

Ukrainian refugee integration: one year on

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PAQ
RESEARCH

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A year of aid: successes, challenges, (un)fulfilled warnings

In February 2022, Russia's attack on Ukraine forced millions of people to flee the country in a matter of weeks and months. Approximately 400,000 of these refugees arrived in the Czech Republic, presenting an unprecedented challenge for the country. Refugees needed immediate accommodation, and a comprehensive plan was necessary to integrate children and adults into schools and the labour market in the long term. It was uncertain how long the war would last and how many refugees would decide to settle in the Czech Republic for an extended period of time.

To address these integration challenges, PAQ Research collaborated with Czech Priorities and a group of independent authors to publish a comprehensive analysis, *Integration of Ukrainian Refugees*

in the Czech Republic 2022+. The analysis provided an overview of the housing, labour, and education markets' capacities, concrete recommendations, and insights on key aspects of long-term integration, crisis management, and legal issues related to refugee status. The report was based on experience from other countries, on local data, and on expert interviews, and provided a comprehensive view of the situation.

In the spring of 2023, the Czech Republic evaluates its success in coping with the integration challenges. PAQ Research has been tracking the refugees' situation since June 2022 in a long-term research series called *Voice of Ukrainians*. This paper, with an evaluation and recommendations for long-term successful integration, builds on our research.

Many of the predictions and warnings of the first study have come true:

- * Up to 2/3 of the refugees who stayed in the Czech Republic after two months into the war remained here, similar to the average refugee wave of the past two decades.
- * Many refugees work, but often in unskilled and unstable jobs.
- * Limited capacity to teach Czech to children and adults has slowed the development of language skills.
- * Without a relocation system, some cities and regions have become overburdened.
- * Education is struggling with limited participation and capacity in kindergartens and secondary schools.
- * In recent months, the transition from hostels to apartments has been hampered by a limited supply of rentals and unrenovated municipal housing.

In some areas, however, the experts' recommendations have been implemented. The actions of the state and the work of NGOs, municipalities and volunteers have averted certain threats.

- * Increased housing support to local households boosted accommodation capacity and helped up to 40% of refugees. Hotel and hostel capacity was mobilised. The housing situation in 2022 reflects the rather positive scenario of the initial study.
- * With the exception of some regions, refugees are being educated in Czech classrooms, despite Ukrainian schools being initially planned.

- * Housing support and humanitarian benefits reduced extreme manifestations of poverty.
- * Thanks to the opening of the labour market, most refugees are working (albeit below their qualifications).
- * Efforts to find employment and adaptation in the Czech Republic are also appreciated by most Czechs. This is related to the fact that from summer 2022 onwards, after a drop from the initial enthusiasm, support for accepting refugees is no longer declining.

At the same time, problems emerged in areas that were only marginally addressed in the study (e.g., mental health problems) or not directly addressed (children's participation in leisure activities).

The present paper offers a summary of successes and challenges in assisting Ukrainian refugees after one year. It is based on the research series Voice of Ukrainians, which has been conducted by PAQ Research in cooperation with the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic since June 2022. The panel research tracks the situation of a representative sample of about 2,000 refugee households in the areas of

a) children's education, b) housing, c) employment and income, and d) mental health.

We are grateful for the detailed understanding of the successes and challenges in integration to the donors who enabled the initial analysis in March 2022 (Pale Fire Capital) and to the donors who supported first three waves of the Voice of Ukrainians research (CS Foundation, RSJ Foundation, 3WFoundation, Google). Since autumn 2022 onwards, the research has been funded by UNICEF CR in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education.

About Voice of Ukrainians surveys

The research series is conducted through an online survey of a panel of refugees from Ukraine who arrived in the Czech Republic between February and November 2022 and who applied for humanitarian benefits via MoLSA. The sample is representative in terms of the region of residence within the Czech Republic, the age and gender mix of respondents within regions (roughly matching MoLSA statistics on humanitarian benefit recipients), and education.



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Evaluation of selected areas of integration – by PAQ Research

/ Schooling

Goals	Areas to address	Status	Detail
Czech schooling participation	Preschools	⊙	66 % children 3–5 years old attend preschool
	Primary/secondary schools	☑	92% children 6–15 years old attend primary school
	High schools	⊙	43% youngsters attend Czech high schools
Actual inclusive integration	Czech language skills	⊗	36% children communicate in everyday situations
	Integration in classes	☑	Only 10% in classes with 5+ Ukrainian pupils

/ Housing

Goals	Areas to address	Status	Detail
Initial housing	State emergency housing	⊙	Humanitarian crises limited to exceptions (Central Station May 2022)
	Aid from local households	☑	Initially accommodated >40% of refugees
	Capacity utilisation across CR	⊙	Strong concentration in Prague, KV, PLZ region
Long-term housing	Transition to rental housing	⊙	40% of refugees in rented accommodation
	Shift from non-residential housing	⊗	25% still in hostels and the proportion is stagnating

/ Employment and income

Goals	Areas to address	Status	Detail
Employment and income	Work	☑	56% work in the Czech Republic
	Salary	⊗	Average earnings only around 150 CZK net/hour
	Poverty	⊙	66% income poverty (with benefits)
	Social support	☑	Humanitarian benefits and housing support have so far limited the extent and level of poverty
Type of work	Skills utilisation	⊗	2/3 work below their qualifications
	Language skills	⊙	1/3 can communicate in everyday situations
	Employment security	⊙	About 1/3 in unstable jobs

/ Leisure and mental health

Goals	Areas to address	Status	Detail
Participation in society	Children's leisure activities	⊙	38% children attend group leisure activities
	Integration in Czech society	⊗	The number of Czechs who personally know Ukrainians has not increased (21%)
Mental health	Mental health problems	⊗	45% of refugees have symptoms of depression or anxiety
	Use of care	⊗	Only a few % of refugees use Czech mental health services

PAQ Research recommendations for refugee integration 2023+

Schooling

- / 1 / Increase participation in kindergartens by informing about free capacities of kindergartens in other parts of a municipality (e.g. also through the labour office), inform about the possibility of reducing kindergarten contributions (tuition fees, lunch fees).
- / 2 / Build pre-school capacities, either in kindergartens or through targeted support of children's groups.
- / 3 / Strengthen adolescent enrolment counselling including language education, leisure activities and overall networking and other outreach, low-threshold and psychosocial services.
- / 4 / Remove barriers to accessing and completing high school education due to lack of proficiency in the Czech language at the level of native speakers (adaptation of entry exams, final exams).
- / 5 / Increase the intensity of Czech as a Second Language (CSL) teaching in schools, ensuring that it is effectively implemented in a greater number of schools. Extend the period during which pupils are eligible for CSL from the current 12 months to 24 months. Consider making the teaching of CSL compulsory. Currently, parents can refuse or schools can justify not teaching CSL.
- / 6 / Map the capacities of schools (kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools), reasons for different acceptance rates and the high concentration of Ukrainian pupils in classes and schools in some regions (Kolin, Cesky Brod, Podbořany, Mariánské lázně, etc.). Ensure maximum enrolment in schools and reduce concentration in classes.

Housing

- / 1 / Continue to support the provision of accommodation by local households. It has the benefits of strengthening the social capital and language skills of refugees, among others. Motivate new households to join.
- / 2 / Integrate refugees as soon as possible into the standard system of state social assistance benefits so that they are entitled to the same housing benefits as Czech households under specified conditions.
- / 3 / In the parameters of the new support system under Lex Ukrajina V (from 1 July 2023), ensure that: a) it leads to the promotion of residential housing over hostels, b) it is not administratively complex, c) it does not provide refugees with significantly lower housing support than SSP benefits for Czechs, d) the definition of vulnerable persons/households with higher support is sufficiently broad. These measures should ensure that refugees are not pushed into hostels and social exclusion.
- / 4 / Consider an incentive system for relocation if the household does not have housing, stable work and children are not also participating in schooling.

- / 5 / In the long term, there should be support for increasing the housing supply and relocation to commercial rentals for both refugees and vulnerable Czech populations. This could involve providing help with rental deposits, renovating municipal housing, building affordable housing, implementing a strong system of guaranteed rental housing, or tax incentives such as the rental tax credit for accommodating refugees and the socially vulnerable.

Employment

- / 1 / Strengthen labor market assistance to help Ukrainians find stable employment that matches their qualifications. The assistance should not only target the unemployed but also refugees who may be underqualified or have unstable employment. It's also important to inform refugees about retraining courses and expand their availability.
- / 2 / Encourage employers to provide Czech language courses to their Ukrainian employees during working hours. Alternatively, consider making these courses available during working hours.
- / 3 / Expand the range of Czech language courses available to employers and job applicants through the Labour Office. Ensure that refugees working outside their qualifications are provided with sufficient information about these courses and other language training opportunities.
- / 4 / Improve and expedite the process for recognizing professional qualifications. Review the list of regulated professions, expand the use of examinations to prove a profession, and prioritize the real use of the National Qualifications Framework system over its formalistic development.
- / 5 / Parametrize the new rules under Lex Ukraine V to prevent motivating individuals to work illegally. Benefits should not be dependent on admitted income alone, and sufficient allowable housing costs should be included while limiting other conditions that may push refugees into concealing and illegalizing income.
- / 6 / The Labor Inspectorate should strengthen controls on illegal and unfair agency employment (which is only part of employment agencies).

Leisure and mental health

- / 1 / Encourage participation in group leisure activities to aid integration and language development. Municipal and district contributions can help with funding.
- / 2 / Support institutions and organizations that provide low-threshold after-school, education, and leisure activities. Offer voucher systems to households interested in these activities.
- / 3 / Prioritize support for adolescents who are not integrated into Czech groups. Improving their inclusion will prevent long-term exclusion and improve employment opportunities.
- / 4 / Build mental health care capacity for Ukrainian refugees and Czechs, focusing on options available to refugees without Czech language skills.
- / 5 / Strengthen and accelerate opportunities for the recognition of qualifications in psychiatry and psychology to create a Ukrainian workforce.
- / 6 / Increase refugees' awareness of symptoms of mental illness and options for specialist care through an awareness campaign in Ukrainian.
- / 7 / Train teachers, doctors, and others in contact with refugees to recognize symptoms of mental illness early and to know psychosocial care options.

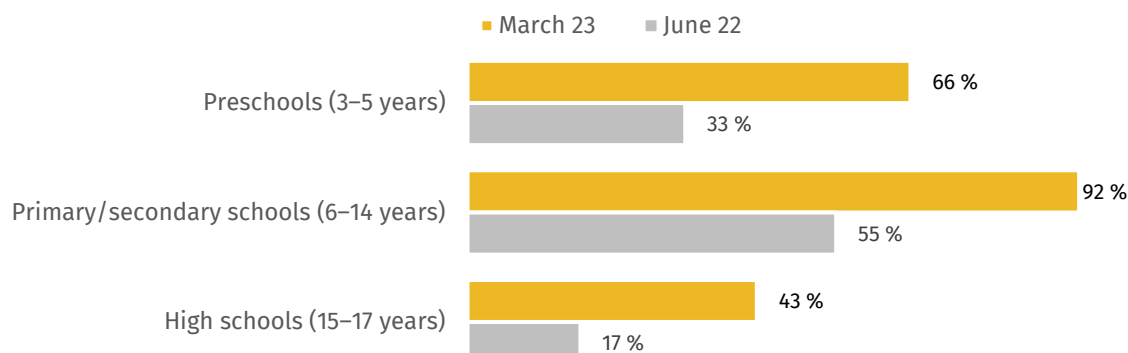
Schooling

Higher attendance is hampered by school capacities and insufficient language skills

Since June, there has been a significant increase in school attendance, particularly in primary schools, with 92% of children attending according to parents. However, the proportion of children in Czech schools has not increased during the school year, with pre-school children and adolescents presenting the most room for improvement. Currently, only two-thirds of children attend kindergartens, significantly less than their Czech peers where nine out of ten attend. To address this, we need to strengthen the use

of pre-school care as it is strongly linked to parents' ability to find work. Additionally, we need to work towards enabling adolescents to be educated in the Czech Republic, with only 43% of adolescents up to the age of 17 currently studying here. Those interested in Czech high schools face barriers in the form of entrance exams, where limited knowledge of Czech is a challenge. We must work to remove barriers to accessing or completing education for all.

/ Chart: School enrolment



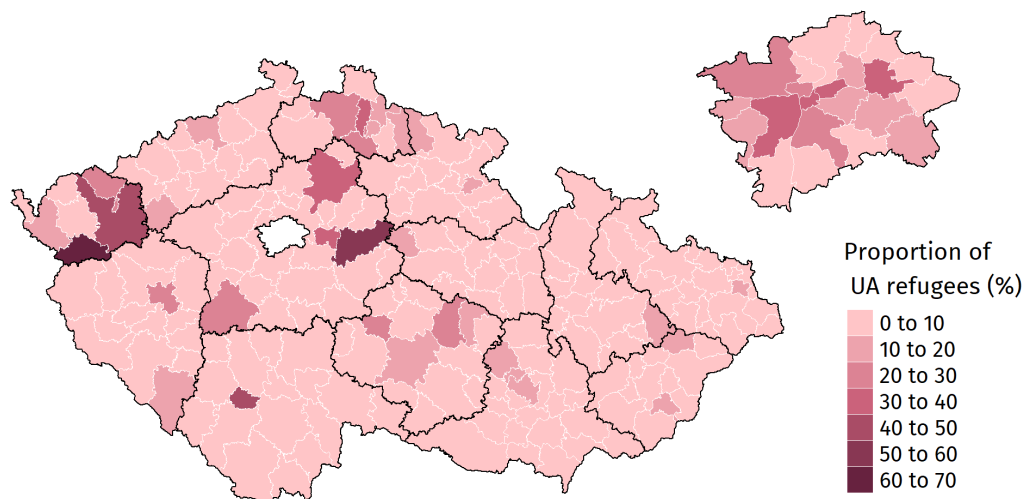
N=1200 (March 23), N=1739 (June 22); children 3-17

All-Ukrainian classes not common

To ensure successful integration, it is crucial to continue distributing Ukrainian children across multiple schools. This approach has been relatively effective thus far. As per the parents' reports, in most primary schools, Ukrainian children have no more than two

Ukrainian classmates. Only 10% of refugee children have five or more Ukrainian classmates, which is due to the high concentration of Ukrainian children in certain areas and some schools not participating in refugee education.

/ Figure: Proportion of refugees in elementary school classes with 6+ refugees (average: 10.3%)

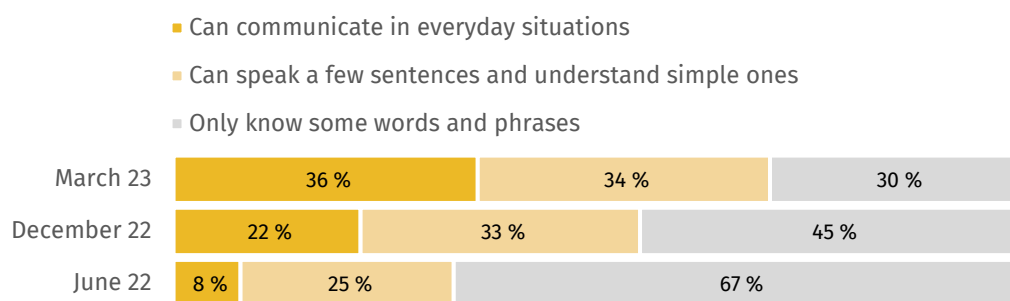


Czech language skills improve organically though we must strengthen teaching

70% of Ukrainian children from the age of 3 can communicate in Czech with at least a few sentences, and 36% can communicate in everyday situations. Czech is improving organically for children of all ages.

Nevertheless, we need to strengthen language teaching at all levels. Czech as a second language is taught to 75% of pupils attending local schools, but mostly at a low intensity (less than 5 hours per week).

/ Chart: Czech language skills among children aged 3–17



N=1200 (March 23), N=1739 (June 22)

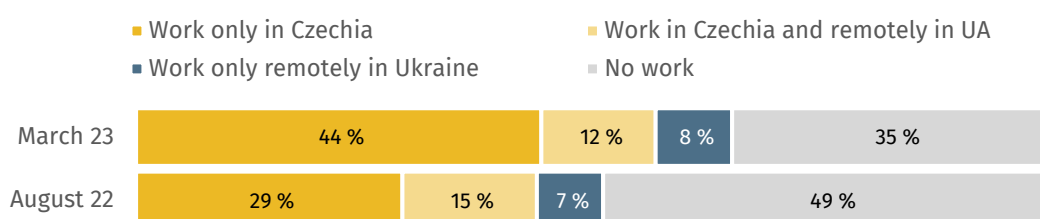
Housing and employment

High employment but in low-skilled jobs

As of March 2023, 56% of the refugee population in the workforce is employed, and the employment rate has been increasing steadily among refugees who arrived in the last ten months. However, for

refugees who arrived last spring, the employment rate has remained around 60% for several months. This suggests that 40% of refugees are facing barriers that prevent them from securing a job.

/ Chart: Work in Czechia and Ukraine

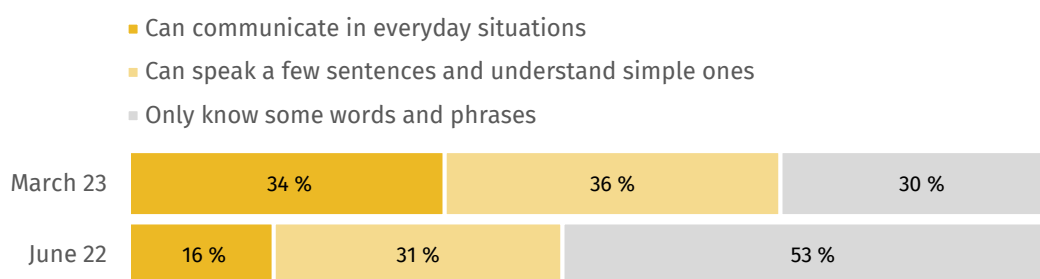


N=1021 (March 23), N=1803 (August 22); Only economically active population (excluding pensioners, students, and people on parental leave)

Many refugees in the Czech Republic with professional experience in specialized, technical, or managerial roles from Ukraine are not able to utilize their full potential. About half of employed refugees work in low-skilled, manual labour positions, and two-thirds work below their qualifications. Enhancing labour market assistance and

language training programs for both job seekers and employers is necessary to address this issue. Proficiency in Czech remains a critical factor for refugee employment, and although there has been progress in recent months, the rate of improvement has been slow among adult refugees.

/ Chart: Czech language skills among adults



N=1325 (March 23), N=1700 (June 22)

Two thirds of refugees under the poverty line

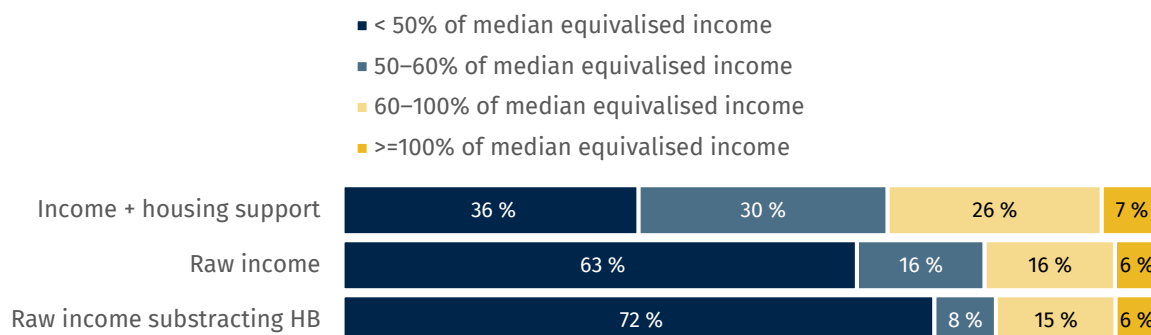
Working in more relevant professions would also bring better pay. Today, a quarter of refugees work for less than CZK 100 net per

hour, and only 13% work for more than CZK 200 net per hour. Refugee incomes remain very limited. Two-thirds live below the

income poverty line (below 60% of the Czech median income) even after taking into account housing support. In comparison, only around 10% of Czechs live below this

poverty line. If humanitarian benefits and free housing subsidies are excluded from their income, 80% of refugees would be living below the poverty line.

/ Chart: Total household income including work income and support



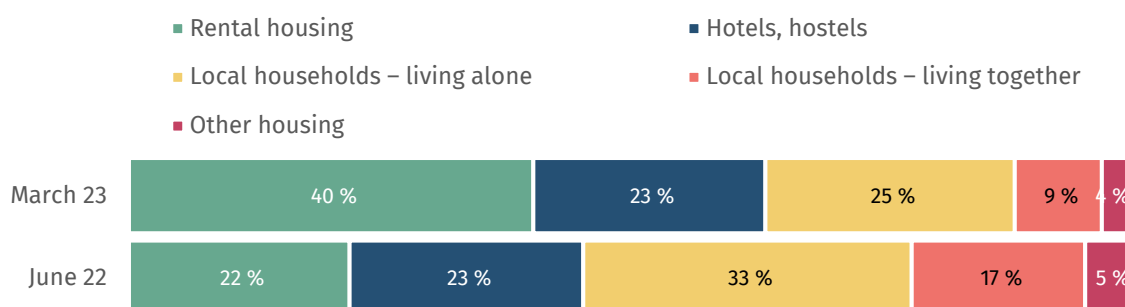
N=3802 (March 23); Income includes income from work of all household members, benefits from the Ukrainian and Czech state, financial and material assistance from Ukraine or Czechia. The first line includes the amount of housing subsidy for people who have it provided free of charge (solidarity households or emergency housing); Equivalized income considers household size and composition; HB = humanitarian benefits

One-fourth of refugees do not have access to permanent housing

Among refugees who arrived in the spring, the proportion of renters has doubled since June 2022, but the increase has been minimal in the past three months. Currently, 40% of refugees live in rented accommodation, while 23% remain in hostels and hotels. There has been little progress in moving refugees out of non-residential housing since the end of 2022. It is crucial to provide support to help

refugees transition to permanent housing and integrate into the standard system of state social assistance benefits. The reduction of support introduced by Lex Ukraine V from July 2023 will affect the housing situation of refugees, and the new support parameters need to be set in a way that encourages legal work and does not force people to live in hostels.

/ Chart: Refugees' housing



N=3802 (March 2023), N=4845 (June 22)

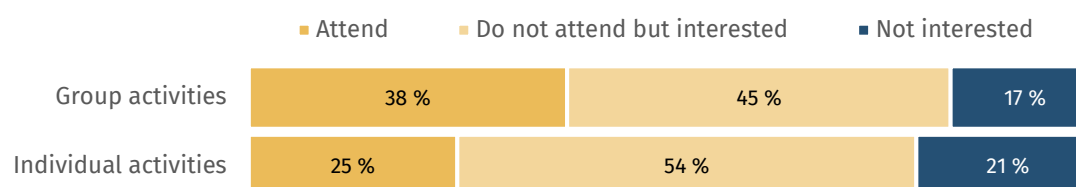
Leisure and mental health

Less than half of the children are well integrated into the Czech communities

According to parental reports, almost 60% of children aged 4 to 17 are not well integrated into Czech communities. This figure has remained relatively constant from December 2022 to March 2023, with nearly a third having no Czech friends. However, children who attend Czech schools and participate in leisure activities have better

integration. Approximately 46% of children aged 4 and older participate in some form of leisure activity, but participation in clubs has not significantly increased. One of the most common barriers to participation is a lack of financial resources and language skills.

/ Chart: Children's participation in extracurriculars



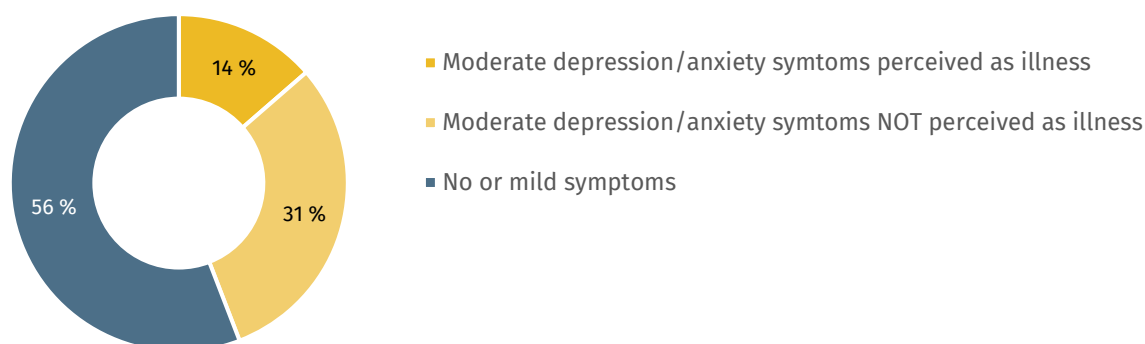
N=1129 (March 23); children aged 4 to 17

Almost half of adult refugees have depression or anxiety

In September 2022, at least 45% of refugees experienced symptoms of moderate or worse depression or anxiety, which is four times higher than the majority population. Only about a third of those refugees identified these symptoms as signs of mental illness. The mental health of refugees is exacerbated by the situation in

their home country as well as poor socio-economic conditions in Czechia. As of September 2022, only 3% of adult refugees had received professional care in the Czech Republic, but another 38% were considering it. One of the main barriers to accessing care is the low awareness of available options

/ Chart: Refugees with at least moderate symptoms of depression or anxiety



N=1175 (September 2022). Symptoms = moderate symptoms of depression or anxiety (measured by PHQ and GAD-7)

Overview of reports

All Voice of Ukrainians reports can be found on PAQ Research blog under the following titles:

- / 1 / Bydlení, trh práce, vzdělávání: Jak postupovat v integraci ukrajinských uprchlíků v ČR 2022+ (16. 3. 2022)
- / 2 / Odmítání při zápisech, málo češtiny a aktivit pro děti: Problémy očima ukrajinských rodičů (18. 7. 2022)
- / 3 / Většina romských uprchlíků v Česku mluví ukrajinsky. Trápí je válečné trauma a materiální nedostatek (27. 7. 2022)
- / 4 / Kvalitní bydlení má jen čtvrtina ukrajinských uprchlíků. Ovlivňuje znalost jazyka i vzdělávání dětí (2. 8. 2022)
- / 5 / Nevyužité kvalifikace, malé mzdy a jazyková bariéra. Výzkum popsal problémy uprchlíků na trhu práce (6. 9. 2022)
- / 6 / Tříkrát vyšší chudoba než u Čechů. Před dalším propadem uprchlíky zatím chrání státní podpora (29. 9. 2022)
- / 7 / Téměř polovina uprchlíků trpí symptomy depresí a úzkostí. O dostupné péči jim chybí informace (24. 10. 2022)
- / 8 / Část uprchlíků nevyužívá zdravotnictví, i když by potřebovali. Brání jim jazyk a neinformovanost (14. 11. 2022)
- / 9 / Docházka ukrajinských dětí narostla. Problémem zůstává slabá výuka češtiny a nedostupnost kroužků (19. 1. 2023)
- / 10 / Uprchlíci pracují častěji než v létě, pořád ale za málo. Nevyužíváme jejich vysokou kvalifikaci (2. 2. 2023)
- / 11 / Integrace uprchlíků zpomaluje, klíčovou zůstává znalost jazyka (5. 4. 2023)
- / 12 / Ukrajinské děti se učí rychle česky, i tak potřebujeme intenzivnější výuku jazyka (13. 4. 2023)

Research blog

All Voice of Ukrainians reports can be found on our blog under the label **Hlas Ukrajinců** or you can open them using this QR code.



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