 160 euros.

Comparison of employment status in Ukraine and Slovakia

Of the 254 respondents who worked before coming to Slovakia and work in Slovakia as well, the largest group (51.8%) now has a job with the same socio-economic index as they had in Ukraine. **A more common (and expected) occurrence is a move downward in terms of occupational status – i. e., the individual's occupation in Slovakia has a lower status than the occupation in which they were working back in Ukraine – this is the case for more than a third of employed refugees from Ukraine (35.4%). In contrast, only 12.9% of those employed now have a higher occupational status.**

Overall, it can be said that refugees from Ukraine are more likely to have jobs with a lower socio-economic index than they had in Ukraine. More than a third of refugee employees have experienced this downward shift. The following model seeks to explain which workers from Ukraine are more likely to have occupations with a lower socio-economic index in Slovakia than they had in Ukraine.

Table 6: Categories of workers from Ukraine who are more likely to become employed in a position with a lower socio-economic index in Slovakia, compared to the position they had in Ukraine, logistic regression

	Sig.	Exp(B)
D_Male	.113	.63
Respondent age	.927	1.00
Education (categories)	.975	1.01
Knowledge of Slovak	.468	.88
Presence of children under 14 in the household	.020	1.92
Length of stay in SK (months)	.316	1.02
R^2 (Nagelkerke)	0.06	
N	252	

The only statistically significant predictor of working at a lower level than the previous occupation in Ukraine is the presence of children under 14 in the household. If other characteristics of the respondent remain constant, **having children under 14 in the household is associated with an approximately 12-13% increase in the probability of working in a position with a lower socioeconomic index compared to the position held in Ukraine. Neither knowledge of Slovak nor length of residence is significant in this case.**

The difficulty of finding a clear explanation of the trajectories of refugees can be illustrated in the focus groups, which highlighted their diversity. **Women who were able to continue to use Ukrainian in their line of work, such as psychologists working with people arriving from Ukraine, were able to start working in their field very quickly:**

"I work in my field; I'm a child psychologist. I had my diploma translated here, and I went to work in a school. I live in Bratislava. I took the largest number of our Ukrainian children, 80 clients. And at the very beginning of the war, then, of course... A very good, very kind head teacher needed someone who could help these children. I just remember that moment when I first came in, those scared eyes. Well, it really was like that... They first accepted me without the diploma. Then they said: if you want to keep working from September, have it nostrified. They confirmed that I'll retain my job, and in addition to that, I work on projects to support our refugees. As long as there is funding, we will work. I work in my specialty." (Alina, age 35, 1 child)

On the other hand, knowledge of Slovak could have meant career advancement, but it might as well have not helped. When answering the question: "Do you think that if you learn the language better than you do now, it will help you find another, better job?" there was disagreement between the participants themselves. Here are three responses from a focus group of childless women:

"No, I've been looking for a job when I already had a good command of Slovak, and that doesn't help. I have no knowledge of English. I only know the basics, and everyone demands a better level of English. I believe that improving your Slovak won't help you find a better job." (Sofia, age 20)

"Yes, Slovak is necessary. So far, I have encountered [mostly] offers that require a higher level of Slovak." (Valeria, age 26)

"There is a perspective, but I haven't had that experience." (Daria, age 28)

Conversely, the quantitative research also showed that even their young children needed to have some level of autonomy, if the women were to devote more of their time and energy to paid work:

"Well, as I said, I work in a shop. I work short and long weeks. I see my child (once) every two or three days because I get up at 6:00 in the morning and I'm home at 8:30 in the evening [...] Since we've been here, she's grown a lot. She literally grew up in three weeks... because she had to... I'm independent, she's independent, she's simply matured, that's what happened."

Conversely, a child requiring more care did not allow even for slow progress toward a more promising, stable work at the same level as in Ukraine:

"I am not happy with my current job. As I said, I worked at [bank name] in Ukraine. In other banks, too, as an economist and accountant. I work as a cleaner in apartments here, and [only do it] informally. It's nowhere near permanent stability. I can't get a stable job, like in a factory, because I have problems with my child. It was very difficult for him to process all this mentally, and now he is registered with a neurologist. He's had seizures and I can't leave him [unsupervised] at home. That's why I'm working a schedule that works for me while he's in school. When he's supervised, I can do some work." (Zlata, age 39, 1 child)

The composition of work teams and the ethnicity of supervisors of the employed refugees was examined by two questions. Fewer than 20% of respondents reported that almost all of their colleagues were from Ukraine (almost all – 3.3%; many – 14.6%). On the contrary, 34.1% of respondents reported having no or very few colleagues from Ukraine. **Approximately 10% of respondents reported that some of the people to whom they report are from Ukraine.** Taking into account the contract type and the kind of work, it turns out that respondents working in services and commerce, as well as specialists, are significantly less likely to report working in teams with a high representation of people from Ukraine.

Table 7: Job search. How did you find your current job in Slovakia? (if you are not currently working, please describe your last job in Slovakia)

I got a tip from an acquaintance from Slovakia	21.9 %
I got a tip from a friend from Ukraine who lives in Slovakia	29.6 %
I got a tip from an institution that helps/associates refugees from Ukraine	15.4 %
I responded to an advert on the internet	20.0 %
I responded to an advert that wasn't on the internet	3.2 %
The employer approached me directly and offered me a job	4.3 %
I found a job through the Labour Office	4.8 %
Other; please elaborate: ...	0.9 %

The responses indicate that formal job search channels are quite poorly represented – job seekers find work predominantly through social networks, especially within the diaspora. Formal or informal job search is not related to the presence of negative phenomena related to work in Slovakia. Controlling for respondent demographics, the multivariate model shows that more educated respondents are less likely to look for work through formal channels.

Informal networks thus seem to facilitate labour market integration without necessarily concentrating newcomers in jobs with poor working conditions that would constitute a "mobility trap" (Kalter & Kogan, 2014). On the other hand, informal networks have been shown to be more important for newcomers with a lower degree of education. This might suggest that they are more relevant for low-skilled jobs. However, informal ties are not without their importance for high-skilled refugees either (Harvey, 2008; Gericke et al., 2018; Badwi et al., 2018), which was confirmed by our focus groups. Overall, our findings correspond with research on post-2022 refugees from Ukraine, which has confirmed the importance of ethnic networks in job search across Europe, regardless of the institutional context (Kosyakova et al., 2024).

The focus groups showed the great complexity of the job-seeking process, which was mainly based on relationships, often casual *(Sofia)***, and often even in highly specialised professions** *(Kata):*

"I couldn't find a job for a long time. I worked as a house cleaner. Then I worked part-time in a small company, some office work, handling orders, packing eco-friendly disposable utensils. This [my current job] is mostly administrative work that can be done from home. But the company closed, and the job didn't last long. Then I worked in a bar as a bartender for a month. It was very hard work, especially when you agree to one thing and the reality is a completely different thing. It wasn't pleasant at all, so it didn't take long until I quit. Then I spent a long time looking for a job. For now, I got a place in psychology. I began to study and teach. Later, my friend helped me to find a job. Just like in Ukraine, it was hard to find a job through a website, but friends always help. Here, I took Slovak classes, met a girl who took me to her workplace got me a job in the company where she worked." (Sofia, age 20, childless)

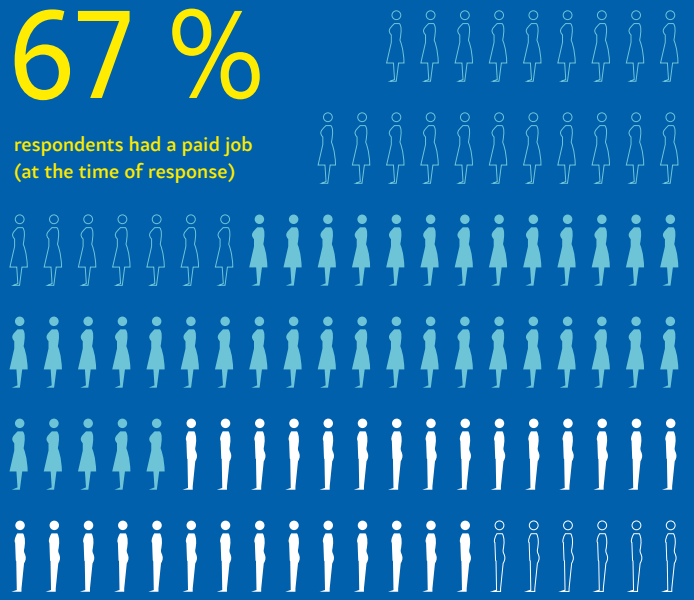
"I got a degree in biomedical engineering, specialising as a medical physicist. In Kyiv, I was working in an oncology centre, and, by chance, I was offered a job here. [It was] when I first came to Slovakia. The man I was staying with offered me a job, saying that a new hospital was opening in Bory and that I should go there for an interview. I sent my CV and took the interview." (Kata, age 35, childless)

Summary

More than two-thirds of the respondents (67%) reported that they had a paid job at the time of response. This represents a higher level of economic activity than that of adult Slovak citizens, which is mainly due to the lower share of pensioners in the Ukrainian population. Almost two thirds of refugees found jobs at the same level of qualifications they had attained in Ukraine. One major exception are parents of children under 14, who are more likely to work below their qualifications level and are more likely to work based on a work agreement contract type.

The average net income of refugees was around 980 euros. Higher incomes were earned by men, people with higher education and people with better knowledge of Slovak. Overall, up to 30.5% of respondents work in services and commerce, which is almost double the share of this type of employment in the Slovak economy, which can be explained by the higher proportion of women among the group of people coming from Ukraine.

With regard to the questions that examine job satisfaction, the majority of the respondents answered that they enjoyed their work, earned enough to make a living in Slovakia, considered it stable, and it matched their qualifications and skills. On the other hand, more than two thirds of the respondents answered that their job could pay more and less



** filled figures show the percentage of respondents performing paid work*

than half felt that their job allowed them to advance to a better position and get a better salary as a result. There appears to be a section of the workforce that is in a vulnerable position at work, with 22.3% reporting that they had a job based on a work agreement contract, which is tied to significantly lower earnings, and 16.5% of the respondents reported working through an agency. Work through an agency and work agreement-based jobs are an order of magnitude more common among Ukrainian refugees than the rate of prevalence in the Slovak job market at large.

Family, care, social networks and community support

Various aspects of care influence the daily life and the social situation of refugees. In the Ukrainian refugee population, the care obligations are significant and specific, which is related to the structure of this population – particularly, its demographic composition, the higher ratio of women in the population, and their situation in the new environment. **In our research, 41.3% of the respondents indicated that their household included at least one minor, and almost 20% indicated the presence of at least one older adult over 65 years of age.** Most households (67.4%) consisted of one to two adults. Only 11.1% of households had more than 3 adults living in them, which may indicate multigenerational living or shared housing. Almost 18% of the respondents reported having at least one child aged 5 and under in the household, with a higher proportion among females (19.4%) than males (14.9%). More than 22% of respondents reported having at least one child aged 6 to 14 in the household, with a higher proportion among women (28.3%) than among men (12.6%). Overall, 13.5% of respondents had at least one teenager (aged 15 to 17) in the household. Again, the proportion was higher for females (15.4%) compared to males (10.3%). The age structure of households is a reason for specific care requirements.

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Table 8: Overview of age groups in respondent households

Age category	Percentage of the whole sample (n=503)	Men (n=174)	Women (n=325)
Children, 0 – 5 years	17.7 %	14.9 %	19.4 %
Children, 6 – 14 years	22.7 %	12.6 %	28.3 %
Youth, 15 – 17 years	13.5 %	10.3 %	15.4 %
At least one child (0 – 17 years)	41.3 %	29.6 %	48.0 %
Adults, 18 – 64 years	76.3 %	78.7 %	76.0 %
Seniors, 65+ years	19.9 %	19.5 %	20.3 %

Childcare presents challenges related to education, healthcare and integration into a new society, while the presence of older adults in households may mean an increased need for health and social support. In addition, many people from Ukraine also have to support family members who have remained in Ukraine, which can increase their psychological and economic burden. At the same time, needs related to care are closely related to the presence (or absence) of husbands or partners in the households of female refugees. Our research shows that almost 45% of the respondents live in a household with their spouse or partner. The proportion is higher among men (56.9%) than among women (39.1%). Women are also more likely to

Table 9: Do you have a spouse / permanent partner?

Answer	Full sample (n=503)	Men (n=174)	Women (n=325)
Yes, we live together	44.9%	56.9%	39.1%
Yes, but we don't live together	17.5%	8.1%	22.5%
No, I don't	37.6%	35.1%	38.5%

be separated from their spouses/partners (22.5% for women vs. 8.1% for men), a consequence of wartime forced migration, in which women typically leave the country while their partners stay behind in Ukraine, resulting in involuntary separation. Approximately 38% of the respondents are not in a relationship.

The presence of a spouse or partner in the household can provide significant help and support, and also addresses needs related to care. In the qualitative research, participants described situations in which emotional and practical support from a partner eased the stress associated with the migration experience. Conversely, the absence of such support can lead to feelings of isolation and psychological exhaustion: *"It seems to me that when you have a family, it's much easier with your husband around. You can tell him things, he can tell you things, and even if you have a fight, it's some kind of a release and then you reconcile. But when I was on my own, without my husband, it was really hard – it was mega hard, it was horrible, really. You hold everything in, you're on the verge [of collapse], like a string..."* (Lyudmyla, age 46, 2 children)

Single-parent households

Given that women who care for children on their own are a vulnerable group, therefore we looked at some specific features of this subgroup. We created a separate set of women based on a combination of responses to some of the questions. We defined single-parent households as those where respondents indicated their marital/relationship status as 1) married but separated, 2) unmarried, 3) widowed, or 4) divorced, and declared that at least one child under 17 lives in their household. A total of 16.7% of the research population, namely 85 women, complied with the criteria.[1] The responses of women living in such households varied from other respondents in some respects, and it appears that their lives are even more complicated given that they are in a different situation than other Ukrainian refugees due to caregiving duties.

Women caring for minor children are employed less frequently – 38.8% of them reported that they were not doing any paid work in Slovakia at the moment (compared to 31.9% of other respondents). This is probably related to the caregiving needs to young children, limiting their choices when searching for a job. Among those who are employed, there is also a noticeable difference in the type of work they tend to perform. They are more likely to be employed on a long-term contracts (71% versus 61% among the rest) and are significantly less likely to be self-employed (2% versus 10% among the rest), which could be interpreted as an inclination towards a stable job and income. In terms of working conditions, they perceive them as acceptable. However, they are also more likely to work on weekends or late in the evening (55% versus 47% among the rest) and find it more difficult to take an hour or two off work for personal matters (42% versus 34% among the rest). In terms of job satisfaction, they are significantly more likely to report that they are looking for a better job or a better paid one, compared to their current position (45% versus 20% among the rest). **In addition, the subsample of those who do not work includes significantly more women from single-parent households who are looking for paid work (43% versus 27% among the rest).**

Likewise, participants in the focus groups reported that they needed to accept their current job despite conditions that were not suitable for them. Some had managed to change jobs later but initially worked shifts that prevented them from providing full care to their children *"Yes, I work 8 hours, and I have a stable job now, [which has] a stable schedule. However, I cycled shifts in a three-shift system for the first 7 months, and there were no days off, so back then I didn't see my child much. Now I have the whole weekend, Saturday and Sunday, [and] we can spend time together."* (Olha, age 34, son aged 11)

Another participant also reported how she and her daughter miss each other due to the differences in schedules between the daughter's school and her shift work: *"Well, [we get] half an hour before she goes to bed, or when I have*

1 These are therefore women who are caring for a child up to the age of 17, even though they may not in all cases be the mother of these children. For simplicity, we refer to them as single-parent households.

days like today and yesterday. I'm working on a short schedule this week. I saw her today. She came home from school, and I spent time with her... But I mean, I wish I could spend more time with her. I have to work, and I work for 12 hours. It's good that she's more mature now; she can stay home and cook meals. That makes me happy." (Svitlana, age 37, 1 child)

Although having a paid job, **women in single-parent households report worse financial security in the survey than other respondents. They earn significantly less – 62% earn less than 800 € (compared to 34% among the rest of respondents), and most of them report a net monthly income of 600 – 800 €**, which is below the average wage level in Slovakia identified for 2024. The lower bound is at the net minimum wage for that year. Overall, they perceive their income as quite restrictive in what they can afford financially. Almost half (47%) of these households declare that they have difficulties buying new seasonal clothes or shoes each year (while 32% of the whole sample reports the same difficulties). 56% of single-parent households perceive that they cannot afford to spend a small amount on themselves each week, e. g. a cinema ticket (35% among the rest of respondents), and 19% of families reported struggling to pay their rent (12% among the rest).

In the focus groups, we have also noted that mothers in single-parent households face significant financial problems. Some of them were only able to support the family by virtue of living in a supported housing program[2]:

"We do everything we can to stay here, [but] a lot depends on the program that we currently have and that subsidises rent; so, for now, until September, we are here, because the program has been extended. Now I can plan ahead for four months in my life. If the program gets abolished, everyone will face the acute question of whether it is possible to pay for their housing. I don't even want to put that question on the table as I don't know what might happen [then]." (Olena, age 38, 2 children)

At the same time, these households face a great deal of uncertainty as the terms of supported housing have been changing frequently and with little notice. As the above quote shows, this increases pressure on such households and causes concerns about family security. They thus feel uncertain about the future, which is a hindering factor for integration.

On the one hand, women living in single-parent households struggle to provide for their families financially. On the other hand, they lack time that they would like to spend with their children and do not have the opportunity to provide them with the standard of care that would be comparable to the one they could provide in Ukraine. The same participant put it this way: *"Actually, I feel that I don't give my children the kind of care that I would like to give them; the kind of care that I could give them in Ukraine. There, I could afford to take them to after-school clubs.*

2 The Supported Housing Programme refers to an accommodation allowance paid to people who house these refugees in their flats and houses. The allowance was introduced at the time of the first major wave of refugees from Ukraine and its rules have changed over time. Focus group discussions were held at a time when the supported housing programme covered a larger proportion of refugees. From 2024 onwards, only vulnerable groups, defined as people with disabilities, people over 65, children under 5 and their parents, as well as people in material need, are eligible.

I had more time, and I gave them more. My daughters also matured quickly here. It happened so because of the circumstances. One of them started going to school, first grade. When I have time, I try to spend it with my children; I don't have a very busy work schedule. I have a day off [here and there], I have free Saturdays [and] Sundays. Since I had to change my profession, I have noticed that the children miss me too." (Olena, age 38, 2 children)

In the focus groups, mothers described various strategies that they employ to compensate for the lack of informal care networks in the family – a common part of their lives in Ukraine notably absent in Slovakia. A frequent narrative was the need for a consistent daily schedule to "get everything done." **In the focus groups, they noted that care within the family is often handled flexibly depending on the resources available – older children help with care for their younger siblings, while younger children had to become more independent by travelling to school alone or by spending time at home without adult supervision at a younger age.** Another perceived obstacle was the limited access to formal care infrastructure – including lack of capacity in kindergartens and in schools of all levels. Due to these circumstances, informal care networks are essential.

Participants organise care mainly within the family, but also within shared housing, community networks or, if the family is more secure economically, also by using paid childcare (Ukrainian nannies). In some cases, grandmothers temporarily come to Slovakia to help with caregiving. Participants noted that they were looking for jobs that would allow them to care for their children, such as flexible work, telework or informal employment. **Others described the strategy of staying out of work until they find a place for their children in a kindergarten or a primary school.** In line with other research findings (UNHCR, 2024), the situation is particularly problematic for those families whose members face specific health needs.

Access to formal care infrastructure, including the healthcare education or kindergartens, plays an important role in the life and social situation of people from Ukraine. In the focus groups, **most participants stated they perceive enrolment of children in kindergartens as important** and expressed interest in placing younger children in kindergarten; sometimes, however, they had to deal with lack of preschool facilities, placing numerous calls and sending emails with no response from state facilities, eventually finding private kindergartens that were the only ones able to offer a place for their children. They expressed a preference for state-run facilities; that said, private facilities were often the only viable option due to their greater availability.

"It so happened that we moved in December, with the winter break already in full swing. There is a state kindergarten there, but nobody answered our emails, and you can't get in there and talk to someone... I would go [to kindergartens], write and call..." (Vasylina, age 33, 1 child)

Most women expressed an **interest in enrolling their children in schools; some have done so straight away, while others waited so as not to add to all of the changes that the children had to face after fleeing Ukraine. Children thus did not enter the Slovak school system, particularly in cases where they continued their online**

education in Ukraine or where their parents could not find a suitable school. The proximity of the school to their place of residence was crucial for families for practical reasons – it made commute or travel easier, alleviated adaptation difficulties, reduced the overall stress associated with schoolwork and allowed the women to better balance their responsibilities within the family with those at work. Although some children continued their studies in Ukraine and went to a Slovak school simultaneously, they gradually stopped with remote learning due to the great difficulty of studying in two schools, adjusting to learning in a new language or due to the time commitment that this required from both children and mothers.

"Well, we stopped before the holidays and that was it; I wrote an application to quit school in Ukraine. Well, he can't manage the adaptation, moving to a new environment, and the required level of knowledge... He only went to a Slovak school. Because of the language barrier, it was difficult to adapt to the requirements." (Julia, age 35, 1 child)

The results of our research show that **93% of six- to fourteen-year-old children of the survey participants are attending primary school, and 89.7% of young people aged 15 to 17 are continuing their studies at secondary schools.** According to the Ministry of Education, there were 10,632 Ukrainian children in Slovak primary and secondary schools at the end of 2024. Data on the exact number of school-age Ukrainian children is not available. UNHCR data (2024) indicates that 32% of the 131,000 Ukrainian refugees are children under 17. This suggests that the high enrolment rate in our sample is unlikely to reflect the reality of all Ukrainian children, and the bias in our sample may have been caused by the selection method of respondents.

Despite the high number of enrolled children, many of them face serious barriers on their path to full integration in the school environment. The language barrier is perhaps the most prominent one. Parents cited the planned early return of their children back to Ukraine as the main reason for not attending school. Other factors include lack of information about enrolment, financial difficulties with school supplies and problems related to not having a command of Slovak. Parents also reported that some children prefer distance education from Ukraine. These findings indicate the need for further support to school integration. In addition to language training for children and teachers, it will be necessary to increase the capacity of schools that accept Ukrainian children and to provide effective methodological and professional support to schools, as well as material support for families facing financial barriers as they strive to manage their children's education.

Insufficient care capacity has also been evident in the child healthcare. A child's illness was perceived by women as a situation that the household could not afford to handle, leading to an emphasis on prevention and minimising the impact of illness on family functioning: *"The way I do it, when they get sick, is that they stay at home and I am available 'remotely' – 'drink this, do this'. I trust them completely."* (Yana, age 43, 2 children)

When it comes to overall well-being, women in single-parent households are at a disadvantage. Their overall satisfaction with their current life is significantly lower than

others (24% rather dissatisfied and strongly dissatisfied compared to 13% in the remaining sample population). This corresponds with the findings of UNHCR (2025), where women aged 35+ reported higher rates of psychological distress compared to men. In the qualitative research, **female participants also talked about the great psychological sense of insecurity that they found difficult to bear. Some of them were aware that it is difficult to find a job in Slovakia that would match their qualifications – and even if they do find a qualified job, it is often not sufficient in terms of remuneration.** As a result, they only live in the present moment and make plans merely for the near future:

"I don't know what our future will bring. There are no jobs in Kharkiv. I am divorced. There is practically nobody left there no friends or relatives. I don't know, it's very difficult. Housing is very expensive here; I've already asked if it was possible to take out a loan later if they let me buy something. Or if I sell the [flat] in Ukraine. If you sell there, it won't pay enough. I don't have a plan yet, everything feels so foggy, so blurry; [it's] very difficult for a single person with a kid." (Svitlana, age 37, 1 child)

Research findings indicate that female Ukrainian refugees, especially those caring for children alone, find themselves in a vulnerable position due to their care commitments and lacking formal infrastructure. They also stress how crucial social networks and community support are when facing displacement. At the same time, this type of assistance goes beyond care and encompasses a wider range of forms.

Social networks, support and community assistance

Informal support and assistance from the participants' social networks and community include emotional, informational, and instrumental assistance, and can take the form of emotional support, financial assistance, sharing of information about work or housing, as well as practical assistance in daily life, all of which help individuals cope with various situations central to the lives of displaced refugees. This form of support is related to interpersonal relationships within an individual's social network, which includes family members, friends, neighbours, institutions, colleagues, caregivers or support groups (Thoits, 2011).

Our research shows that **Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia rely primarily on their own Ukrainian community, while having fewer but stronger ties to people from Slovakia.** In the survey, we asked how many people, both those from Ukraine living in Slovakia and those from Slovakia, respondents consider close enough to rely on in case of serious personal, financial, or other issues. Responses showed that the majority reported having three or more close people from Ukraine (48.7%), compared to the number of such people who are from Slovakia (30.6%). This indicates that their primary source of help and support is the Ukrainian community. At the same time, only 6.8% of the respondents have no close person from Ukraine in Slovakia; up to 13.1%, however, have nobody close from Slovakia. More than a half (51.9%) of the respondents have only one to two close people from Slovakia, with women (54.2%) relying on them more often than men (47.1%). At the same time, it appears that women

have generally more stable social networks than men, and their ties to people from Slovakia, though not as numerous, are stronger. **These findings show how important the role of the Ukrainian community is in providing mutual social support.**

Table 10: **Overview of social support from people from Ukraine and Slovakia**

Number of close persons	People from Ukraine – Whole sample (%)	People from Ukraine – Men (%)	People from Ukraine – Women (%)	People from SK – Whole sample (%)	People from SK – Men (%)	People from SK – Women (%)
None	6.8 %	5.8 %	7.4 %	13.1 %	15.5 %	12.0 %
1 – 2 persons	41.4 %	42.00 %	40.6 %	51.9 %	47.1 %	54.2 %
3 – 5 persons	36.8 %	36.2 %	37.5 %	22.3 %	23.6 %	21.9 %
6 or more persons	11.9 %	13.2 %	11.4 %	8.4 %	10.3 %	7.4 %
Don't know/don't want to answer	3.2 %	2.9 %	3.1 %	4.4 %	3.5 %	4.6 %

The qualitative research has also shown that support and assistance in displacement were mainly seen through the prism of informal networks. In terms of practical help, women most frequently mentioned their own mothers/in-laws, friends and/or roommates, as well as the community at work – their colleagues and co-workers. Participants also mentioned online forums and social media discussion groups as a source of support: *"[There's] also my husband's mother, but we have become friends with a family from my husband's work here – a girl and her family –, and we are very supportive of each other. We can also talk about anything related to Slovakia, such as various organizational and legal issues, and [there's] also the people at my husband's work, because everybody there has some experience."* (Vasylina, age 33, 1 child)

In the event of financial difficulties, Ukrainian refugees often turn to their social networks, not only in Slovakia but also in Ukraine. Participants in the focus groups reported that their primary source of financial support was friends and acquaintances, especially from the Ukrainian community in Slovakia, as well as family members or their Slovak colleagues at work. Several respondents also noted that due to their difficult financial situation in Slovakia, they receive support from their spouses in Ukraine, if only in a symbolic manner. In some cases, the respondents' parents helped temporarily from Ukraine: *"My husband can help me a little now... What the husband can send from Ukraine... the income in hryvnas does not match or cover the local expenses in euros... That help simply cannot balance out and cover the needs."* (Yana, age 43, 2 children)

When facing financial difficulties, Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia do not rely solely on local resources, but instead activate their wider network of contacts, including both their community in Slovakia and family members in Ukraine. The reverse flow of financial support is also an important aspect, as in some cases, the refugees are assisted by their relatives in Ukraine, especially by their spouses and parents. These dynamics highlight the fact that their families are interconnected transnationally and that their community relationships persist despite being geographically separated.

Transnational interconnection: family relations, contacts and ties

Due to war and displacement, Ukrainian families live in different countries. However, they maintain strong ties with family members and keep a sense of family belonging through transnational relations, care, and mutual support (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Cienfuegos-Illanes & Brandhorst, 2023). Our research shows that **refugees living in Slovakia maintain intensive contacts with their families and friends in Ukraine.** Most respondents (77.5%) communicate with their loved ones in Ukraine at least once a week, while up to 23.5% are in touch every day. Most frequently, they communicate two to three times a week (29.2%). Women maintain slightly more intensive contact with their loved ones than men.

Table 11: Frequency of contact with people in Ukraine

Frequency of contact	Whole sample (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)
Daily	23.5 %	20.1 %	25.5 %
2 – 3 times a week	29.2 %	28.7 %	29.2 %
At least once a week	24.9 %	26.4 %	23.7 %
At least once a month	15.7 %	16.1 %	15.7 %
Less frequently	6.8 %	8.6 %	5.9 %

In the focus groups, the participants stressed that communication with their families, husbands, relatives and friends in Ukraine is very frequent and essential for them. They also expressed a strong desire for physical closeness with their loved ones: *"I am in touch with my family every day, which is also a big plus. I don't know how we would manage without those daily video calls, not just once a day, but several times... I miss the hugs, of course, but it is what it is."* (Lyudmyla, age 46, 2 children)

In terms of communication forms, video and chat-enabled platforms such as WhatsApp, Viber and Telegram were prevalent in the focus groups. These tools play a key role in intergenerational and family communication, serving both communication with fathers of the families who remained in Ukraine and that with grandparents. As one participant noted, *"Well, my children talk to their father every day, always via video; they like it very much, they expect him to join*

us for holidays... But the children are fine, they communicate the same, maybe they are even closer [now]." (Yana, age 43, 2 children)

Frequent contacts and interactions are also largely motivated by the need to care for family members who have remained in Ukraine. Our research shows that this need is significant – more than half of the respondents (51.9%) reported that they have loved ones in Ukraine who currently need care. Men declared the need to provide care to someone in Ukraine slightly more often than women (54.6% versus 51.1% of women).

Table 12: Overview of relatives left in Ukraine in need of care

Answer/Family member	Whole sample (%)	Men (%)	Woman (%)
Has someone in Ukraine who needs care	51.9 %	54.6 %	51.1 %
Has no one in Ukraine who needs care	48.1 %	45.4 %	48.9 %
Grandparents	55.9 %	57.9 %	54.8 %
Parents	60.5 %	60.0 %	60.8 %
Sick partner	3.8 %	2.1 %	4.8 %
Children	5.4 %	5. %	5.4 %
Animals	18.0 %	14.7 %	19.9 %
Other persons	4.2 %	5.3 %	3.6 %

Parents (60.5%) and grandparents (55.9%) were among the most reported family members staying in Ukraine, with a minimal difference between men and women in this respect. Women are more likely to report caring for a sick partner (4.8%) than men (2.1%). However, it is not only family members who are left behind in Ukraine, but also abandoned houses, farms and animals, the care for which the refugees cannot manage directly. According to the research, 18.0% of respondents said that their animals were left behind in Ukraine. This suggests that **in addition to caring for loved ones, many refugees are also dealing with responsibility for property and living beings left without direct care after having left.**

The focus group participants further elaborated the need for care, most often stating that they were trying to secure help for their parents or in-laws who remained in Ukraine:

"My family stayed in Ukraine... we are the only ones who left. My parents are not very old, they are also in their seventies, but we helped them there and are helping from here [in Ukraine and from Slovakia, respectively – note], so it's basically the same for us. Thank God, my sister and her family get by without problems all by themselves; they don't need anything like that. My husband's family also either stayed in Ukraine or returned to Ukraine from Germany. In fact, the support is always there, the standard support, so to speak. Nothing special is happening, nothing has changed. That's basically it." (Yelizaveta, age 43, 2 children)

The nature and extent of "remote" support for people in Ukraine

With all that said, how do Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia support their loved ones who have remained in Ukraine? In a quantitative survey, we explored different forms of support – emotional, material, financial and military support. The findings show that **strong family ties are the strongest element of this support, with emotional support being the dominant form of assistance.**

Table 13: Overview of different forms of support

Form of assistance	Whole sample (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)
Emotional support	53.3 %	46.6 %	57.2 %
Material aid	29.2 %	32.8 %	27.4 %
Food	18.5 %	17.2 %	19.4 %
Financial aid	46.7 %	50.6 %	44.9 %
Remote purchase of services	3.8 %	4.0 %	3.7 %
Support to the military	5.6 %	3.5 %	6.5 %
Other forms of aid	3.6 %	2.9 %	4.00 %

Emotional support is the most common form of assistance (53.3%). More than half of the refugees regularly provide emotional support to their families, friends and relatives in Ukraine. Women (57.2%) provide emotional support more often than men (46.6%), which may be related to their greater tendency to maintain family and social ties. **Almost half of the respondents (46.7%) send money to Ukraine, with men (50.6%) sending financial aid more often than women (44.9%). This may be because many men still bear economic responsibility for their loved ones, while enjoying greater economic stability in their new country.** Material assistance and food deliveries are less common. Only about 30% of respondents provide material assistance (clothing, medicine, equipment), with men being slightly more active in this area (32.8%) than women (27.4%). Even fewer respondents (18.5%) send food to Ukraine, as they might opt not to travel to Ukraine for security reasons. Purchasing services remotely is rare (3.8%) and includes, for example, paid social services and healthcare for older adults. Support for the military is low (5.6%), but women (6.5%) are more likely to provide it than men (3.5%). Most refugees focus on basic forms of assistance such as emotional and financial support.

Mental health of refugees

Uncertain situation in Slovakia, stress connected to financial support and provision of care for their families, concerns about the situation and for loved ones in Ukraine, as well as unclear future prospects – all these factors have an impact on the mental health of refugees. Almost a quarter of them experienced depressive feelings a significant part or most of the time during the past week (i.e. the week prior to responding to the research questions), and a fifth have perceived stress often or most of the time. Similarly, a quarter reported a lack positive feelings often or most of the time. On the overall four-point experience scale, they ranked between 1.75 and 2.75.

Table 14: **Feelings experienced past week**

	I haven't experienced any positive feelings	I have overreacted in certain situations	I felt sad and depressed	I felt nervous and I had to do something about it
It didn't apply to me at all	31.20 %	30.20 %	25.60 %	34.20 %
It sometimes applied to me	43.50 %	52.50 %	51.90 %	44.10 %
This applied to me often	22.90 %	16.50 %	19.50 %	18.70 %
This applied to me most of the time	2.40 %	0.80 %	3 %	3 %

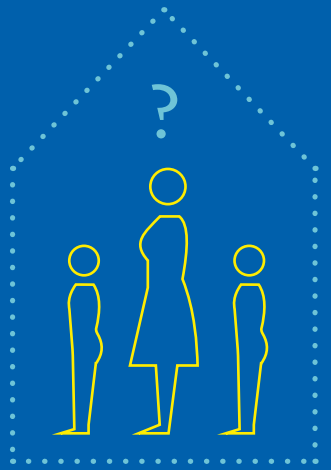
These results highlight the mental health difficulties present among refugees from Ukraine. They are consistent with other research focusing on mental health in this population, which suggests several possible reasons – trauma associated with war and their forced departure from their homes, as well as cumulative stress associated with relocation, adaptation and integration in a new country (Ellis et al., 2024; Buchcik et al., 2023). Despite the evident need, problems with access to mental health support persist. According to the UNHCR survey (2025), only 32% of people from Ukraine in Slovakia who had experienced mental health problems sought professional help.

Summary

The findings of our research highlight a complex situation regarding care in the families of Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia. The predominance of women, the high proportion of single-parent households, and multigenerational living pose specific challenges related to childcare, elderly household members, and the maintenance of transnational ties. Lack of care infrastructure, limited access to kindergartens, or absence of flexible work options for parents might further complicate the situation and leave refugees in a vulnerable position. Single women with children who, although working, find it difficult to cover all the family's needs (including housing) are a particularly vulnerable group.

At the same time, we see how important social networks, community support, and informal care strategies are to compensate for the absence or insufficient level of institutional support. Although the Ukrainian community seems to be the main source of help and support, links with Slovak society are also an important source of informal support structures, especially for women. At the same time, transnational interconnection represents an additional source of help and support, which applies to help directed not only from Slovakia to Ukraine, but also from Ukraine to Slovakia.

Support for refugees should consider specific care challenges and include the development of accessible services – especially in the areas of childcare, flexible working conditions, and psychosocial support. Furthermore, opportunities for interaction and networking between the Ukrainian and Slovak communities need to be strengthened, creating more sustainable support and integration mechanisms.



Single women with children are a particularly vulnerable group

4 Integration of Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia and its psychological context

One of the key aspects of successful integration of refugees is a sense of acceptance and belonging to a new country. This involves not only the practicalities of settling into a new environment, including language acquisition and integration into the labour market, but also the complex psychological processes involved in building relationships with the majority population and redefining one's own identity. This issue is particularly relevant for people from Ukraine who came to Slovakia due to war.

Research shows that the quality of social interactions between migrants and the native population significantly influences not only their level of integration, but also their overall life satisfaction and psychological well-being (Kadlečíková et al., 2011; Popper et al., 2006). At the same time, the language barrier often represents the first significant hurdle when integrating into a new society. That said, it is precisely by overcoming these barriers and building interpersonal relationships that one can develop a stronger sense of belonging and form a new, more complex identity (Hynie, 2018).

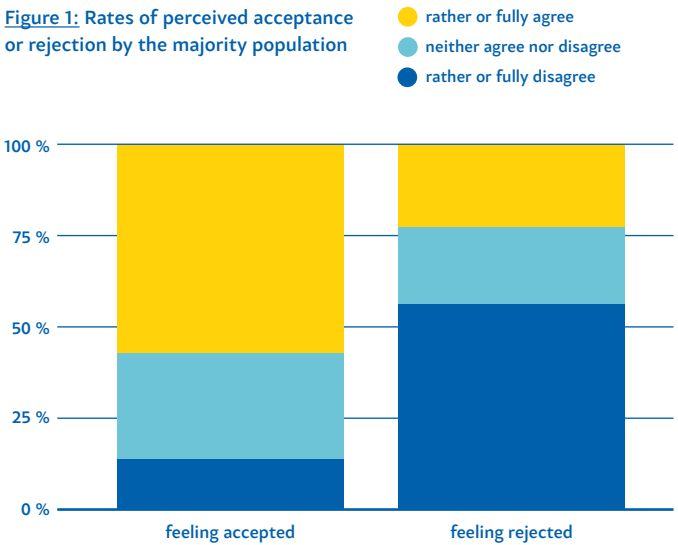
In this chapter, we focus on three mutually connected aspects of integration of the Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia:

- the degree of perceived acceptance by the majority population,
- the nature and quality of contacts with the locals, and
- identity and a sense of belonging in a new environment.

The degree of perceived acceptance by the majority population

We asked our respondents to describe the extent to which they feel accepted or excluded in Slovakia because of their origin in Ukraine. A total of 57.7% stated that they felt accepted in Slovakia, and 56.6% of the respondents reported no experiences of exclusion or mistreatment because of their origin. That said, almost a quarter of the respondents (23.3%) stated that they had experienced rejection or mistreatment, and almost a third (30%) were ambivalent about their acceptance by the majority population.

Figure 1: Rates of perceived acceptance or rejection by the majority population



The refugees' perception of the majority population's stance towards them is also important for successful integration into the new society (Te Lindert et al., 2022). In total, 61.1% of respondents agree or strongly agree that Slovaks have a generally positive attitude towards people from Ukraine, are friendly towards them and want to spend time with them. Similarly, less than a fifth (19.6%) think that Slovaks' impressions of Ukrainians are strongly or somewhat negative in general, and 38.8% think that they are strongly or somewhat positive. However, an almost equal portion of respondents (41.6%) believes that these impressions are neither positive nor negative, which may lead to perceiving the signals sent to refugees by members of the majority population as ambiguous.

The following story suggests that personal contacts between people from Ukraine and people from the majority population across different age categories can be an important factor in building mutual understanding and positive relationships. One of the young respondents from Ukraine in the focus group described his positive experience of meeting an older Slovak as follows:

"After school, I was going to take the bus. I was waiting at the bus stop, and an elderly gentleman came up to me and started talking to me. He was Slovak and I speak Slovak, so we talked. He said that a long time ago he had lived in Ukraine, [and] that his daughter was studying there. We had a chat and then he left." (Vladymyr, age 15)

The working environment is also an important space for social integration of people from Ukraine and for strengthening contacts with Slovaks. A positive attitude to work can also contribute to experiencing life satisfaction.

"I work in a shop, household supplies. I have an employment contract. I have been working [there] for more than a year, before that I worked as a forewoman. I like my job at the moment. The Slovaks have treated me very well. They became not only my colleagues, but also my friends. I still work there. I am satisfied." (Svitlana, age 37, 1 child)

Similarly, the quantitative data suggests that 60% of respondents currently feel satisfied with their lives, while only 14.4% feel dissatisfied and just over a quarter (25.5%) feel similar levels of both satisfaction and dissatisfaction. That said, the relationship between feelings of acceptance and satisfaction with life has become apparent: if respondents perceive that the majority population does not accept them, they also feel less satisfied with life (r = 0.34)[1].

Nature and quality of contacts with the local population

The ability to overcome the language barrier is an important factor for a successful integration of refugees. **Most respondents report that they know Slovak at a sufficient level to be able to communicate.** Although only 2.2% of them report knowledge of Slovak at the level of their native language, almost a quarter (23.6%) can converse and write fluently in Slovak and almost half (45.2%) can speak Slovak in everyday situations and understand texts.

[1] V In this bracket, as well as in the brackets in the following text, the value of the correlation coefficient "r" is given, which describes the strength of the relationship between the named variables. The closer the number is to 1, the stronger the relationship between the variables. For simplicity, the value of the number r does not express the direction of the correlation, which is indicated in the text, but only the strength of the relationship.

Although the language barrier can be a challenge, some respondents do not perceive it as a major problem, which is also due to the linguistic proximity between Slovak and Ukrainian, as mentioned by one of the younger research participants:

"I used to take Slovak courses before, but then I quit. I don't know how to explain it... Even though I've got a language barrier, it's not that much of an obstacle. Slovak is similar to Ukrainian, so it's not that much of a problem." (Sebastian, 17 rokov)

Among the respondents who always or regularly use Slovak, they do so especially to communicate with state institutions or in offices (79.4%), in public spaces (75.3%) or at work (67%). As many as 43.2% use Slovak always or regularly to communicate with their friends and acquaintances, whilst 31% use it sometimes. However, 47.2% report rare to no usage of Slovak at home and 27.9% state that they only use it sometimes in this context. Interestingly, the use of Slovak is related to lower education (r = 0.34), suggesting that respondents with higher education are more likely to use English or another foreign language in communication. Similarly, older respondents are more likely to communicate in Slovak than younger respondents (r = 0.28).

Language is particularly important for integration at work and for having job opportunities in their field of work in Slovakia. Another important factor that helps the respondents overcome the language barrier is support and positive relationships within their work teams:

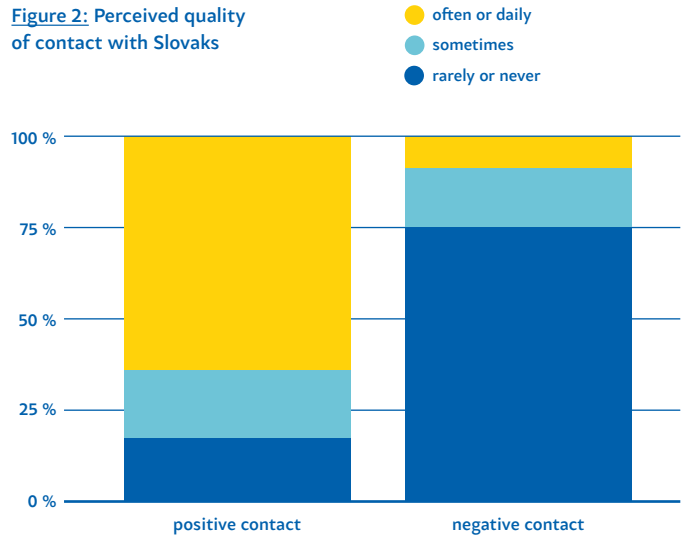
"When I first came here, I didn't speak Slovak, so I went to work wherever they took me. [Even] in a bakery, which is not my field. I met a team of five Slovaks. They were very friendly,

I worked [there] for seven months and during that time, I learned the language. It was real-world practice. They didn't speak English, so we had to speak Slovak. Then I got a job in my specialty; I translated my diploma myself because it's expensive to get a translation and go through the nostrification. (...) Since April, I have had that other job. I am a chemist by profession, and now I am really happy with my job. Well, [it's] like back home. [It's] a little different, but it's my specialty. I am happy and we are a team again. There wasn't a single Ukrainian who'd make it easier for me, but I learned the language." (Olha, age 34, 1 child)

The respondents were also asked about their experiences and the quality of their contact with Slovaks. We were interested in both positive experiences, interactions or friendly relations (positive contact) and negative experiences and misunderstandings (negative contact). Our results indicate that three quarters of respondents (75.2%) report only minimal negative interactions with Slovaks (occurring rarely or never). In fact, almost two thirds of respondents report predominantly positive interactions (occurring often or daily).

Our results further indicate that more than two thirds of respondents (67.8%) are interested in establishing even closer contacts with people from Slovakia and almost two thirds (62.9%) would like to spend more time with them. This indicates a strong motivation towards social integration as one of its key dimensions (IOM, 2008). This interest in deeper social ties may reflect both a natural need to overcome isolation and build a support network in a new environment (see e.g. Shaw & Wachter, 2024), as well as a pragmatic desire to better navigate the local society and gain access to employment or other opportunities.

Figure 2: Perceived quality of contact with Slovaks



When we asked female workers in the focus group whether they interacted predominantly with Slovaks or Ukrainians at work, they mentioned positive interactions with their Slovak colleagues.

"The Slovak colleagues are polite. I work with both Slovaks and Ukrainians in the team. The Ukrainians and Slovaks treat each other well. (...) The Slovaks are very nice, very friendly, positive, smiling, so overall it's fine." (Anna, age 44, 1 child)

"Same, I communicate with Slovaks. (...) A lot of people have spoken Russian since the Soviet Union period. This means that there is no language barrier. They are very friendly. It's a bit difficult for Ukrainian students, though." (Oksana, age 57, childless)

"Well, Slovaks are Slovaks, great. And at my work, the Slovaks are learning Ukrainian. They say they will come to rebuild Ukraine." (Alina, age 26, childless)

The daily interactions with the host population and the nature of such interactions are both very important for the psychological adjustment and well-being of people who have moved to a new environment (Kenfack et al., 2024). Our research shows that **experiences with locals play a key role in the respondents' overall life satisfaction, their emotional experience, and the perception of their own identity.** When these interactions are negative, refugees feel less engaged in society. On the other hand, positive interactions facilitate their adaptation and increase the likelihood that they start perceiving Slovakia as their new home.

Negative experiences may worsen the well-being of people from Ukraine and their willingness to integrate. Those who experience negative behaviour from the majority are less satisfied with their lives (r = 0.34) and are more likely to experience negative emotions or feelings, including that of sadness, nervousness and stress (r = 0.41). In addition, they are slightly more likely to identify as refugees (r = 0.15), which may indicate that they feel excluded from Slovak society. Those who experience more negative contact with the majority also tend to perceive negative attitudes of Slovaks towards Ukrainians to a higher extent (r = 0.45) or experience social rejection more often (r = 0.51), feeling that their identity and social situation are misunderstood or ignored.

These factors may also be related to the social behaviour of refugees – those who experience more negative interactions are also less likely to make contact with people from Slovakia (r = 0.28). A stronger identification with being a refugee is associated with lower life satisfaction (r = 0.21), suggesting that social isolation and stigmatization may be related to a lower level of well-being.

Conversely, **positive contact with Slovaks may promote the social integration of refugees and improve their quality of life.** Those with more frequent positive contact with the majority are generally more satisfied with life (r = 0.39) and experience fewer negative emotions (r = 0.30). They feel slightly less like refugees (r = 0.13) and are slightly more likely to identify as residents of Slovakia (r = 0.19) and the European Union (r = 0.13).

An important finding is that **positive contact is weakly associated with higher motivation of refugees to stay in Slovakia** (r = 0.19) and may provide incentive to create new social ties – people with more frequent positive experiences with Slovaks are more interested in further interactions (r = 0.37). This indicates that creating a safe and supportive environment can significantly influence their decision to stay in the country and actively participate in society.

Our data also suggest that respondents with higher education are slightly more likely to seek contact with Slovaks (r = 0.15), perceive contact with them as slightly more pleasant (r = 0.16), and have somewhat fewer experiences of feeling rejected or excluded (r = 0.11). The perception of interactions with Slovaks is also related to the age of the respondents. While younger people perceive contact as more pleasant (r = 0.17), the feeling of exclusion tends to increase with older age (r = 0.13).

The following stories from focus groups suggest that **social integration is a gradual process and can sometimes**

be challenging. However, positive contact and social interaction and communication with colleagues at work or peers at school is a facilitating factor. The school is an important institution that can foster cooperation and positive contact on an equal level between Slovak and Ukrainian children and youth. That way, it is possible to build trust in contact (Turner & Cameron, 2016).

"I didn't have any problems, my son is the only Ukrainian in the class and that probably helped him to start speaking Slovak faster, talking to Slovak children like that. I came home from work; our house is full of Ukrainians, we've got Ukrainian neighbours, but there are also our children, and some Slovaks, too. (...) I'm very happy that my son started talking to them and has been in touch with them since then. That's why I think it helped that there were no Ukrainian children in the class to hold on to, so he learned to communicate with Slovak children in Slovak. It was difficult, there were tears and everything, but now that this journey is over, we have Slovaks among our friends." (Ania, age 44, 1 child)

Compared to their Slovak peers, young respondents pointed out differences in their living conditions. *"This is my subjective opinion, but I think we have slightly different problems. First of all, we have a different mentality. In Slovakia, or in Europe in general, students can live with parents who support them, while in our country, you move out to be on your own at seventeen or eighteen. So Slovak students can concentrate on doing well in their studies, and Ukrainians have to look for a job and think about becoming independent while also studying and managing their personal and social lives. And on top of that, now that there's a war, it's even harder. But the situation is individual for everybody. Many people have gone abroad and it's very difficult when they don't speak the language of the country."* (Timea, age 18).

"In my opinion, the childhood of Slovak children is longer by a couple of years. Ukrainians already go to college at seventeen... We can say that they are not children anymore [then]. And especially now, during the war. Slovaks study peacefully at universities, all the way up to the age of 26. That means they have a longer childhood." (Martin, age 17)

These stories also suggest that young people from Ukraine face a double burden. In addition to the challenges of growing up, quickly gaining independence, or having to find their own identity, they also have to cope with the trauma of war experiences (see e.g. Gallo Kriglerová & Holka Chudžíková, 2025). These factors can greatly affect their ability to integrate and build positive contact with their Slovak peers.

Identity and sense of belonging to a new country

A crucial aspect of successful psychological integration of refugees is the ability to integrate in a way where they can retain their original identity and cultural background, whilst embracing elements of the new culture and forming a relationship with the host country (for an overview, see e.g. Chvojková & Hřebíčková, 2018). This process involves physical, emotional and psychological adjustments that allow individuals to perceive themselves as a part of a new community, retaining their identity at the same time. The balance between accepting the new

culture and maintaining their original values is of key importance (Berry, 1992). Participants in focus groups felt similarly: *"Well, I definitely want to integrate into this culture, get to know it a little bit more. I want to fulfil my life here somehow, I mean, to be able to live fully as a Ukrainian. As a Ukrainian, and not as someone who came here and grew to be 'half-Slovak' [smile]."* (Yeva, age 31, 1 child).

The respondents were asked to identify the extent to which they see different local and communal affiliations (local, national, European, or global) as important parts of their identity – who they feel they are and how they perceive themselves. Our data suggest that an important part of respondents' identities is primarily identifying as citizens of Ukraine (71.1%) or members of their ethnic group/nation (64%), then citizens of the wider region (61.4%) or their district, town or village of residence prior to their departure from Ukraine (57.4%). More than half of the respondents (50.4%) consider being European as very important or somewhat important for their identity; almost half of them (45.4%) consider being an inhabitant of Slovakia as very important or rather important for their identity. The refugee identity, which is seen as rather important or very important by 44.3% of respondents, strengthens if facing lack of acceptance by Slovaks and having negative experiences of contact (Bobowik et al, 2017). While almost a third of the respondents (31.3%) feel that they are citizens of the world, only about a fifth of them (20.4%) would identify with the former Soviet Union (20.4%).

The age of the respondents is related to their self-perception as the residents of their district, city or village in Ukraine (r = 0.22), as residents of their wider region of origin (r = 0.19), as members of their ethnic group/nation (r = 0.16), as residents of the former Soviet Union (r = 0.20), and as refugees (r = 0.12). The education of respondents also shows some (although weak) relation to self-identification. The higher the respondent's education, the weaker the identification with the former Soviet Union (r = 0.12) and, conversely, the higher the self-perception as an inhabitant of Slovakia (r = 0.11) and the European Union (r = 0.12).

Table 15: Self-identification of respondents

	% of respondents for whom this identity is rather important or very important
Citizen of Ukraine	71.1
Representative of an ethnic group, nation	64
Resident of a region (oblast, several districts) in Ukraine	61.4
Inhabitant of a village, district or town in Ukraine	57.4
European	50.4
Inhabitant of the Slovak Republic	45.4
Refugee	44.3
Citizen of the world	31.3
Citizen of the former Soviet Union	20.4

Our results suggest that **Slovakia, traditionally perceived as a transit country in the context of international migration, is gradually transforming into a place where refugees seek stability and an opportunity of long-term settlement** (Přívarová et al, 2022; Štefančík et al., 2022). This trend is of much interest, given that Slovakia (similarly to the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary) has become a place where many refugees from Ukraine have found safety. Although some have moved further to Western Europe, many have remained in these countries, motivated by geographical proximity, cultural and linguistic similarities, as well as the possibility of returning to Ukraine and helping their relatives (Moroń et al., 2024). Based on their experience of life in Slovakia, almost two thirds (63.7%) of respondents perceive Slovakia somewhat or much more positively than before their arrival in the country, and less than one third (29.3%) report no changes in their perception of the country.

More than three quarters of respondents (76.3%) are considering staying in Slovakia for more than five years; only less than a quarter (23.7%) of them are not considering a stay longer than five years. Of those who want to stay in Slovakia, a significant majority is aged 35 and below (81.7%) and has attained higher education (90.8%). If respondents were to consider returning to Ukraine, they would mainly do so if their relatives or loved ones in Ukraine needed their care (45.4%) or if they experienced mistreatment by Slovaks (18.8%).

The focus group results suggest that people of different ages consider staying in Slovakia for a variety of reasons, including new long-term relationships and friendships in the case of young adults, securing a future for one's children in the case of parents of minors, or the need for stability and peace of mind to live out the rest of one's life in the case of middle-aged or senior respondents.

"Well, yes, I am dating a Slovak, and that is why I have friends and acquaintances here who are also Slovak. I haven't started living a full life in Ukraine yet, so why not start it here?" (Valeria, age 20, childless)

"I see my future here, in this country. I also see my family's future here, but I still want to be able to go to Ukraine and want for my husband to be able to go there. I mean, for the war to end, because there are still lots of close people there that I want to keep seeing. And here, I want to be able to fulfil my life vision. I mean, secure a good future for my child somehow, and my own living." (Yeva, age 31, 1 child)

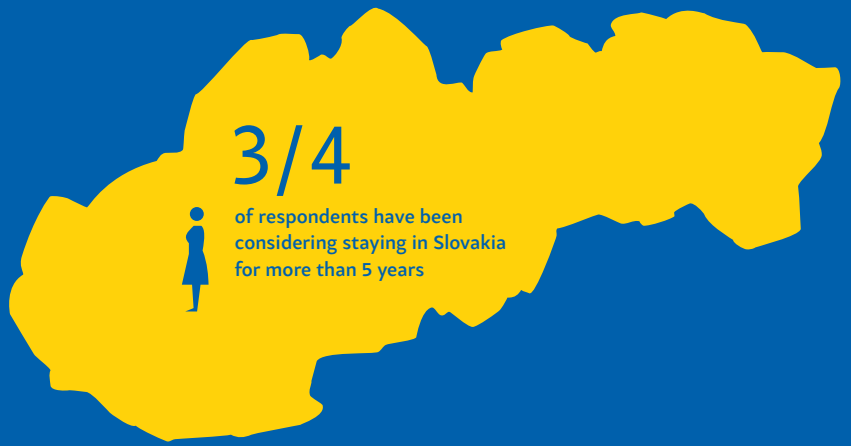
"I would like to move on because I'm getting older, and I don't want to run back and forth. I would like to settle somewhere on the edge, so that there would be some shelter, some housing; you have to keep on living somehow. I don't know how it will be in Ukraine. All my relatives are there, [and] my soul hurts, but there is no going back. Running away again, being confused again. Maybe if I were twenty, I'd consider it; but yeah, one has to let go." (Anna, age 44, 1 child)

Summary

A significant portion of respondents has expressed interest in continuing their social integration into Slovak society. That said, any interpretation of these results has to recognize the different backgrounds of the respondents' motivation to build relationships with the majority population. In the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine, this interest may represent a short-term adaptation strategy aimed at improving the current quality of life, whilst also possibly indicating other plans to remain in the country on a more long-term basis.

Although most experiences of our respondents are those of acceptance, a significant portion (one fifth) reports feeling rejected by the majority population. The issue of acceptance (or lack thereof) is also linked to the refugees' mental health, life satisfaction and overall quality of life. Moreover, those who feel accepted also identify more strongly with Slovakia.

More than three quarters of respondents have been considering staying in Slovakia for more than five years, indicating a shift in the perception of Slovakia as a transit point towards their destination chosen for long-term integration. Many Ukrainians have chosen to stay in Slovakia as well as in other countries of the V4 group, motivated by geographical, cultural and linguistic proximity. This trend necessitates the development of a coordinated and comprehensive policy to ensure improved linguistic support, access to education, employment opportunities and social inclusion. For integration to be sustainable, it is necessary to develop a holistic strategy on a national level, promoting social participation of Ukrainian refugees and enabling them to contribute to social development.



5 Summary of key findings from the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic

Cooperation with the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic (ASCR) and information about the research

The report includes key findings of the partner project of the Institute of Sociology of the ASCR (https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/cz/tiskove-zpravy/ostatni/ostatni-ruzne/5935-hlas-ukrajincu-vyzkumna-zprava), which extend the context of the results from Slovakia and help researches identify similarities and differences as they map the status and life of Ukrainian refugees in different Central European countries.

The Centre for Public Opinion Research, part of the Institute of Sociology of the ASCR, implements the Voice of Ukrainians project. This project was created as a collaborative effort of the Institute of Sociology of the ASCR and PAQ Research. It is a longitudinal quantitative study of the Ukrainian refugee population in the Czech Republic, i.e. the citizens of Ukraine who have moved to the Czech Republic due to the Russian invasion launched on 24 February 2022. Similar to research in the Slovak Republic, the research in the Czech Republic maps the situation of Ukrainian refugees in key areas of integration and everyday life, with a recurrent focus on working conditions and labour market inclusion, income and material living conditions, housing, Czech proficiency among adults, as well as the education and leisure activities of children. The findings provide an overview of the challenges faced by this population, together with factors that influence their adaptation, improving our understanding of their needs and gaining insight into the dynamics of the integration process.

The Ukrainian Refugee Panel was created in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic (MLSA), and panel participants have been recruited from among applicants for humanitarian benefits. The panel was later organised again in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MLSA) and the Ministry of Interior (MoI) of the Czech Republic.

Integration of Ukrainian Refugees in the Slovak Republic. Summary of key findings:

- Ukrainian refugees show a high level of economic activity, most often working in services and commerce, where their representation is almost double the Slovak average, especially among women.
- On average, they have worked in their current positions for more than a year (14 months) and 62.5% of working Ukrainians have an employment contract.
- Many Ukrainian refugees are in vulnerable working conditions, as more than a fifth carry out work on the so-called work agreement contract type, or do so through agencies, which leads to lower wages and uncertainty.
- Opportunities for career development are limited, with only less than half of the respondents feeling that it is possible to get a better job or a higher salary.
- Social networks play a key role in the integration of refugees, as both the Ukrainian community and people from Slovakia are a source of significant social support, contributing to their well-being.
- Most respondents plan to stay in Slovakia with a long-term outlook, with over 75% considering a stay of five years and more.

Integration of Ukrainian refugees in the Czech Republic. Summary of key findings:

- A large majority of the economically active Ukrainian refugees in the Czech Republic works full or part-time in the Czech Republic, seeing systematic growth of this share in the first two years and having noted an increase between 2023 and 2024. By 2024, the situation has stabilised and the opportunities for participation seem to have peaked.
- At the same time, Ukrainian refugees work below their qualifications, with specialists assuming both skilled and unskilled blue-collar positions.
- A major part faces difficult working conditions and financial stress, and a significant proportion has inadequate legal or social protection. In addition, upward career mobility or development are only accessible to a minority of the refugee population.
- A significant proportion of Ukrainian migrants still experience income poverty and material deprivation, although the situation has somewhat improved over the time.
- Knowledge of Czech is closely linked to labour market integration. It is thus positive that refugees in the Czech Republic have acquired a better command of Czech, although there are still individuals who cannot advance their career due to lower proficiency. Work is cited as the main factor that prevents them from taking courses and forces them to rely on self-study.
- The outlook regarding an eventual return has also been evolving. We have seen an increase in the share of those who plan to stay in the Czech Republic for the next two years; that said, plans to return are influenced not only by the ongoing war, but also by other, highly variable factors.

6 Conclusion

The *"Social Survey of Ukrainian Migrants in Slovakia"* project of the Slovak Academy of Sciences has brought substantial findings on the life, work and social situation of Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia, as well as findings on their integration with a potential to go beyond the scope of a social probe. By identifying the positives, obstacles and challenges, the research results can contribute to the improvement of the living and working conditions of people coming to Slovakia from Ukraine, and draw attention to systemic shortcomings, stimulating public debate and active participation of all stakeholders.

Positive findings regarding the integration of refugees from Ukraine:

- **High economic activity** – more than two thirds of the respondents are working, which is above the levels observed in the adult population of Slovak citizens.
- **Work matching qualifications** – almost two thirds of refugees have found employment at or above their qualification level.
- **Social networks and community support** – support to people from Ukraine is provided primarily by the Ukrainian community, and to some extent by their Slovak connections.
- **Stability and job satisfaction** – many consider their jobs stable, financially sufficient and adequate to their skills.
- **Long-term plans to stay** – more than three quarters of the respondents are considering staying in Slovakia for five and more years.

Findings on barriers to integration of refugees from Ukraine:

- **Inadequate job level** – parents with young children often work below their qualifications, many on temporary or less favourable contract types.
- **Low wages and limited career opportunities** – most respondents want a higher salary, less than half see the possibility of career advances.
- **Working in vulnerable conditions** – more than a fifth (22.3%) work on "work agreement" contracts and 16.5% through agencies, which leads to lower incomes and insecurity.
- **Childcare and eldercare** – the high proportion of single-parent households and the lack of infrastructure complicate integration.
- **Experiences of non-acceptance** – about one fifth of respondents reports experiences of rejection or ambivalent attitudes from the majority population.

Challenges in the integration of refugees from Ukraine:

- **Improving access to education and work** – there is a need for better support of language acquisition and flexible working conditions for parents.
- **Expanding childcare services** – the availability of nurseries and other services to support families is of major importance.
- **Promoting social inclusion** – strengthening links between the Ukrainian and Slovak communities.
- **Coordinated state policy** – aimed at long-term integration and active participation of the refugees in society.

A thorough knowledge of the situation of Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia is essential to improve the understanding of their needs and the challenges associated with the ongoing process of inclusion. Three years after the beginning of Russia's total invasion of Ukraine, Slovakia is at a point of transition from emergency reception to long-term integration. This shift requires a systemic and thoughtful approach to the development of inclusive policies and support mechanisms that reflect the real needs of Ukrainian refugees. However, this process is not possible without the consideration of the perspectives, experiences and voices of people from Ukraine based on empirical findings, as well as on a thorough understanding of their situation, their needs and the broader context of their lives in Slovakia.

The research findings show that the process of integration of people from Ukraine in Slovakia is already underway and, in many respects, progressing. At the same time, there are still several significant challenges that may affect its long-term sustainability or potential, as well as general social cohesion in Slovakia. Addressing them will require coordinated efforts of the state, civic organisations, academia and the refugees themselves. The future of integration will thus depend not only on the individual adaptation strategies of people from Ukraine, but mainly on Slovakia's ability to provide comprehensive support in the spheres of education, employment, and social protection, with particular attention to vulnerable groups. In this context, considering the specific needs of different refugee groups – including children, elderly persons and persons with disabilities – proves essential, with a personalised

approach to integration policies being seen as a key prerequisite for their success.

The research findings thus provide a valuable foundation for strategic planning of integration processes, highlighting the urgent need for systemic changes towards ensuring long-term social cohesion and inclusion.

Three years since the war began, Slovakia is becoming a country that people from Ukraine (and other countries) prospectively see as their future. However, the question of how we, as a society, can create the conditions for their full integration, remains open.

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