

Voice of Ukrainians: Education, Housing, Employment, Poverty, Mental Health

/ Refugee survey



Sociologický ústav
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About the survey

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Summary

The survey is carried out by PAQ Research in cooperation with the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences. It maps the experiences of Ukrainian refugees who have moved to the Czech Republic since February 2022. Reports from the survey are published under the umbrella of series “Voice of Ukrainians”.

Methods

The survey is carried out in several waves, each focusing on different topics regarding living in the Czech Republic as a refugee.

The online surveys are sent to a panel of refugees managed by the Institute of Sociology of the CAS. The panel was created in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic. Participation in the research is anonymous, respondents' identities are verified by telephone during the recruitment phase. The sample is representative in terms of the region of residence within the Czech Republic, the combination of age and gender within regions, and in terms of education. Representativeness is ensured by a combination of random stratified sampling (reaching randomly selected contacts within the micro-regions of the Czech Republic) and subsequent data weighting to ensure that the sample structure matches statistics from the Czech Ministry of Interior.

Survey waves:

1. wave: Education, leisure, housing:

N = 1300 households with N=1447 children; data collection 20. 6. – 13. 7. 2022

2. wave: Employment, qualifications, language, IT skills, poverty:

N = 6215 refugees in 1457 households, data collection 4.–29. 8. 2022.

3. wave: Health, use of services:

N = 1347, data collection 5.–22. 9. 2022

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1) Education

Main findings and relevant recommendations

Reasons for delayed attendance include lack of information and rejection by schools

About 57% of Ukrainian refugee children attended Czech primary/secondary schools¹ in June. Kindergartens and high schools were both only attended by around 25%. One eighth of children in primary school age and one fifth of high schoolers did not attend any schooling neither in Czech schools nor online in Ukraine.

Most parents are planning to enrol their children in kindergarten and primary school which could result in oversubscription of schools in certain regions. High-school aged students are at risk of not enrolling at all.

The main reasons for non-enrolment include a planned return to Ukraine, rejection by schools as well as lack of information about where and how to enrol children.

Recommendations

Increase support for families in enrolling their children in schools. Prepare information campaigns on when and how to enrol children, communicate via social media and other channels.

Introduce regulations so that most schools must accept at least some Ukrainians pupils and that the number of UA pupils per class is capped. Boost capacities of kindergartens and playgroups.

Fund "busing" – that is, transporting children from oversaturated locations to nearby schools, villages, or quarters with more capacity.

Relax regulations on enrolment in high schools including transition during the academic year, recognition of studies (10th and 11th grade in Ukraine) etc.

2/3 of children speak little Czech. Teaching is not intensive

22% of children aged 3 and over do not speak (almost) any Czech. Another 43% only know some words and basic phrases. Proficiency is lower among preschool children, otherwise there is no difference by age. Most children's English is better than their Czech.

A vast majority of children learn Czech at primary school, but for only 1 hour a day in 50% of cases. Only 20% of children aged 7–17 are learning Czech intensively (2 or more hours a day). Intensive Czech learning significantly affects language proficiency. Around 70% of these children can put together at least a few sentences and understand text.

Recommendations

Intensify the teaching of Czech as a second language in primary schools and start subsidizing language teaching in high schools and kindergartens.

Involve children in leisure activities where spontaneous language learning takes place. Prevent schooling segregation which leads to reduced language learning.

Support online and hybrid forms of Czech language teaching to compensate for insufficient staff capacity.

Most children remain outside Czech groups, parents want support for leisure activities

Up to 2/3 of parents say that their child is not well integrated into Czech children's social groups. This problem concerns all age groups.

Only one fifth of Ukrainian children aged 5 and over participate in sport activities and even fewer in art clubs or hobby clubs. This can limit socialisation and language learning. Leisure activities for children are in high demand among Ukrainian parents.

Parents report that only about a quarter of children receive psychosocial support at school.

The positive news is that 2/3 of children in primary school are in classes with at most 2 other children from Ukraine. Fully Ukrainian classes or large numbers of Ukrainians pupils are so far the exception but could be more common after the autumn enrolment wave.

Recommendations

Provide free integration activities for Ukrainian children (and possibly other low-income children): sports, arts and leisure activities. The focus should be on collective activities that boost language learning.

Maintain the distribution of children from Ukraine across many schools. Examine reasons for rejections by schools with no refugee children. Introduce caps on the number of refugees per class (20%) so that autumn enrolments do not lead to exclusion, fully Ukrainian classes etc.

Train teachers and staff to recognise mental health problems and follow-up with school psychologists and other professionals.

School enrolment linked to housing; parents' employment linked to kindergarten placement

Kindergarten attendance is linked to higher parental employment. Availability of close-by kindergartens and children's groups may lead to more labour force participation by parents.

Children from families living in non-segregated housing who are in contact with Czechs are more likely to participate in the schooling system. This may be due to assistance from the locals and the fact that these families have been in the Czech Republic for longer.

School attendance is lower in saturated regions (Prague, partially Central Bohemia) and at the secondary level of primary schools (11–15 years).

Recommendations

Increase capacities of kindergartens and children's groups in congested regions. Increase state subsidization and simplify regulations of children groups.

Reduce rates of accommodation in segregated housing (hostels) which negatively affects school participation and schooling success. Extend subsidy for housing provided by locals, fund renovations of council housing, and develop a guarantor system in rental housing (where the state or municipality covers security deposits and any damages).

When new refugees arrive or relocate within the Czech Republic, make effort to consider school and housing capacities.

Publication date: 18 July 2022

Full report in Czech is available at pagresearch.cz

2) Housing

Main findings

Quality of housing

/ 1 / Roughly one-fifth of refugees from Ukraine in the Czech Republic live in commercial rentals or council housing, almost 30% in non-residential types of housing (hostels, hotels and other types of accommodation) and the rest live in apartments provided or shared with Czech or Ukrainian households. Refugees who arrived in later months, had no family contacts here before the war, or are smaller and childless households are more likely to stay in non-residential housing. This may also be the result of significantly lower state support for smaller households.

/ 2 / More than half of the refugees live in cramped conditions – with less than 6 m² of living space per person (bedrooms and living rooms). This concerns people in hostels, but also those accommodated by locals, as these families tend to be larger.

/ 3 / Problems with lack of privacy and insufficient hygienic conditions are particularly pertinent to refugees in hostels, where one in three people do not have their own key to enter and leave as they want.

/ 4 / The overall picture shows that only a quarter of refugees from Ukraine in the Czech Republic live in apartments or houses with sufficient living space (6 m²) per person and their own access to sanitary facilities. Another and the largest part of refugees (46%) currently reside in housing that is substandard. A third part (29%) is in hostels, hotels and other non-residential types of housing.

Relocation and plans

/ 5 / Refugees who move into hostels often find it difficult to relocate to better accommodation – 75% of them have stayed in hostels and only 17% have moved into independent housing (rented flats or provided by locals).

/ 6 / Half of the refugees are looking or planning to look for new housing, more often those in hotels and hostels – i.e., housing demand is still high. Ukrainians living in apartments provided by Czech residents are house seeking less often. They are also more likely to be planning an early return to Ukraine, which, however, may not be possible given the evolution of the conflict.

The link between housing and integration

/ 7 / Refugees who have been in the Czech Republic since February or March and live in apartments or houses can speak Czech better than those who came at the same time but have lived in the more excluded environment of hostels and hotels. People living together with locals speak Czech the best (21% can speak it in everyday situations). Children from these families are more likely to have attended Czech schools in June – probably due to assistance with enrolment provided by the Czechs.

PAQ Research Recommendations

/ 1 / The state should support refugee integration through help with housing to avoid additional costs due to unused professional qualifications (low level of Czech) and schooling problems. This is because housing integration is closely related to integration in schooling and language proficiency.

/ 2 / Based on our research and public data, we estimate there were around or over 250,000 Ukrainian refugees in the Czech Republic in June. Around 14% of them were planning to return home. However, given the unclear development of the conflict, up to 200,000 refugees might still need accommodation come autumn. The state's housing support policy must therefore have long-term perspective.

/ 3 / Extend the subsidisation of housing provided by locals at least until the end of the year, as a large portion of refugees depend on it. Subsidies should be degressive (e.g., 5,000 CZK for one person, but only CZK 12,000 for three people), and should only apply to currently unused flats/houses, so as not to affect the housing supply for the Czech population.

/ 4 / State support for accommodation in hostels, hotels and apartments provided by Czech households should be conditional on minimum quality standards, for example in terms of living area and access to bathroom facilities.

/ 5 / Boost the offer of the housing market to ensure there is enough housing for both the vulnerable Czech population and for refugees is key. This can be done by a combination of facilitating renovations of council flats and construction of new affordable housing and building a robust system of guaranteed rental housing (where municipalities and the state act as guarantors for landlords).

/ 6 / Refugee Integration Support Centres should focus on assisting families in hostels as this type of accommodation poses the greatest risk due to substandard conditions, particularly for families. This assistance should aim to help refugees progress to more standard forms of housing.

/ 7 / For new refugee arrivals and those who remain in non-residential or emergency accommodation and whose integration in other areas (schools, employment) is stagnating, the state should put in place relocation systems to leverage the supply of housing and schools in less saturated regions.

/ 8 / The state should design (and announce in advance) conditions for the extension of temporary protection and, where appropriate, the subsequent granting of work visas. This can reduce uncertainty of housing providers and employers and motivate them to offer opportunities to Ukrainians.

/ 9 / Ad-hoc forms of support (humanitarian aid, solidarity housing) must expire in a way that is not solely conditional on finding work, to avoid incentivizing illegal work. The system will need to allow for transparent transition from ad-hoc forms of support to the standard Czech benefits system. This transition must avoid refugees being caught in a vacuum of financial support (reduction of ad-hoc benefits and inaccessible standard support), as this can result in more segregation in housing, worse language and schooling integration, and more space for illegal forms of work.

Publication date: 2 August 2022

Full report in Czech is available at paqresearch.cz

3) Employment

Main findings

Work activity and what affects it

/ 1 / Over 40% of economically active Ukrainian refugees in the Czech Republic (adults, excluding students, pensioners, and parents on parental leave) are currently in paid work. The majority work more than 30 hours per week and some also work remotely in Ukraine. Around 8% only work remotely in Ukraine. Thus, overall, half of the economically active refugees work. Others may have had occasional jobs and one-time work contracts in the past.

/ 2 / Within parents, those who have access to kindergarten are significantly more likely to work. People who live in standard quality housing are more likely to work. College-educated Ukrainians are more likely to work remotely in Ukraine, less often for Czech employers. Refugees in Prague work less often overall. This may be related to stronger connections to the already earning Ukrainian diaspora, less access to kindergartens, or barriers to engaging in skilled positions in the capital.

Use of qualifications

/ 3 / A large proportion of Ukrainians who have arrived in the Czech Republic since February had relatively high job qualifications in Ukraine – 2/3 of economically active respondents in Ukraine were specialists, managers, technical workers, or clerks (ISCO job classification).

/ 4 / However, refugees working in the Czech Republic seldom put their qualifications to use. Ukrainians who work for Czech employers are in 44% in significantly less qualified jobs than in Ukraine (in particular, a drop from specialised positions to unskilled manual work), 21% have slightly deteriorated (for example, a drop in qualifications within manual work) and the remaining roughly one third have stayed in their level of qualifications.

/ 5 / Of those currently in the labour force, the people most likely to fall into lower-skilled positions are those who have worked in Ukraine as technical and professional workers and clerks. Two thirds of them they experienced a drop in qualifications and less than half of them work as manual workers and such. Qualification stability is greatest among the minority of Ukrainian refugees who have already worked in unskilled manual occupations in Ukraine.

/ 6 / Across qualifications, roughly half of economically active refugees are not currently in employment. However, people in more specialised jobs are significantly more likely to work remotely in Ukraine and less likely to have found employment in the Czech Republic.

Prekarization

/ 7 / Extreme overworking of refugees by Czech employers or by working multiple jobs in the Czech Republic occurs but is relatively uncommon – 5% of refugees who work, work more than 60 hours per week.

/ 8 / Many refugees earn low wages. More than a third (35%) earn below 100 CZK (net) per hour and only 11% earn over 200 CZK per hour. In most occupations, Ukrainians earn less than the average hourly pay for Czechs. However, overall, low earnings are mainly due to working in unskilled jobs.

/ 9 / Around a fifth of refugees on the labour market say they work for agencies (13%) or informal labour brokers (7%), which are often associated with income reductions. Many others have past experience with these jobs or have been offered them.

Satisfaction and job-seeking

/ 10 / About half (52%) of working refugees are satisfied with their job. Less than a third (31%) say that their work is on the level of their qualification, which is in line with the above comparison of occupations in Ukraine and the Czech Republic. Satisfaction is linked to income level and the opportunity to use one's qualifications.

/ 11 / Only 20% of working refugees say that their income in the Czech Republic would be enough to support them long-term, including providing their own housing without additional income from Ukraine or support.

/ 12 / Three quarters of unemployed refugees and 40% of those who work are actively looking for a new or a different job. In their own words, what would help them most is better knowledge of Czech language (mentioned by 83%) and official recognition of professional qualifications (mentioned by 32%).

Language and ICT competences

/ 13 / Around one fifth of refugees say they can speak Czech to communicate in everyday situations and understand text. Most (57%) say they can put together a few sentences and understand simpler ones. However, progress in subjective language abilities since June has been relatively limited.

/ 14 / One reason can be that only a third of adult refugees attend language classes – 22% in person and 10% online. A large proportion (45%) try to self-educate instead. However, only a minority of refugees (30%) manage to study Czech intensively (more than 5 hours a week).

/ 15 / The reason for the limited learning of Czech is not refugees' reluctance, but a lack of resources to pay for courses (38%), or lack of knowledge about courses or lack of time due to work or childcare.

/ 16 / People who understand Czech in everyday situations are significantly more likely to work. They are also more likely to work in professions that match their qualifications.

/ 17 / The relationship between employment in the Czech Republic and IT skills is not clear. Instead, people with very high IT competences are more likely to work remotely in Ukraine.

Overall summary

Despite the relatively high labour force participation of Ukrainians, experts' warning from March 2022 are still relevant – that a language barrier, not recognizing qualifications and unavailable childcare could lead to refugees being mostly employed in unskilled and lower-paid jobs. This poses a threat to the Czech Republic, too, as wages in these sectors could then be subject to being kept low, and the Czech market could miss out on benefiting from the refugees' qualifications and expertise.

PAQ Research recommendations

/ 1 / Help employers reduce uncertainty and plan better. For example, clearly define conditions for extensions of temporary protection and subsequent provision of a work permit. Allow refugees' temporary stay to count towards the time required to obtain permanent residence. With less uncertainty, employers may be more willing to invest in employees' language training, upskilling etc.

/ 2 / Expedite official recognitions of professional qualifications – revise the list of regulated professions, increase capacities for recognition of foreign education, improve the examination process for registering a profession, allow proof of competence via employers, cancel fees for recognition of qualifications.

/ 3 / Provide more assistance on the labour market – for example, the Labour Office and other institutions could send job offers to refugees including those who have found employment that is below their qualifications.

/ 4 / Boost language training for adults – offer free language training (even if online or hybrid), make it compulsory for employers to provide employees with time for language training.

/ 5 / Boost capacities of playgroups and kindergartens, especially in overpopulated regions with a limited supply (e.g., Prague and its surroundings, Brno).

/ 6 / Fight the grey economy – by strengthening the authority of the labour inspectorate office or by tax reductions for low-earning workers.

Publication date: 6 September 2022

Full report in Czech is available at paqresearch.cz

3) Poverty

Main findings

- / 1 / The poverty level among Ukrainian refugees is incomparably higher than among the Czech population. Even after adding financial humanitarian aid and the value of subsidy provided to Czech households hosting refugees to refugees' income, 35 % of them are living in income poverty (this is 9–10 % among Czechs).
- / 2 / Refugees are currently protected against total poverty by humanitarian benefits from the state (about 80 % of refugees are receivers) and free accommodation. Without this support 84 % of refugees would fall below the poverty level. Support has the strongest impact on families with children – these are more often accommodated for free, and the humanitarian benefit has higher relative value for children (before the recent policy change).
- / 3 / Households with no employment income are twice more affected by income poverty. Out of those in employment, poverty affects principally those in low-skilled, manual work (which take up the majority). Refugees thus largely suffer from barriers to quality employment - including language, lack of pre-school childcare and official recognition of qualifications. This also increases dependence on state support.
- / 4 / Three quarters of refugees have savings for no more than one month (among Czechs this is about 30 %). A combination of savings and income shows that a total of 29% of refugees are both in income poverty (after housing support is included) and have savings for no more than one month. Another 41% live in households with income above the poverty line but insufficient savings.
- / 5 / 62 % of refugees suffer from severe material deprivation (this is below 2 % in the Czech population¹). For example, 89 % cannot afford an unexpected expense of 13,000 CZK and 36 % cannot afford two pairs of well-fitting shoes for each household member. Single mothers are the most affected by material deprivation.
- / 6 / Refugees' financial situation is linked to integration, including through opportunities to attend language courses and secure standard housing. The most predictive indicator of integration is whether a household has at least minimal savings.

PAQ Research recommendations

- / 1 / Support quality employment that reduces poverty and state support dependence. This requires measures such as more active assistance in the labour market (for example, by sending offers from the Employment Agency and other sources to people who have found employment well below their qualifications), increasing pre-school capacities, free Czech language courses even during working hours, and simplifying the recognition of Ukrainian qualifications.

¹ The Czech statistic is however biased towards a lower value because surveys do not include foreigners, people living in hostels, asylum houses and most extremely poor neighbourhoods. If these were included, the number of people in severe material deprivation in the Czech Republic would probably be around 5-8 %

- / 2 / Continue to help Ukrainians via the humanitarian benefit and, if reductions are needed, differentiate it according to household size.
- / 3 / Incentivise housing provided by Czech households - it is cheaper than accommodation in hostels and the money can help Czech households during the energy crisis.
- / 4 / Design and communicate well a plan for transitioning from ad-hoc assistance (humanitarian benefit and subsidizing hosting Czech households and hostels) into the standard State Social Support System. Ad-hoc aid instruments and eligibility for standard social benefits should overlap by at least 1 month, as social benefits are delayed.
- / 5 / Assist the poorest refugees in finding food banks and other forms of assistance.
- / 6 / Implement programs that provide free leisure activities or pre-school care, both for Ukrainian refugee families and for disadvantaged Czech families, so that they do not need to save on education and integration for children.

Publication date: 29 September 2022

Full report in Czech is available at pagresearch.cz

3) Mental Health

In cooperation with the **National Institute of Mental Health**

Main findings

- / 1 / Prevalence of mental illness symptoms is very high among refugees. Our survey used standardized screening questionnaires PHQ (depressive symptoms such as depression or fatigue) and GAD (anxiety symptoms such as restlessness and irritability). 45% of refugees are found to have at least moderate symptoms of depression or anxiety, a proportion four times higher than in the Czech population. Among Czechs moderate symptoms were around 11% even during the covid crisis.
- / 2 / Less than a third (31%) of people who are experiencing symptoms of moderate anxiety or depression are aware they may be suffering from a mental disorder. Young people are more likely to self-identify.
- / 3 / Women and young adults under 30 are significantly more likely to suffer from mental health problems. Symptoms are linked to both refugees' background (poor condition of their house in Ukraine, family left behind in Ukraine) and their socio-economic situation in Czech Republic (unemployment, poor housing, material deprivation, lack of language skills and low children's school participation).
- / 4 / We estimate that around 75,000 adult refugees are in need of professional mental health care, but only around 5,000 refugees (3%) in the Czech Republic have so far received assistance. The main barrier to accessing help is the lack of information on what services are available. Fear and shame about seeking help is a moderate barrier.
- / 5 / A standardised questionnaire measuring children's wellbeing revealed lower quality of life of refugee children (compared to Czech benchmark data). The metric is related to the mental health of adults in the household (which, like children's mental health, is influenced by socio-economic factors).

Recommendations of PAQ Research and the National Institute of Mental Health

- / 1 / Increase mental health care capacities for both Ukrainian refugees and Czechs and focus on securing options available for refugees without Czech language skills.
- / 2 / Strengthen and accelerate the recognition of psychiatry and psychology qualifications to build a Ukrainian workforce and create a system of assistance for Ukrainian psychiatrists to allow them to work with health information systems (reporting towards insurance companies, medical facilities, etc.), for example through the assistance of medical interpreters.
- / 3 / Raise awareness among refugees about mental illness symptoms and professional care via an information campaign in Ukrainian, for example through formal communication channels such as public administration (e.g., KACPU) and popular Ukrainian social networks (e.g., Telegram). Target campaigns also at professionals working with refugee communities.

- / 4 / Train teachers, GPs, and paediatricians (and other professions working with at-risk refugees) to be able to recognise symptoms of mental illness early and understand the available options for psychosocial care.
- / 5 / Address mental health care not only considering refugees' traumatic experiences, but also in the context of the negative socio-economic conditions associated with a refugee status.
- / 6 / Aim to reduce the stressors that impair mental health among refugees – strengthen labour market assistance, offer free language courses, extra financial aid to the most vulnerable refugee groups, etc.
- / 7 / Work to destigmatize mental health across the population of both Czechs and Ukrainians to reduce barriers to addressing problems early.
- / 8 / Strengthen systemic mental health care, which is underfunded, including support of prevention and early diagnosis.

Publication date: 24 October 2022

Full report in Czech is available at pagresearch.cz