Finnish Refugee Council

Needs assessment: Understanding social cohesion among displaced Ukrainians in Helsinki metropolitan area, Finland

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Key findings

The needs assessment used a mixed-methods approach combining data from in-depth interviews (N=20) and from a survey (N=174), conducted from August to October in 2024, in assessing social cohesion within the displaced Ukrainian population living in the Helsinki metropolitan area, Finland.

PUBLIC SERVICES AND EMPLOYMENT

Most survey respondents reported problems in accessing health services. Barriers included language issues and lack of knowledge of the healthcare system. 21% of respondents said they had to wait so long for treatment that they had ended up paying it for themselves. Interview participants identified various **barriers to accessing mental health treatment**: long waiting times, stigma and limited awareness of mental health, insufficient support in the Ukrainian language, and a lack of recognition for the qualifications of Ukrainian-speaking professionals.

More than half of the survey participants stated that they were still attending Finnish or Swedish language classes, while 28% had attended but were not currently attending. Majority were positive about the language lessons they had received, with 44% agreeing and 18% strongly agreeing that they were satisfied. Interview participants highlighted the need for teachers who speak Ukrainian or Russian. Other challenges included finding appropriately levelled courses despite placement tests, as well as barriers like advanced age, work, and family commitments.

The most common activity is attending language courses or professional training, reported by 34% of respondents. Employment is less common, with 14% working full-time and 4% working part-time. Sales or service workers (27%) and other workers (30%) make up the majority of employed respondents.

Three out of four respondents identified a lack of Finnish or Swedish language skills as the most common challenge when seeking employment in Finland. Additionally, one in four noted that their professional qualifications were not recognized in the country. **Many interview participants had decided to focus on improving their language skills, while others decided to obtain a Finnish diploma, usually through vocational training, as a route to better employment opportunities.**

The majority of respondents (57%), who were employed at the time of the survey, reported working at a lower occupational level in Finland compared to their previous role in Ukraine. 45% reported being employed on temporary contracts. **A central concern for many interview participants was how to find a permanent, good quality job that would ensure both economic stability and a possibility to stay in Finland for long term.** Some of them were frustrated by what they perceived to be their low status in the Finnish labour market.

One in five of survey respondents reported that they had faced excessive bureaucracy in Finland. Discrimination in public institutions was reported by only 6% of respondents and discrimination at work by 4%.

One in three survey participants stated that their household's income was barely sufficient to meet basic needs. **In addition, one in ten reported that their income was not sufficient at all, which may indicate that a proportion of displaced Ukrainian households are experiencing some economic hardship.**

SOCIAL COHESION

Many respondents reported a strong sense of belonging to Finland, with 38% saying that they felt completely or rather strongly connected. Two in three of the survey respondents reported that they had made friends with local non-Ukrainians whom they had met after arriving in Finland. **Interviews reveal that the relationship of the displaced community with the Russian-**

speaking minority in Finland is complex involving both mistrust and co-operation. These two groups interact both in the workplace and during their free time.

Findings from both the survey and in-depth interviews demonstrate that displaced Ukrainians in Finland actively support Ukraine, for example by collecting donations, and help each other, for example by sharing information. Both survey and interview respondents had an inclusive idea of the Ukrainian nation. Almost two out of three believed that a person can be truly Ukrainian without speaking the Ukrainian language. **However, some interview participants expressed concerns about social divisions stemming from ethnicity, language, and varying experiences of the war. For example, some were worried about how men of military age living abroad might be received on their return.** According to the interview data, gender equality and the treatment of minorities should be key priorities in all reintegration and reconstruction efforts.

FUTURE

The largest group of the survey respondents (37%) said that they planned to stay in Finland permanently. A smaller but significant proportion (17%) expressed plans to stay in Finland but commute to Ukraine, for work or other commitments. At the same time, one in three remained uncertain about their future plans. **Finnish language courses are identified as the most critical need, with 66% of respondents considering them the most beneficial for successful integration into Finnish society.** Closely following this, 64% highlighted the importance of access to educational opportunities, emphasising the need for further education to support their integration. Survey respondents indicated that pursuing further education was a means to enhance their position in the labour market, as they faced challenges in securing quality jobs, particularly in their areas of expertise. Many felt that the uncertainty related to the temporary protection system was hindering their integration.

1 Introduction

This report by the Finnish Refugee Council (FRC) was commissioned by the Council of Europe Development Bank and funded by the European Union. The report offers insights into the current state of social cohesion among the displaced Ukrainian population in Helsinki metropolitan area Finland, focusing on trust, equality, civic participation, and collective solidarity. This needs assessment has three main objectives: first, to examine some aspects of social cohesion within the displaced Ukrainian population; second, to identify the specific needs and challenges affecting to social cohesion and third, to explore the role of social services in fostering social cohesion both in the current context and in preparation for the population's eventual return to Ukraine after the conflict, as well as their integration into Finnish society.

The needs assessment used a mixed-methods approach combining data from in-depth interviews (N=20) and from a survey (N=174), conducted from August to October in 2024, in assessing social cohesion within the displaced Ukrainian population living in the Helsinki metropolitan area, Finland.

Firstly, we will assess the use of public services and investigate the barriers that may hinder access to these services in the Helsinki metropolitan area. Secondly, we look at labour market integration and equality (in the workplaces). Thirdly, the study will identify potential sources of conflict within Ukrainian diaspora such as linguistic, ethnic and geographical divisions. Fourthly, the report will identify future needs in terms of social cohesion and integration both in Finland and for when Ukrainians return to their homeland after the war (e.g. language classes, job search assistance, psychological support, mental health support).

This needs assessment provides a concise summary of previous research, research methods, and findings from both data sets, and suggestions for pilot projects that would address the needs of the displaced Ukrainians living in Helsinki metropolitan area with the temporary protection status.

1.1 Displaced Ukrainians in Finland and Helsinki metropolitan area

In the EU context, a displaced person is a third-country national or stateless person who has been forced to leave his or her country and cannot return there safely and permanently. Approximately 73 500 Ukrainian citizens have applied for temporary protection in Finland since the beginning of the war.[1] Almost all applicants have been granted protection. The Ministry of the Interior estimates that nearly one in three individuals granted temporary protection have left Finland for Ukraine or another country.

In 2023, the population of Helsinki grew by nearly 900 people born in Ukraine, as individuals under temporary protection were registered as residents. There are also Ukrainians in Helsinki who remain within the reception system. Based on various sources, it can be estimated that by the end of 2023 there were between 2,500 and 3,000 people in Helsinki who had been forced to leave Ukraine because of the war (and about 600 who had arrived in Finland earlier).[2]

[1] Tilastot | Maahanmuuttovirasto (migri.fi)

[2] Saukkonen, Pasi (2023): Alati moninaistuva Helsingin väestö – havaintoja ulkomaalaistaustaisen väestön kasvusta ja rakenteesta | Helsingin kaupunki.

1.2 Data collection and methodologies

The needs assessment is based on two data sets: survey data, which we analyzed quantitatively, and in-depth interview data, which we analyzed qualitatively. We conducted an internet-based survey for Ukrainian refugees living in the Helsinki metropolitan[3] area with temporary protection (N = 174). The invitation to participate was sent to several internet forums and Telegram channels used by the Ukrainian refugee community in Finland, including the channels from the Help Center, where Ukrainian refugees receive support in the Helsinki metropolitan area. The questionary included demographic questions, questions about situation of the displaced persons in Finland, and questions related to social cohesion and return to Ukraine. The analysis of the quantitative data is descriptive with charts of relative and absolute frequency distributions of the answers. Both the questionnaire and the invitation were provided in Ukrainian language. Participants had the opportunity to enter a draw for an opportunity to win one of five €30 gift cards.

It is essential to acknowledge that the sample is not random, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Respondents were self-selected and it is likely that this introduced some bias to the sample. Below, we compare the demographic data from this survey with other sources regarding displaced Ukrainians residing in the Helsinki metropolitan area.

The research team conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with participants selected in collaboration with the Help Center. The interviews took place within the center's facilities. Using purposive sampling, we selected participants to represent key groups within the refugee population: (1) women and men, with and without children; (2) various age groups; (3) Ukrainian and Russian speakers; (4) individuals registered with municipalities and those residing in reception centers; and (5) people both employed and unemployed (see Appendix 1). The duration of each interview was from one to two hours. The interview languages were Ukrainian and Russian and in one case Finnish. The requirement of new participants was stopped when the data was saturated, that is, when gathering additional data did not lead to new insights or information.

1.3 Research participants

We first describe the characteristics of *the survey participants* and then the characteristics of *the interview participants*. Women make up 78% of the sample, while men make up 22% (Table 1). The majority of respondents are in the 36-45 age group, representing 37% of the total, followed by the 26-35 age group with 24% and the 46-55 age group with 19%. Younger respondents aged 18-25 represent 11%, while those aged 56-65 and 66 and over are under-represented at 7% and 2% respectively. Women outnumber men in all age groups, with both genders most strongly represented in the 36-45 age group. Regarding gender and age our sample is close to other surveys in Finland and elsewhere. In the 2023 survey by the Finnish Ministry of Interior, 75% of respondents were female. The majority of respondents (84%) in that survey were aged between 26 and 55 years.[4] It is possible that older participants were less likely to participate in an internet-based survey.

Additionally, during the recruitment process for in-depth interviews, it was observed that men were less likely to participate. This may be related to the fact that men of military age are not permitted to leave Ukraine without a special allowance.

[3] City statistics (urb) (europa.eu), Functional Urban Area, Eurostat and Tilastokeskus: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/metadata/EN/urb_esms_fi.htm.

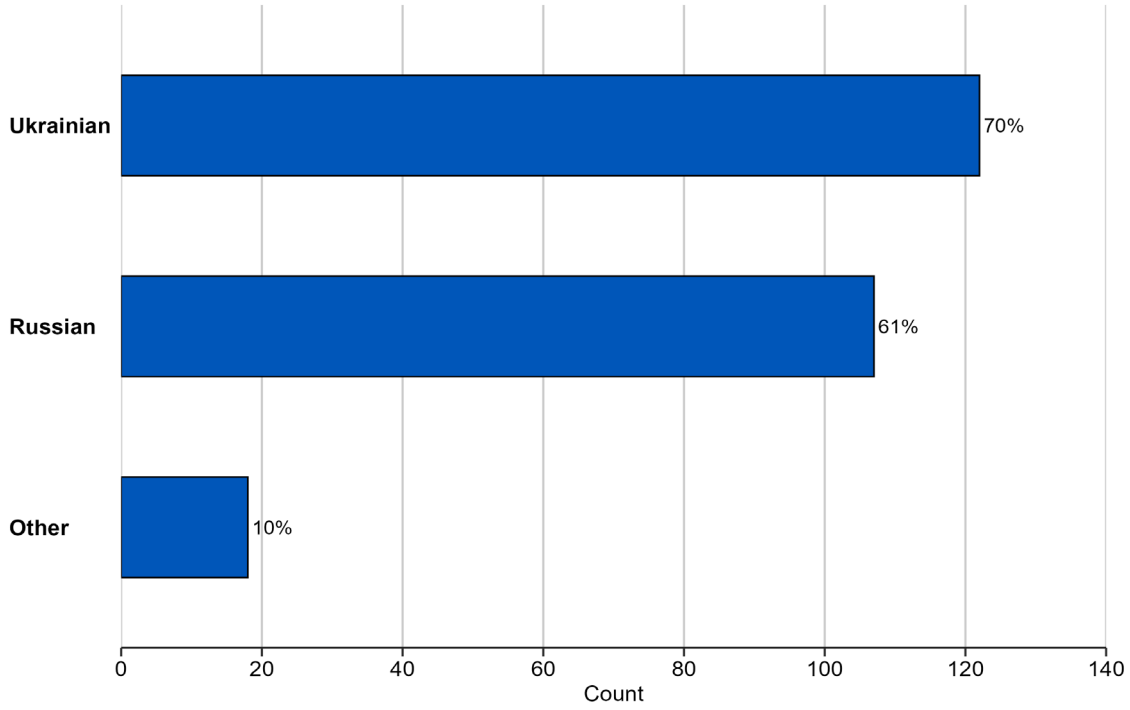
[4] Koptsyukh & Svynarenko: Ukrainians in Finland who fled the war: their registration in municipalities of residence and their future plans – survey results. Publications of the Ministry of the Interior, 2024:10.

Table 1 Gender by age of the respondents. Counts and percentages (N = 174).

	Age						Total
	18–25	26–35	36–45	46-55	56–65	66 or older	
Gender							
Female	15 (11%)	32 (24%)	52 (38%)	26 (19%)	8 (6%)	3 (2%)	136 (78%)
Male	5 (13%)	10 (26%)	12 (32%)	7 (18%)	4 (11%)	0 (0%)	38 (22%)
Total	20 (11%)	42 (24%)	64 (37%)	33 (19%)	12 (7%)	3 (2%)	174 (100%)

Ukrainian is the most common language spoken at home by respondents, used in 70% of households (Figure 1). Russian is the second most common language, spoken in 61% of households. A significant number of households are bilingual or multilingual, with considerable overlap between the use of Ukrainian and Russian. In addition, one in ten respondents reported using another language in their household in addition to or instead of Ukrainian, Russian or both.

Figure 1. Household languages of the respondents. Percentages and counts (N = 174).



As we can see from Table 2, one in three respondents are from Eastern Ukraine, followed by Southern Ukraine with 27% and Northern Ukraine with 22%. This is not surprising, given that these areas have experienced the most intense fighting during the war. Central Ukraine accounts for 9% of respondents, while Western Ukraine is the least represented region with only 7% of respondents. The geographical distribution is similar to previous surveys in Finland. A significant proportion of Ukrainians with temporary protection status in Finland come from regions of Ukraine that were subjected to the most intensive attacks by the Russian army.

Table 2. Home regions of the survey respondents. Counts and percentages (N = 174).[5]

Region	Count	Percentage
Central Ukraine	17	10
Eastern Ukraine	59	34
Northern Ukraine	38	22
Southern Ukraine	47	27
Western Ukraine	10	6
I prefer not to say	3	2
N = 174	**174**	**100**

Participants were reflecting a highly educated group: almost one in two respondents have a master's degree or higher (Figure 2). This is followed by 23 percent with a bachelor's degree and 18% with vocational training. A smaller proportion, 5%, have only completed secondary education. Results were close to the earlier survey (2023) by the Interior ministry of the registered refugee population in the whole country in which 63% of all respondents had at least a bachelor's degree and 27% had completed a specialised college or vocational training.[6]

Figure 2. Education level of the respondents. Percentages and counts (N = 174).

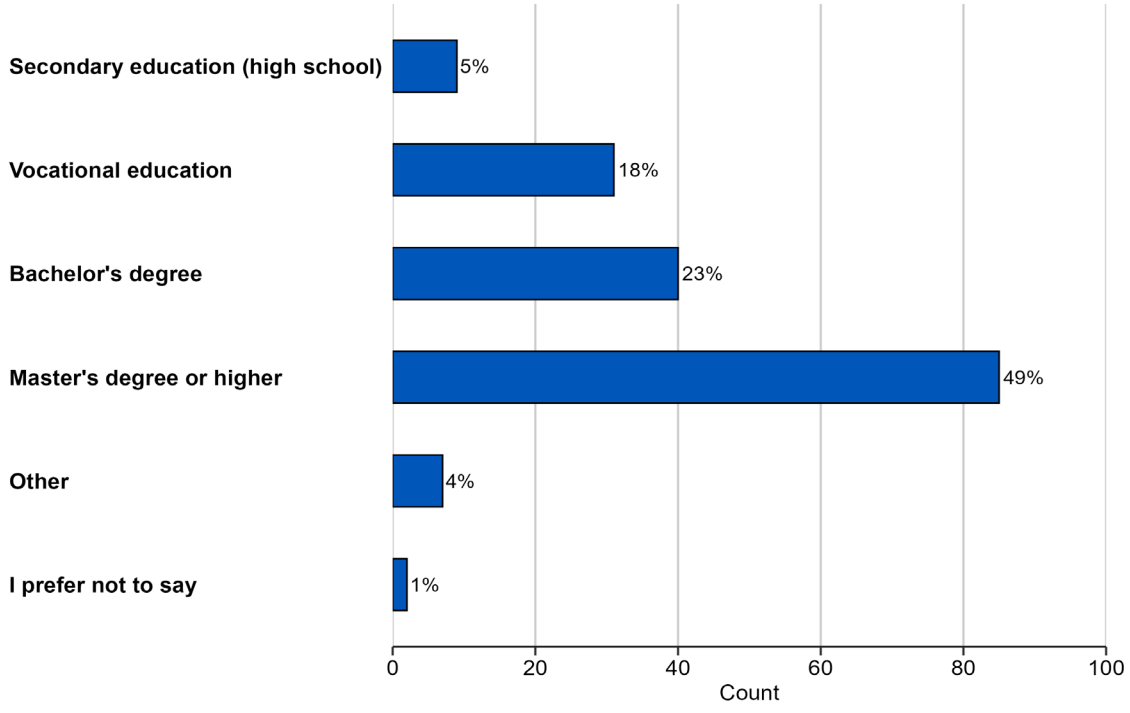


Figure 3 shows that almost half of the respondents arrived between 24 February and 30 June 2022, in the early stages of the war. The second largest group, 22.4%, arrived between 1 July and

[5] For a more detailed distribution of the geographical regions see Appendix, Table 1.

[6] Koptsyukh & Svynarenko: Ukrainians in Finland who fled the war: their registration in municipalities of residence and their future plans – survey results. Publications of the Ministry of the Interior, 2024:10.

31 December 2022. There were fewer arrivals in subsequent periods, with 11.5% arriving between 1 January and 30 June 2023, 6.3% between 1 July and 31 December 2023, and only 3.4% in each of the periods in 2024.

Figure 3. Time of arrival in Finland. Percentages and counts (N = 174).

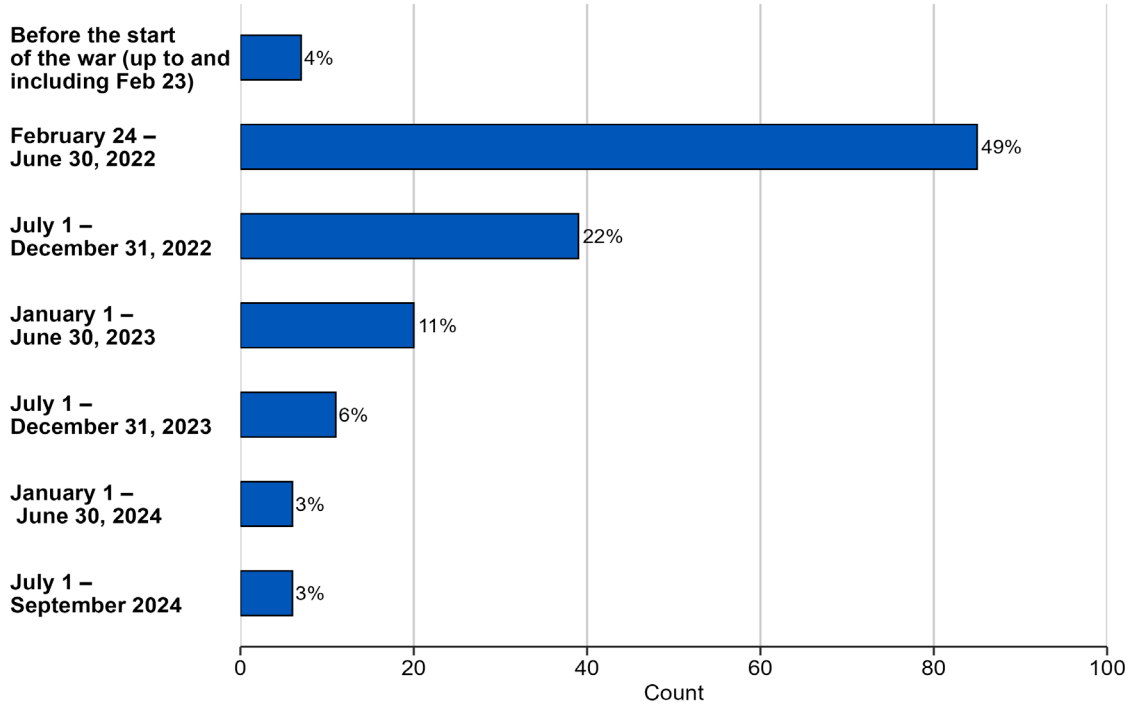
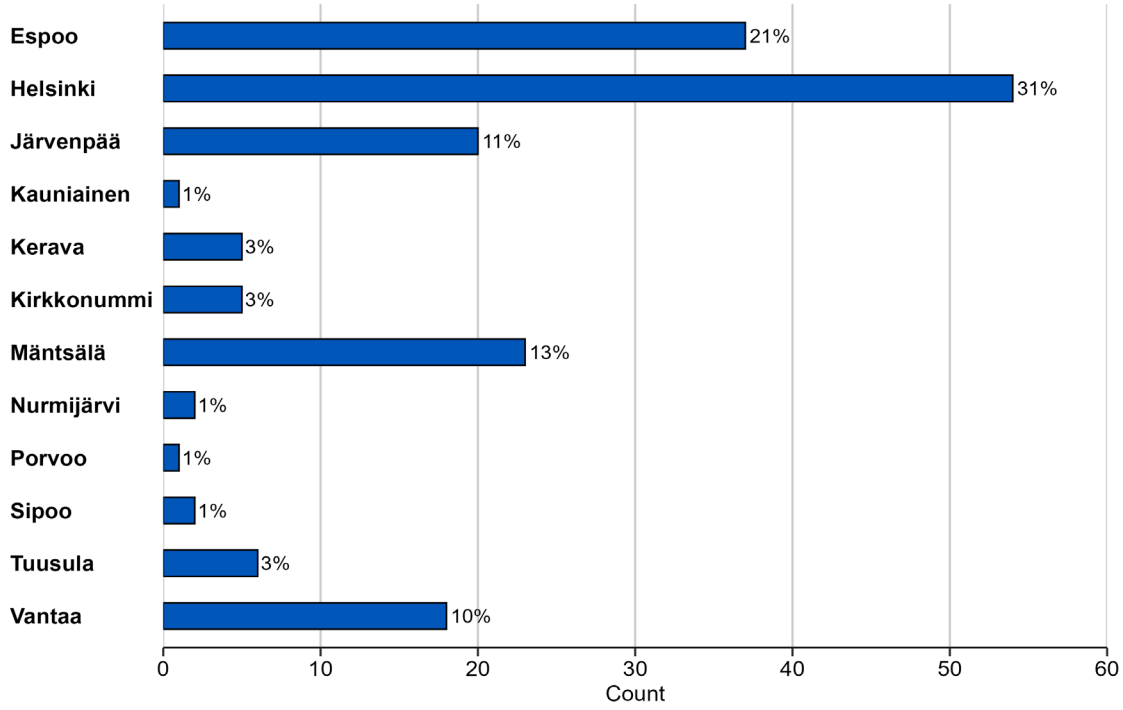


Figure 4 shows that the largest proportion of respondents, 31%, live in Helsinki, followed by 21.3% in Espoo. Mäntsälä accounts for 13.2% of respondents, while Vantaa is home to 10.3%. Järvenpää has 11.5%, with smaller shares in other municipalities such as Kerava and Kirkkonummi (both 2.9%), Tuusula (3.4%), Sipoo and Nurmijärvi (both 1.1%). The differences between the participants from different municipalities reflect at least partly the data collection process, as our main partner was the Helsinki-based Help Center, and officials from some municipalities north of Helsinki, such as Mäntsälä and Järvenpää, helped with the distribution of the questionnaire.

Figure 4. Place of residence. Percentages and counts (N = 174).



The in-depth interview participants were also predominantly well-educated and had diverse professional backgrounds. We spoke with business managers and professionals, construction workers, design and planning specialists, engineers, entrepreneurs, as well as educational and medical professionals. Most of the participants were female (15 out of 20). The majority were young adults or in early middle age, primarily falling into the 26–35 and 36–45 age groups, while older adults (56–65 and 66 or older) were less represented. Geographically, respondents come from diverse regions of Ukraine, including Kyiv, Kharkiv, Mariupol and Dnipro, with participants from other areas heavily impacted by the conflict, such as the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

People chose Finland as a place of refuge for various reasons, mainly because of existing links to the country, such as family members or friends. The main places of residence were Helsinki (three out of four), Espoo, Kirkkonummi and Vantaa. The majority had registered their residence in a municipality, with the exception of three individuals and most had arrived during the first year of the war, except for one individual who arrived more recently. Most participants had worked at some point during their stay, and five were currently employed.

2 Social cohesion and forced displacement of Ukrainians

The European Union and its member states have responded to the significant displacement crisis caused by the war with a diverse, if at some level contradictory, mix of policies. The policies aim simultaneously to provide refuge to people fleeing Ukraine, to facilitate the integration of displaced persons into host societies, and to support their eventual return and the reconstruction of Ukraine. The Temporary Protection Directive has provided access to public services through municipalities and other local actors in European cities and metropolitan areas. In addition, the EU, its Member States and international organisations are committed to assisting Ukraine in its reconstruction efforts and the resettlement of displaced populations.

However, this set of policies has resulted that many municipalities across Europe hosting significant new immigrant populations, who are included in the standard integration services, yet who's right to stay is determined on an annual basis. It is important for officials, policy makers and third sector actors to gain a better understanding of the diverse needs of this population. Important questions include the use of public services by displaced Ukrainians, barriers to accessing these services, labour market situation and obstacles to employment, as well as future plans.

Extensive research literature shows that social cohesion is a key factor for immigrant integration, and that trust and solidarity between social groups are important for inclusion and equality both in the host society and in the country recovering from the crisis. Although there are different conceptions of what social cohesion means, it often refers to a shared sense of purpose, willingness to cooperate with and trust in other members of a group.

2.1 Needs of the displaced Ukrainians in Europe

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, more than 6 million Ukrainians have fled to EU countries, with many registering under the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), which was activated on 4 March 2022. The TPD gives displaced Ukrainians access to temporary legal residence, the right to work and access to public services. The latest extension ensures that these rights will continue until at least March 2026. According to the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) survey on Ukrainian displaced persons, most respondents did not experience any difficulties when travelling to and within the European Union (EU).[7] Most also felt that they had received sufficient information about their rights and the services available to them under the Temporary Protection Directive.

According to a German study, the main need of Ukrainian refugees was to learn the German language, followed by securing employment.[8] **In the FRA study mentioned above, two thirds of Ukrainians of working age were not in paid employment at the time of the survey.** Respondents reported inadequate knowledge of the host country's language and family caregiving responsibilities, particularly for women, as the main barriers to employment. From those who had found work, three in ten respondents reported experiencing some form of exploitation at work, such as underpayment, very long work hours or work without a contract.

In Europe, according to the FRA study, around 60% of Ukrainian IDPs were staying in a private apartment or house. Of these, more than half were contributing to the cost of their accommodation, either partially or in full. The most common housing problems are lack of privacy and having to share a kitchen or bathroom with strangers. Most adult respondents live with

[7] FRA: Fleeing Ukraine- European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2023.
[8] Brücker, H. et al. 2023.

dependent children, often in accommodation that lacks a quiet or separate room for the children to study. There is, of course, a great deal of variation between circumstances in different host countries. According to a German survey, around 79% of Ukrainian refugees in Germany live in private accommodation.[9]

Although the Temporary Protection Directive guarantees access to public healthcare, refugees have reported various challenges in accessing health services. In the previosly mentioned FRA study, almost half of respondents aged 16 and over cited 'language difficulties' and almost a third cited 'not knowing where to go or who to contact' as the most common barriers to accessing healthcare. In addition, almost half of respondents reported feeling down and depressed often or always since arriving in the host country. Despite this, almost two out of three respondents expressed optimism about the future, and more than 30% said they felt a sense of belonging to the community in their host country.

2.2 Meaning of social cohesion

There is no single standard definition of social cohesion and there is no standard operationalization of the concept in social research.[10] The concept is used across various disciplines and various contexts from economic development to social psychology. At the same time, there are certain features and distinctions that many researchers consider important for a meaningful concept of social cohesion.[11] First, social cohesion has both vertical and horizontal dimensions: members of a society may have more or less trust in institutions such as the law or social services, identify as members of a state, and participate in institutional processes such as elections (vertical dimension); members may also have varying levels of trust in each other and varying levels of actual relations between members of a group and with other groups in society. Second, social cohesion can be divided into an abstract domain that relates to individuals' attitudes, such as a sense of belonging, and a concrete domain that relates to their behaviour, such as actual participation in social activities.

Recent research is increasingly converging on a narrower definition of social cohesion that excludes factors such as inequality, which are better understood as underlying causes or consequences rather than core elements. Although there is no consensus, some experts argue that this narrower approach is more practical. Schiefer and van der Noll,[12] for example, suggest that aspects often associated with social cohesion - such as shared values, inequality and quality of life - should not be seen as its integral components, but as phenomena that can affect or be affected by social cohesion.

Cohesion can be analysed as a feature of a group itself, as cohesion between distinct groups or society or social groups and the state. In research, social cohesion is discussed both as cohesion of societies and, as cohesion of smaller scale social units such as small communities or workplaces (Friedkin 2004, World Bank 2020).

Existing research on the impact of displacement on displaced persons has shown mixed results. Some studies point to negative psychological effects of victimization, such as higher levels of anger, lower levels of trust, and other outcomes associated with low social cohesion. This

[9] Heiermann, P. & Atanisev, K. (2024). The Application of the Temporary Protection Directive to Refugees from Ukraine in Germany (EMN Germany Paper 1/2024). Nuremberg. Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. https://doi.org/10.48570/bamf.fz.emndp.01/2024.en.2024.rlschutzukr.1.0

[10] In addition, there is considerable overlap in the definition and use of the concepts of social cohesion and social capital by researchers. See e.g. Klein, C. (2013). Social Capital or Social Cohesion: What Matters For Subjective Well-Being? *Social Indicators Research*, 110(3), 891–911. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-011-9963-x.

[11] Chan, J., To, H.-P., & Chan, E. (2006). Reconsidering Social Cohesion: Developing a Definition and Analytical Framework for Empirical Research. Social Indicators Research, 75(2), 273–302. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-005-2118-1

[12] Schiefer, D., & van der Noll, J. (2017). The Essentials of Social Cohesion: A Literature Review. *Social Indicators Research*, *132*(2), 579–603. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-016-1314-5.

suggests that victimisation and displacement may undermine social cohesion. However, other research has documented “post-traumatic growth” in victims of conflict, where individuals who have been victimised appear more cooperative, civically engaged, and exhibit characteristics associated with high social cohesion.[13]

This study uses a definition that is also used by the World Bank: Social cohesion is “a sense of shared purpose, trust and willingness to cooperate among members of a given group, between members of different groups, and between people and the state”.[14] It should also be noted that social cohesion is not only a positive concept: for example, an invading army or criminal organisation may have high social cohesion; or social cohesion may be created by excluding minorities. The desirability of high cohesion always depends on the wider social context.

2.3 Social cohesion and displacement of Ukrainians

Previous research suggests that while many aspects of social cohesion have remained stable during the war, there are tensions between IDPs and host communities. [15] For example, residents of western Ukraine are more likely to report such tensions than residents of other oblasts. Other potential sources of division include differences between Ukrainian and Russian speakers, between ethnic Ukrainians and Russians, and between populations in eastern and western Ukraine. A survey conducted in Ukraine in 2023 survey reveals mixed perceptions of reintegration of the returning refugees.[16] On the one hand, a majority of respondents (66%) believe that the public will generally accept returnees from abroad back into normal life. On the other hand, more than half expect different attitudes towards different categories of citizens (54%) and foresee potential challenges (52%). In addition, almost half (49%) expect the authorities to introduce unfavorable legislation for refugees, while more than a third (36%) think it likely that the public will perceive refugees living abroad as traitors.

According to a study by Oleksandra Deineko, during Russia's full-scale invasion, Ukrainians demonstrated resilience, with increased mutual support and solidarity.[17] For example, there was a significant change in attituteds towards national identity, with the proportion of people identifying as 'citizens of Ukraine' rising from 45.6% in 1992 to 84.6% in July 2022. The increased use of the Ukrainian language and decreased consumption of Russian media underlines these developments. Despite these changes, challenges to cohesion remain. The results by Deineko suggest that social divisions may emerge, particularly between those who remained in Ukraine and those who fled, with the risk of exclusion and stigmatisation. To address these potential divisions, strategies that encourage active participation by refugees - such as volunteering and engaging in international advocacy - could help to promote unity and inclusion.

There is little research that examines the social cohesion of Ukrainian refugee diasporas in host societies as a two-way process. One contributing factor may be the generally warm and universal welcome that Ukrainians have received. For example, a study in Romania found that both Romanians and displaced Ukrainians had predominantly positive attitudes towards each other.[18]

For Ukrainian displaced persons, social cohesion is a transnational issue, as solidarity, mutual aid and trust are needed within the diaspora community, between the diaspora and the host community, between the diaspora and those who remain in Ukraine, and in the future in the

[13] Myers, E., Sacks, A., Tellez, J. F., & Wibbels, E. (2024). Forced displacement, social cohesion, and the state: Evidence from eight new studies. *World Development*, *173*, 106416-. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2023.106416

[14] Barron, Cord, Cuesta, Espinoza, Larson, and Woolcock, 2023.

[15] Center for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development 2023, 19.

[16] European Union Advisory Mission (EUAM). (2023). *Public Survey Results: September 2023*. Слайд 1 (kiis.com.ua)

[17] Oleksandra Deineko. Ukraine, War and Resistance: Reshaping Social Cohesion. Studia Socjologiczne 2023. 2 (249), 155–177.

[18] „Survey Regarding the Social Cohesion in the Context of Ukrainian Crisis” Study Report, 2023 Study developed by the Romanian Association for Health Promotion (ARPS) for UNICEF Romania.

reconstruction process of a recovering Ukraine or as immigrant members of the host society. This study contributes to the exploration of these issues by asking a) questions about the experience of services provided by regional and local providers, such as language courses and health services; b) questions about the outcomes of integration policies, such as labour market position and equal opportunities; c) questions about social cohesion. Social cohesion is examined at the horizontal level in both subjective (trust and belonging) and objective dimensions (friends and participation); and in the transnational context by asking questions related to the Ukrainian community, belonging to Finland, and Ukrainian national identity.

3 Public services and needs of the displaced Ukrainians

Accommodation

- Three out of four respondents were registered in municipalities. Most live in privately rented apartments (62%), some in municipally rented apartments or in housing managed by social housing providers. More than one in three live with children under the age of 18.
- Most respondents, 72%, said that they had no specific time frame for moving out from the current accommodation.
- Experiences of finding accommodation and settling into a community varied: some relied on friends or online platforms, while others faced challenges, including navigating complex processes on their own, some received proactive support from social workers after registration.

Health

- The majority of survey respondents had some problems accessing health services. Language difficulties were the most commonly cited barrier (44%) and almost one in three reported challenges due to a lack of knowledge about where to seek help or who to contact.
- More than one in five of respondents said they had to wait so long for treatment that they had ended up paying for it themselves.
- 7% reported a need for care due to a long-term illness or disability in the household.
- Interview participants identified some barriers to accessing mental health treatment, including long waiting times, stigma and limited awareness of mental health, insufficient support in the Ukrainian language, and a lack of recognition for the qualifications of Ukrainian-speaking professionals.

Language teaching and learning

- More than half of the survey respondents were still attending Finnish or Swedish language classes, while 28% had attended but were not currently attending.
- Majority were positive about the language lessons they had received, with 44% agreeing and 18% strongly agreeing that they were satisfied.
- Both groups of participants reported a need for Finnish language teachers who speak Ukrainian or Russian, help in finding language courses with an appropriate level of difficulty and pace, as well as barriers to learning and/or finding a suitable course, such as advanced age, work and family commitments.

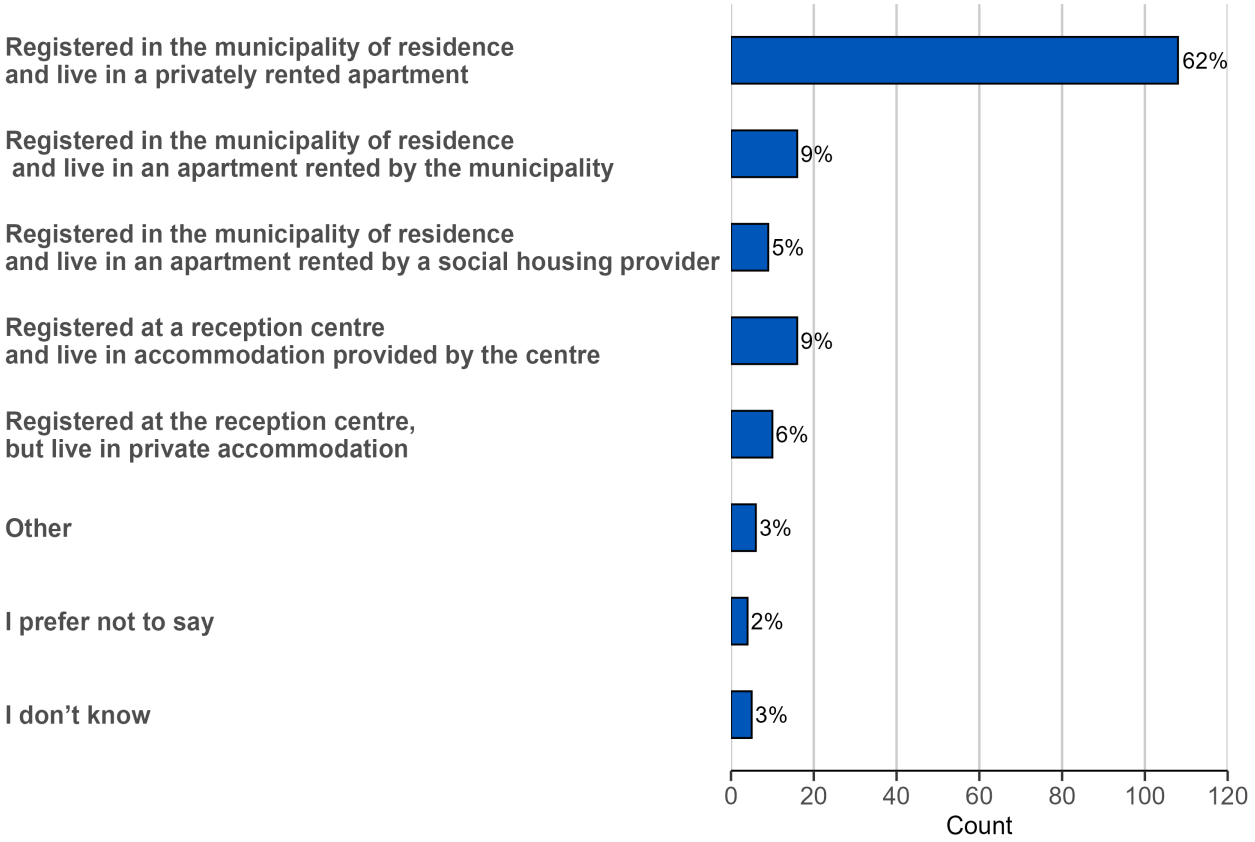
Other services

- The most common form of assistance received by respondents in the past month was financial assistance, reported by 43% of respondents, closely followed by language training at 40%.
- One in four had received help from the Employment office (TE-toimisto). Some criticised the Employment office services because they had hoped for more personalised and comprehensive support from the employment officers.

3.1 Accommodation

A majority (76%) of the survey respondents have registered in municipalities (Figure 5). Most live in privately rented apartments (62%), some in municipally rented apartments (9%) or in housing managed by social housing providers (5%) .[19] Only 9% live in receptions centers or in accommodation provided by reception centers, and 6% are registered at reception centers but live in private accommodations. Nationally, according to the Finnish Immigration Service, a total of 27,000 Ukrainians have registered as residents in municipalities, while approximately 9,400 of the Ukrainians living in reception centers are eligible to a municipality but have not yet applied.[20] In the survey conducted by the Ministry of the Interior, data was collected in November 2023, approximately half of the respondents were registered in a municipality.[21]

Figure 5. Living arrangements. What are your living arrangements right now? Percentages and counts (N = 174).



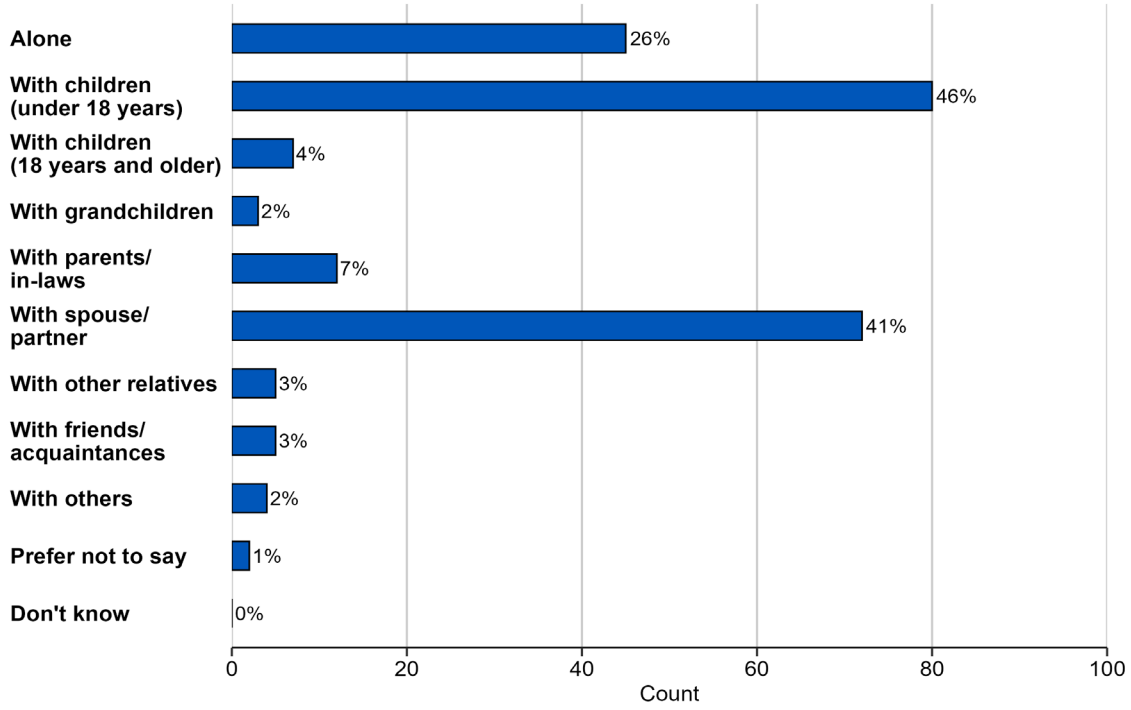
Almost half of the survey respondents live with children under 18 (Figure 6). Similarly, 41% live with their spouse or partner. One in five of the participants live alone.

[19] Both municipal housing providers and social housing providers sometimes rent also some non-ARA-apartments (not publicly subsided) and private entities also rent ARA-apartments (publicly subsided).

[20] Finnish Immigration Service, 3.12.2024. https://migri.fi/en/-/almost-12-000-ukrainians-have-applied-for-temporary-protection-in-finland-this-year.

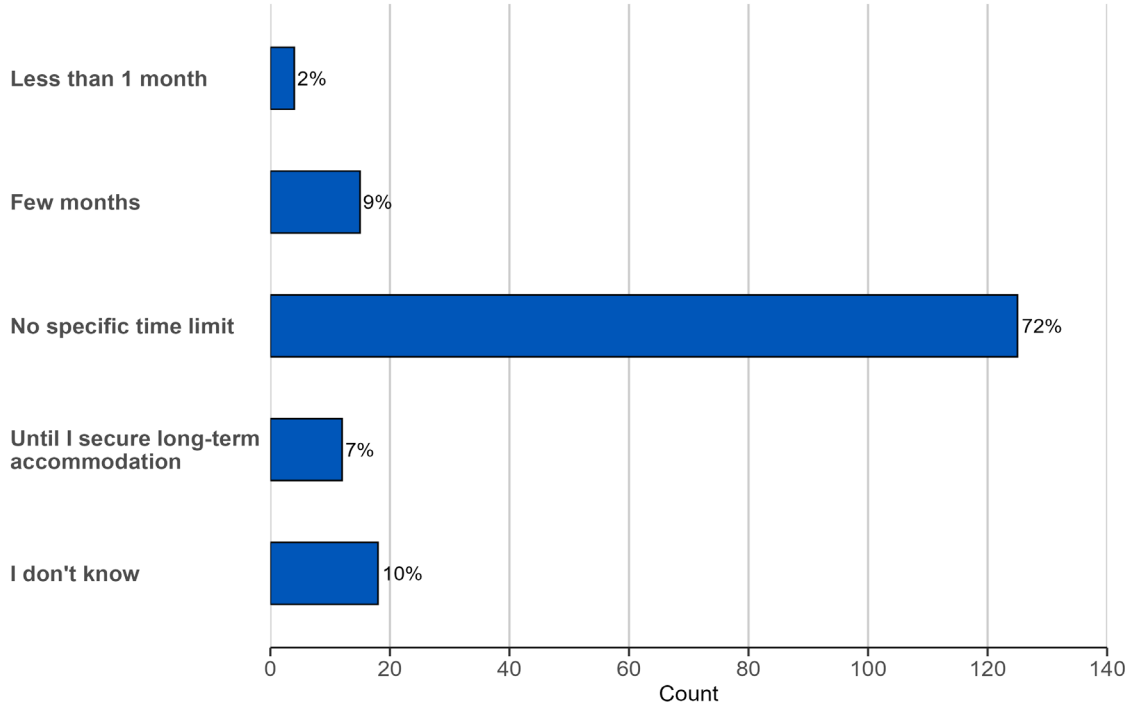
[21] Koptsyukh & Svynarenko 2024.

Figure 6. With whom do you live? Percentages and counts (N = 174).



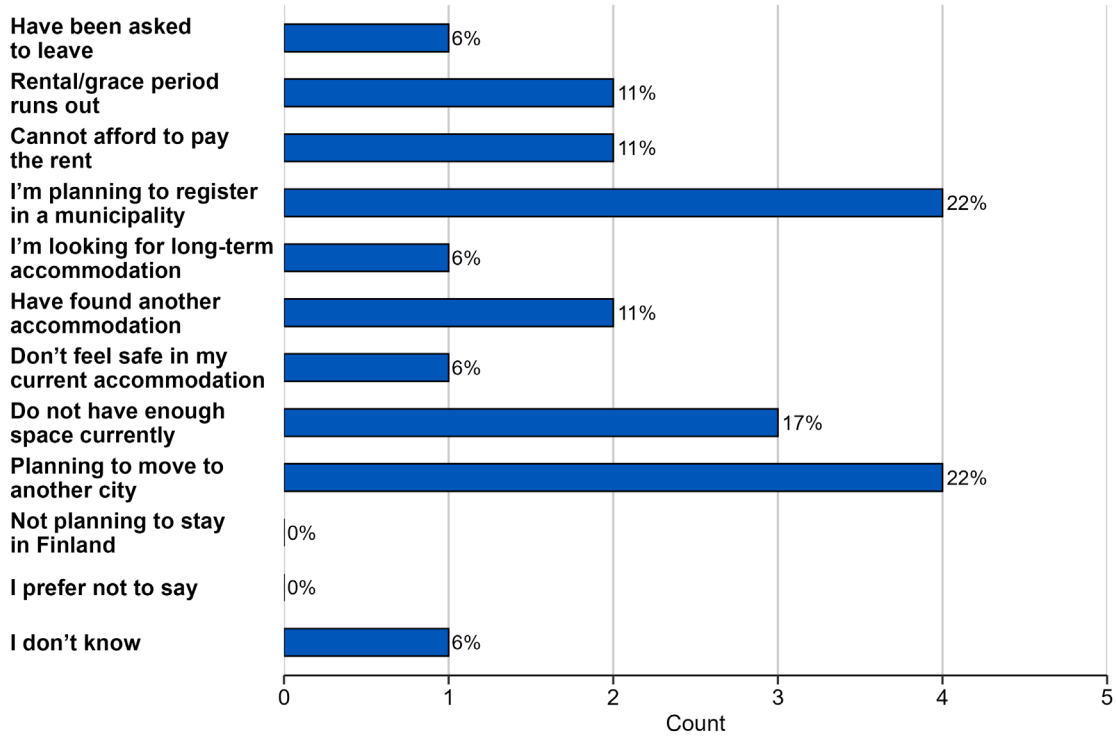
Most respondents, 72% (125 individuals), indicated that they had no specific time frame for moving out from the current accommodation (Figure 7). The responses likely reflect both uncertainties concerning the long-term plans of the displaced persons and a sense of stability in their current housing situation. A further 7% plan to stay until they secure long-term accommodation and 10% are uncertain about their plans.

Figure 7. Planned residence time in the current accommodation. Percentages and counts (N = 174).



Although the responses may reflect the uncertainty caused by both the ongoing conflict and the temporary status, on the positive side, very few are planning to leave their accommodation because of financial constraints (Figure 8). Only 18 respondents plan to leave within the next few months. Of these, only a few (6 persons) will be compelled to do so due to an inability to afford rent, insufficient living space or not feeling safe in their current accommodation.

Figure 8. Reasons for leaving the current accommodation. Percentages and counts (N = 18).



After arriving in Finland, not all Ukrainian interviewees relied on reception services for accommodation. Some used alternative solutions, such as finding a rented flat with the help of volunteers or connections with friends or arrangements made by employers. Some stayed with family members already living in Finland. Often these solutions were combined with periods of accommodation provided by the centers.

Finding accommodation can be a challenge for Ukrainian displaced persons in Helsinki metropolitan area:

> *"I had problems. No one responded to my applications when I started looking for an apartment before registering with a municipality. I had the temporary protection status, and they [landlords] thought I was unable to pay. At that time, I did not have municipal registration which was a problem. I applied everywhere, but they didn't respond to me although I had a temporary job and a good salary. […Eventually], a friend of mine, who had registered applied on my behalf, and then I personally went to meet the landlord and signed the contract. It was very fast."*
>
> *"Anna",[22] Espoo*

As Anna describes, sometimes friends provide crucial help in finding accommodation. Others said that they were able to find accommodation relatively quickly through online platforms; others had problems because of language barriers or because they did not have online banking credentials.

Respondents reported mixed experiences of registering their residence with a municipality. – it can be easy for some, but difficult for others, for example, due to the challenge of securing housing or finding the necessary information. Some interviewees told us that they had to navigate and gather all the necessary information on their own, which they found overwhelming. There were also exceptions, as some individuals living in Helsinki described being contacted by social workers after registration and provided with all the necessary information. The Help Center assisted some people to complete their registration. The timeframe for registering

[22] The names are aliases.

residence with a municipality varied: some people registered as soon as it was possible, others stayed for a while as clients of the reception centers.

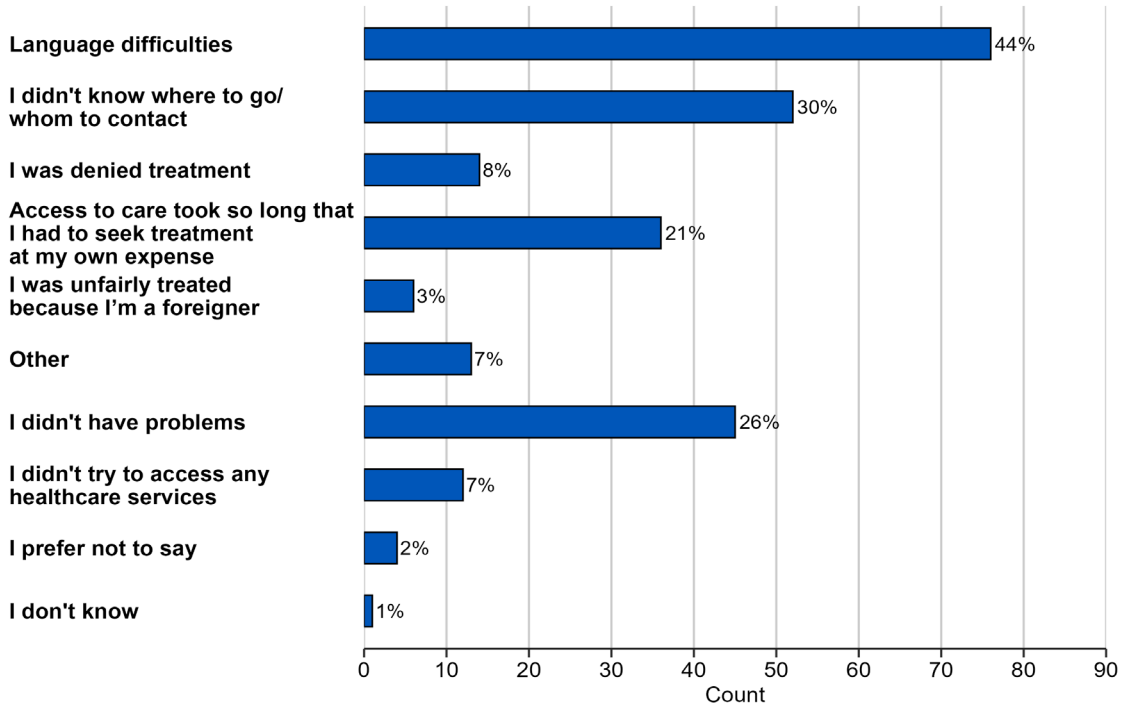
3.2 Health and mental health services

> *"When I was working, I had insurance. So, of course, it was much easier. Now it's difficult because I no longer work, I don't have insurance, and it's impossible to reach the health center's phone numbers. I tried several times to book an appointment for myself and my daughter, but I didn't succeed."*
>
> *Natalii, Helsinki*

The survey confirmed that the difficulties mentioned in the above quote were shared by other Ukrainians with temporary protection, as the majority of respondents had some problems accessing health services (Figure 9). 26% of respondents had no problems accessing healthcare. Language difficulties were the most common problem, affecting 44% of respondents. This shows that communication problems are a big issue when it comes to accessing health services. 30% of respondents indicated that they did not know where to go or who to contact, suggesting that adequate information about the healthcare system was not provided, at least not in a language they could understand. 21% of respondents reported waiting so long for treatment that they had to pay for it themselves, while 8% were denied treatment. Some of these problems are likely to have occurred during the reception period. In addition, delays in treatment may have resulted from the transition between systems after registration with the municipality. It is also possible that issues are connected to the current challenges of the Finnish healthcare system. In the FRA survey of displaced Ukrainians across Europe, conducted in early autumn 2022, language difficulties and lack of information were cited as barriers to accessing healthcare by (respectively) 47% on average and 30% on average in the participating countries.[23]

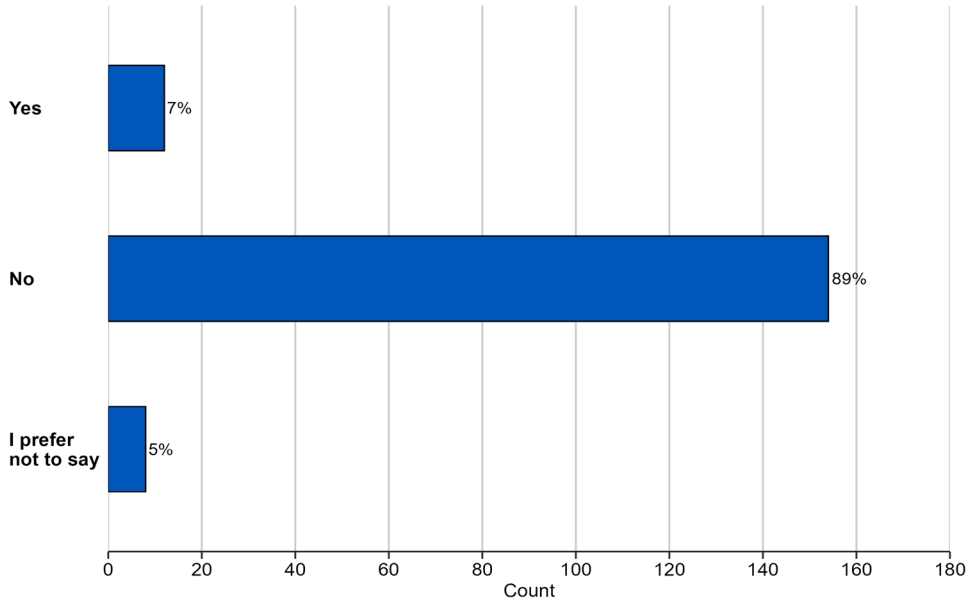
[23] FRA 2023.

Figure 9. Difficulties experienced in accessing healthcare services in Finland since arrival. Percentages and counts (N = 174).



The results in Figure 10 show that the majority of the survey respondents (89%) answered that in their household there is no need for care in the household due to a long-term illness or disability. A smaller proportion (7%) reported a need for due to a long-term illness or disability. While most households do not face such healthcare needs, a notable minority does.

Figure 10. Is there a need for healthcare in the household due to long-term illness or disability? Percentages and counts (N = 174).



Many interviewees were grateful for the healthcare they have received in Finland. However, experiences of difficulty getting treatment were also common in the interview data:

> *"I go to the health center and wait in line to be seen if my child complains about something, like a headache or stomach ache. My child often has stomach issues. Often, they tell me, 'Stay at home for a while,' as if it's nothing serious. Only when I come back a second or third time with the same problem do they do something."*
>
> *Iryna, Helsinki*

Her experience illustrates one of the strategies Ukrainians employed to overcome challenges in accessing healthcare services. Iryna personally visited the health center repeatedly until her child received the necessary care. Some interviewees had similar experiences in reception centers, where they were only given access to treatment after repeated requests.

One in five of the survey participants said that lack of knowledge formed a barrier to access for healthcare. In the interviews, we were told that lack of information could also have serious financial implications for displaced Ukrainians:

> *"I thought, for example, that Terveystalo [a private Finnish healthcare company] was a public clinic, but it turned out to be private. I went there and underwent some examinations. [...] They [Kela] said they could only reimburse a part of the costs. I'm currently unemployed. [...] The bill was quite large, and it's difficult for me to pay it."*
>
> *Bohdan, Espoo*

Another interviewee, an older woman, expressed gratitude for Finland's healthcare system, including reimbursement for treatments and prescriptions, but noted delays in obtaining cataract surgery, ultimately choosing to undergo the procedure in Ukraine. Another respondent suggested that cultural differences might also contribute to the challenges. She noted that Ukrainians often have different expectations of doctors, such as receiving medication for symptoms that are typically treated without drugs in Finland. **Providing more comprehensive health information could help address these misunderstandings.**

Most interview participants reported being offered emotional or psychological support at some point during their stay. However, few had taken advantage of this opportunity. Participants

with expertise in the field highlighted the substantial mental health needs resulting from the war and displacement.

> *Here are 64,000 Ukrainians, more or less. We understand that these people are, at the very least, in crisis, and most of them are in a traumatic state. I hear a lot of feedback, for example, when people seek psychological help from the reception center […]. Either they don't receive this help because there is no one available, meaning official staff, or they are placed on a waiting list for several months. During the waiting period, the person's condition worsens, and soon they require psychiatric help, or they become depressed, or at the very least, it leads to a decline in their overall well-being. Then Ukrainians look for other ways to either get this psychological help or to cope with the situations, and these ways are not always, shall we say, positive. It could be alcohol, drugs, aggression, or self-harm.*
>
> *Nataliia, Helsinki*

In addition to long waiting times, interviewees mentioned other barriers to accessing psychological support. Some participants highlighted that individuals are often unaware of the availability of psychological services, what therapeutic work entails, and who it is intended for. Fear of judgment or cultural stigma associated with mental health issues may also deter individuals from seeking help. Furthermore, negative associations with the historical practices of Soviet-era psychiatry still influence attitudes toward mental health care. Limited access to services in the Ukrainian language poses a significant challenge. Some individuals feel uncomfortable speaking through an interpreter or with a Russian-speaking therapist. This issue is further compounded by the fact that many Ukrainian mental health professionals with temporary status in Finland often do not have their qualifications officially recognised.

In sum, access to health and mental health services was a notable challenge to the Ukrainian nationals living with temporary protection in the Helsinki metropolitan area. Language barriers and limited knowledge of the health system often hampered access. More than one in ten respondents had to seek private care due to delays. Mental health care faced additional barriers, including stigma, long waiting times, a shortage of Ukrainian-speaking professionals, and problems with the recognition of practitioners' qualifications.

3.3 Language training

Almost all survey respondents (97%) reported being proficient in Ukrainian and a very high percentage (93%) were proficient in Russian (Figure 11). This is not surprising as most Ukrainians are bilingual, with the majority of respondents originating from the eastern, southern and central regions. Almost 50% of the respondents said they could work or study in the English language. 26% said they knew the Finnish or Swedish language. However, while some of them have started learning or are familiar with the local language, the majority do not yet have sufficient skills to work or study in Finnish or Swedish. The high level of English proficiency raises the question of whether existing language skills can be used for employment, education and integration into international workplaces.

Figure 11. Languages that the respondents know well enough to work or study in. Percentages and counts (N = 174).

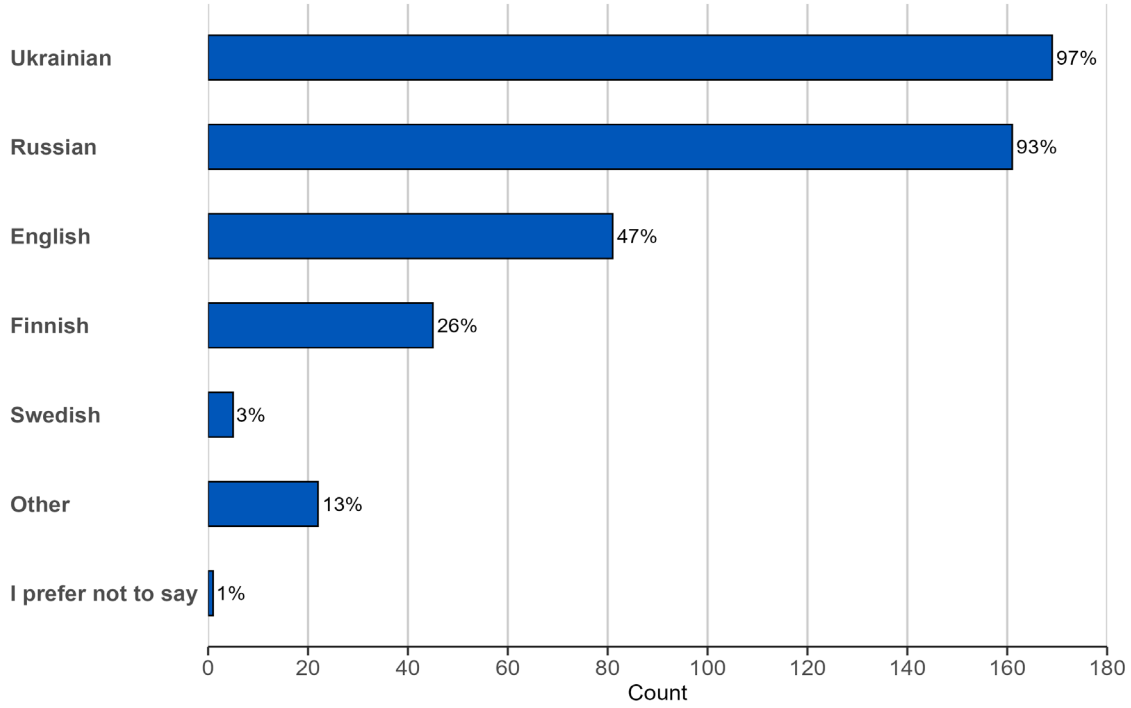


Figure 12 shows that the majority of the survey participants, 51.1%, stated that they were still attending Finnish or Swedish language classes, while 28.2% had attended but were not currently attending.[24] In addition, 13.8% were planning to start lessons later and 6.3% said they had not participated at all. These figures are quite positive compared to, for example, the situation in Germany in 2023, when around half of Ukrainians with temporary protection status had either attended or were currently attending language courses.[25]

[24] Finland's national languages are Finnish and Swedish.
[25] Brücker, H. et al. 2023.

Figure 12. Have you taken part in Finnish or Swedish lessons? Percentages and counts (N = 174).

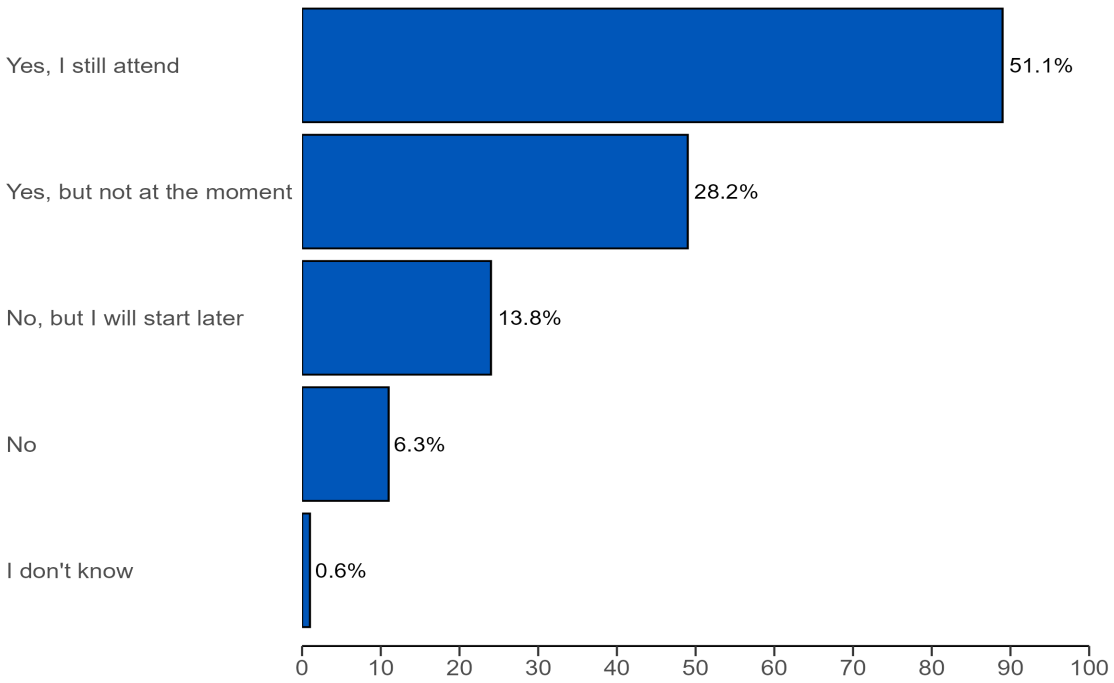


Figure 13 shows that the majority of survey respondents were positive about the language lessons they had received, with 44% agreeing and 18% strongly agreeing that they were satisfied. Meanwhile, 30% neither agreed nor disagreed, indicating a neutral attitude. A small proportion were dissatisfied, with 5% disagreeing and 2% strongly disagreeing. Most participants were satisfied with their language teaching, a significant minority were either neutral or dissatisfied. This question was only asked of those respondents who were currently attending a language course or who had attended a language course in the past.

Survey respondents also had the opportunity to give an open response to the question: "What changes could be made to improve language training for displaced Ukrainians in Finland? Many participants hoped for more practice-oriented teaching methods, e.g. integrating real-life language practice into the courses, such as conversation exercises, group discussions and activities like shopping or communicating with authorities. There were suggestions to create opportunities for interaction with native Finnish speakers, as they see regular communication with locals as essential for developing language skills. A significant number of respondents were in favour of linking language training to employment opportunities, suggesting that work alongside language learning would allow practical application of skills.

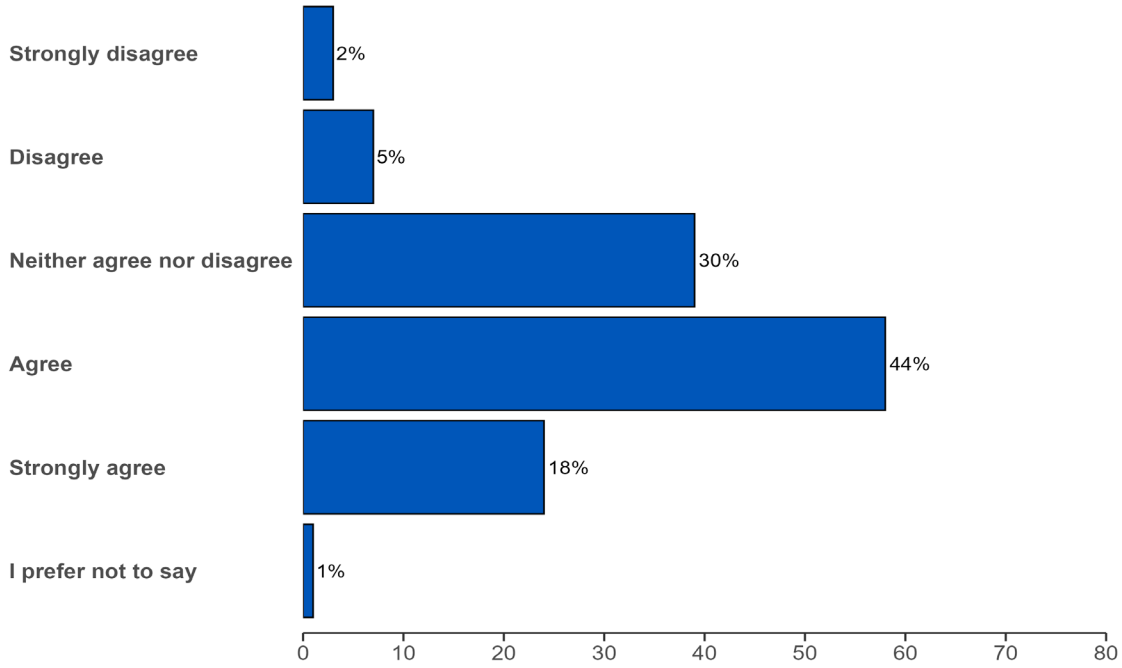
The fast pace of existing courses is also criticised. Many find intensive programmes overwhelming, leaving little time to understand or retain the material. At the same time, others hoped for more intensive and faster courses.

A common concern is the lack of Ukrainian or Russian speaking teachers, as many feel that they could explain difficult subjects, especially grammar, more effectively. However, some felt that a Russian-speaking teacher would be problematic for them as Ukrainians.

Some respondents complained about access to language courses, citing challenges such as long waiting lists, insufficient places and distance from home. Mental health issues and stress due to the temporary and precarious situation of the displaced Ukrainians were mentioned as a barrier to language learning.

Overall, participants hoped that language teaching and course provision would take account of different levels of proficiency and individual circumstances.

Figure 13. I am satisfied with the language lessons I have received. Percentages and counts (N = 174).



The interview participants expressed different perspectives on the importance of language skills in Finnish society. While all agreed that Finnish language skills are crucial for employment, their experiences of language barriers in everyday life varied. Some were optimistic, as illustrated by Anatolii's view:

> *"Honestly, we've gotten used to not understanding everything. I know a little English. And now Finnish and these two languages are getting mixed up. We laugh about it, but I'm understood to some extent. And if there's something that isn't understood, then there's Google Translate."*
>
> *Anatolii, Helsinki*

Anatolii believed that also with limited skills and good will, you can get along and survive. Others found that without any Finnish or English skills many issues were difficult to navigate. For example, opening a bank account was a challenge and some solved the issue by asking a Finnish friend or an English speaker to help. Others were worried of elder relatives for whom many practical issues like corresponding with authorities were too difficult because they could not speak Finnish or English.

All working age participants were motivated to learn Finnish, but some displaced Ukrainians found it challenging to learn Finnish and work at the same time.

> *You understand, don't you, that even in my current job, if I knew Finnish, my salary would be higher. But I can't learn Finnish because I am working.*
>
> *Antonina, Helsinki*

Some had opted for English instead of Finnish or Swedish:

> *"I have such a difficult situation. Although I have two higher education degrees, I have studied French all my life at school and university. I came here and realized that I should learn English or Finnish. I asked my Finnish friends for advice. We still think that we are going back. They said: 'You*

> *should learn English because you need English everywhere [...].' So, I started studying English online a year and a half ago. And I'm still studying. I'm already on my third course. So, I can communicate in English quite well now. Since I work in a café, I know vocabulary related to food and everything about my café work in. And to communicate freely, I have […] my son, as my interpreter – he already communicates well. At work, I use this kind of 'Finnish-English'."*
>
> *Kateryna, Helsinki*

Other interviewees also had children who had learned Finnish fluently and were now helping their parents. Some found ways to improve their Finnish skills even though they were simultaneously working. For example, one person who is currently working was using her own funds to study:

> *"Yes, it was a good course. There were classes every day. I studied in two courses. The first time, I studied for three months, but then I had to stop because I found a job. Later, I joined again and earned a certificate. Level B1.1. Now I have applied for a B2-level course and will start studying Finnish at my own expense in an adult education center."*
>
> *Anna, Espoo*

Anna was also satisfied with the level of teaching in the government-sponsored language course, as were most respondents in both data sets**.** At the same time, people had critical comments and suggestions for improving the Finnish language courses:

> *"I am very satisfied with [the language courses]. Unfortunately, there are some issues at the school: our teachers change every week. This is very difficult because each teacher has their own teaching style. I also have a problem with the courses: even though I adapt quickly, there are 11 different nationalities in the group, and not a single Russian or Ukrainian speaker. I'm the only one there. The teacher speaks only Finnish... I don't understand a word of what they say. I improvise every day."*
>
> *Anatolii, Helsinki*

One suggestion, also mentioned in the open-ended responses of the survey, was the need for teachers who could speak Ukrainian or Russian. In addition, finding a course at the right level proved to be a challenge for some, although many had taken placement tests to determine their level. Some participants cited their advanced age as a barrier to learning, while others cited work and family commitments as significant barriers.

3.4 Other services

Figure 14 shows that the most common form of help received by respondents in the last month was financial help, reported by 43% of respondents, closely followed by support to study Finnish or Swedish at 40%. Help with housing or accommodation was reported by 30% and medical care by 34%. Smaller proportions reported receiving help with daily living (9%), finding a job (8%) or dealing with official matters (8%). Some participants reported receiving no help (14%), while 9% selected 'none of the above'. The results show that social benefits and language courses were the most used services.

Figure 14. Received assistance during the last month with. Percentages and counts (N = 174).

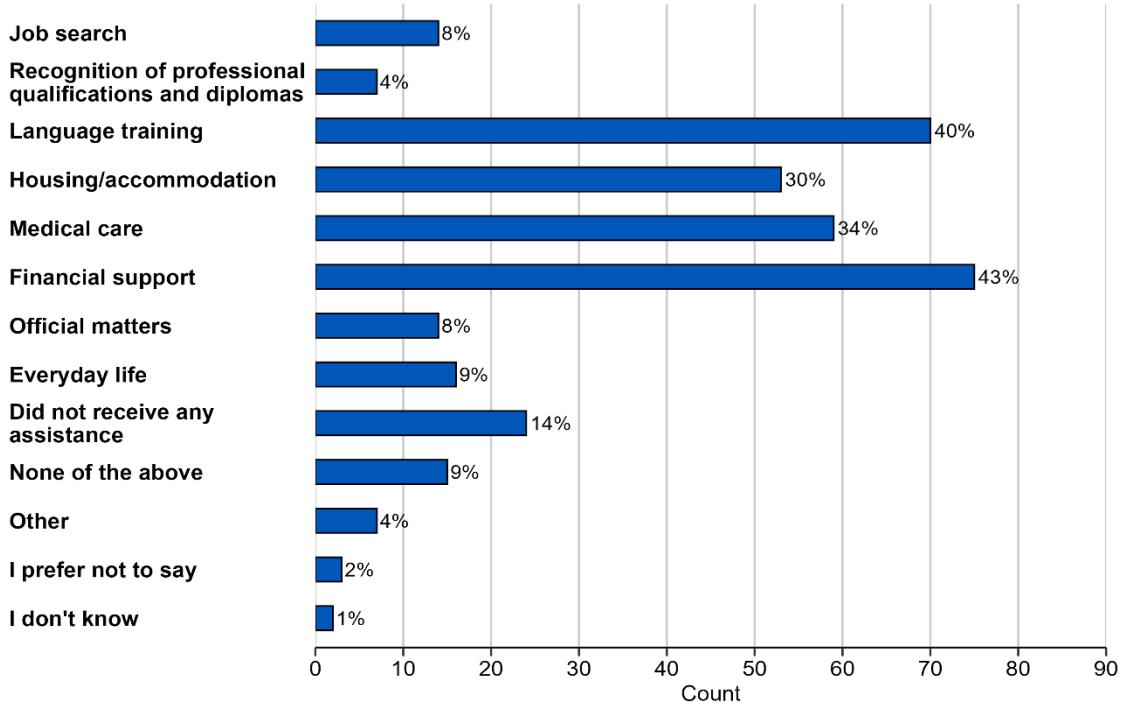
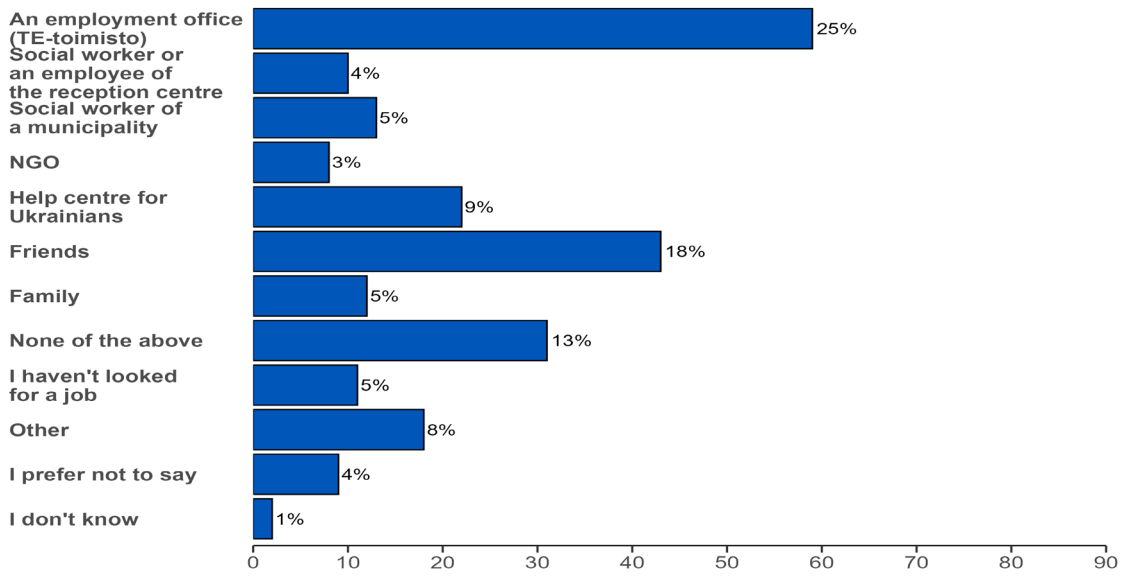


Figure 15 shows that the most common source of help that respondents used to find a job in Finland was the Employment office (TE-toimisto), with 25% of respondents reporting help from this source. Friends were the second most used source of help, with 18% of respondents having received help from them. Help Centers for Ukrainians also played a role, with 9% receiving help from them. 5% received help from their family. Help from social workers, reception center staff or municipal social workers was reported by 4-5% of respondents, while NGOs helped 3%. 13% of respondents said they had received no help from any of these sources and 5% said they had not looked for a job.

Figure 15. Received help in finding a job in Finland from. Percentages and counts (N = 174).



At the end of the following chapter, we address some of the issues identified by interview participants regarding Finnish public services and bureaucracy. It is important to add that municipalities implemented proactive policies aimed at ensuring individuals were informed about available benefits.

> *“I have a personal municipal social worker. By the way, they are coming to visit us tomorrow because they said they are making introductory visits to all families with small children. And they informed us about the benefits from Kela that we are entitled to and other possible benefits. And they always say that if I become unemployed, I need to inform them, and they will help.”*
>
> *Kateryna, Helsinki*

At least in Helsinki, municipal social services support families with small children through personal visits and information sharing. Issues with social and unemployment benefits were something that some participants struggled with, so it is possible that social work in some municipalities is aiming to mitigate these potential challenges with proactive measures such as visits and face-to-face meetings.

> *“There is a lot of variation around these questions in the in-depth interview data and internet survey data: there are respondents who had lot of knowledge of the services and those who didn’t. For example, one respondent mentioned receiving information about local services through a letter written in Finnish. I received a letter at home that explained how we can go to the hospital and how everything is organized here [in Vantaa]. It was in Finnish.”*
>
> *Volodymyr, Vantaa*

It is possible that variations in municipal policies contributes to the differences participants experienced in the registration process and the information they received about the public services.

Some of the interview participants were critical about the services offered by the Employment office (TE-toimisto):

> *" I don't think the TE Office does anything that helps with job searching. I don't see any connection between work and what they do."*
>
> *Ljubov, Helsinki*

The frustration can be partly explained by the difficult labour market situation in Finland in general and the low position of Ukrainians in the labour market in particular. At the same time, some participants had hoped for more personal and practical help from the employment officers. Positive comments were made about a TE Office worker who was himself Ukrainian. Interview respondents were also generally satisfied with the government-supported apprenticeships they had participated in, although none had led to permanent employment.

4 Labour market inclusion and equality

Working in Finland

- 14% of the respondents were working full-time and 4% working part-time. 34% were attending language courses.
- Sales or service workers (27%) and other workers (30%) make up the majority of employed respondents. Managers (2%), specialists (9%) and experts (7%) make up a relatively small proportion, despite the high level of education of the respondents.
- Some interviewees are or have been employed in temporary or part-time jobs such as cleaning and factory work, often facing challenges such as job insecurity or even unfair labour practices

Problems in finding employment

- Three in four respondents considered a lack of Finnish or Swedish language skills to be a challenge when looking for a job. One in four reported that their professional qualifications are not recognised in Finland.
- Many interview participants had decided to focus on improving their language skills, while others decided to obtain a Finnish diploma, usually through vocational training, as a route to better employment opportunities.

Quality of the jobs

- The majority of employed respondents (57%) reported working at a lower occupational level in Finland compared to their previous role in Ukraine. 45% reported being employed on temporary contracts
- A central concern for many interview participants was how to find a permanent, good quality job that would ensure both economic stability and a possibility to stay in Finland for long term. Some of them were frustrated by what they perceived to be their low status in the Finnish labour market.

Experiences of inclusion and exclusion

- 26% of survey respondents reported that they had faced excessive bureaucracy in Finland. Discriminatory treatment in public institutions and discrimination at work were reported by 6% and 4% of respondents respectively.
- 34% reported that their income was only slightly sufficient. In addition, 11% reported that their income was not sufficient at all, which may indicate that a proportion of Ukrainian households are experiencing severe economic hardship.

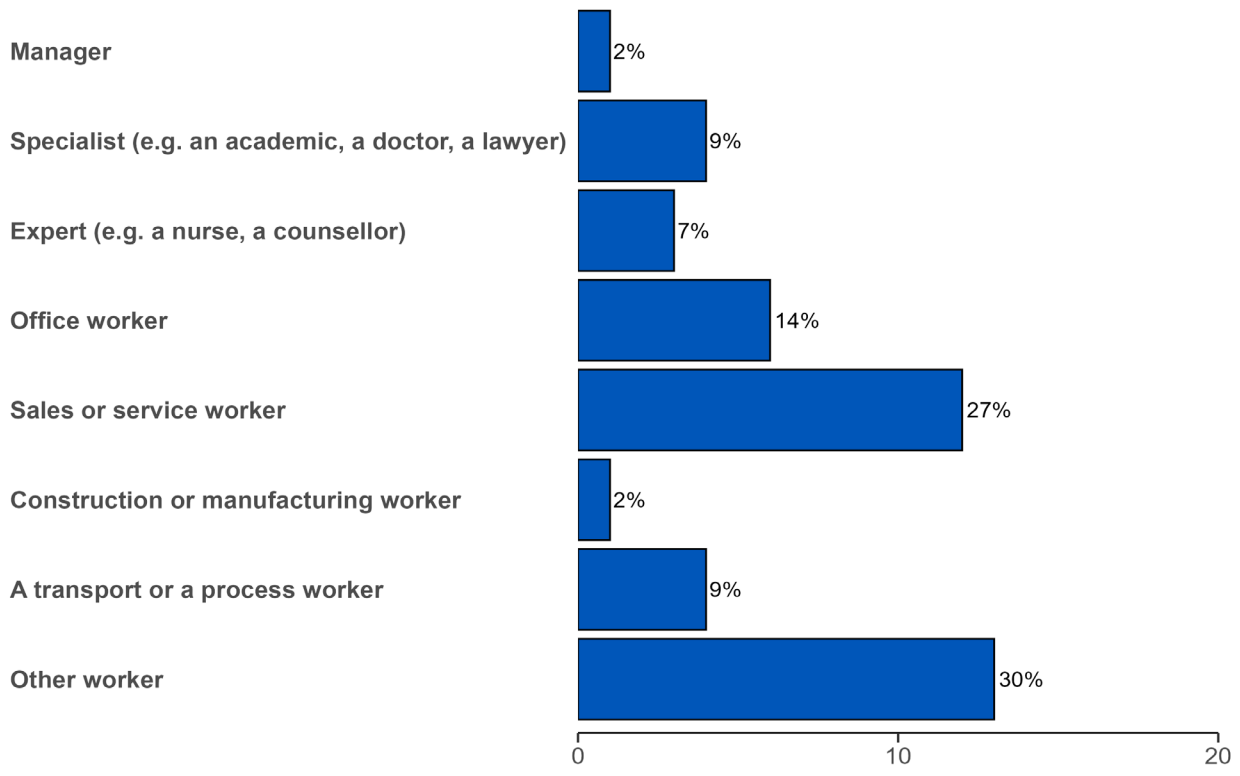
4.1 Working in Finland

Figure 16 describes the main activities of respondents in Finland. **The most common activity is attending language courses or professional training, reported by 34% of respondents.** Employment is less common, with 14% working full-time and 4% working part-time. A small percentage own a business (1%) or are self-employed (1%). Other activities include being an apprentice, intern or volunteer (5%), continuing a job or business from Ukraine remotely (2%) and studying full-time (10%). Meanwhile, 9% are unemployed and actively looking for work, while 4% are at home with family or as carers and not looking for work. A small proportion are retired (2%) or unable to work because of illness or disability (5%). The results reflect the challenges of securing employment. Language training and education is one way to address this issue for displaced Ukrainians.

Figure 16. Main activity in Finland at the moment. Percentages and counts (N = 174).

Figure 17 shows that sales or service workers (27%) and other workers (30%) make up the majority of employed respondents. Clerical workers (14%) make up a significant proportion, suggesting that administrative or clerical roles are also important. **Managers (2%), professionals (9%) and experts (7%) make up a relatively small proportion, despite the high level of education of the respondents.** Transport or process workers (9%) and construction or manufacturing workers (2%) represent a smaller but notable proportion. When interpreting these results, it is important to bear in mind the gender imbalance in the refugee population and the likely additional gender bias in this survey.

Figure 17. Occupation of those respondents who reported that they are working in Finland. Percentages and counts (N = 174).

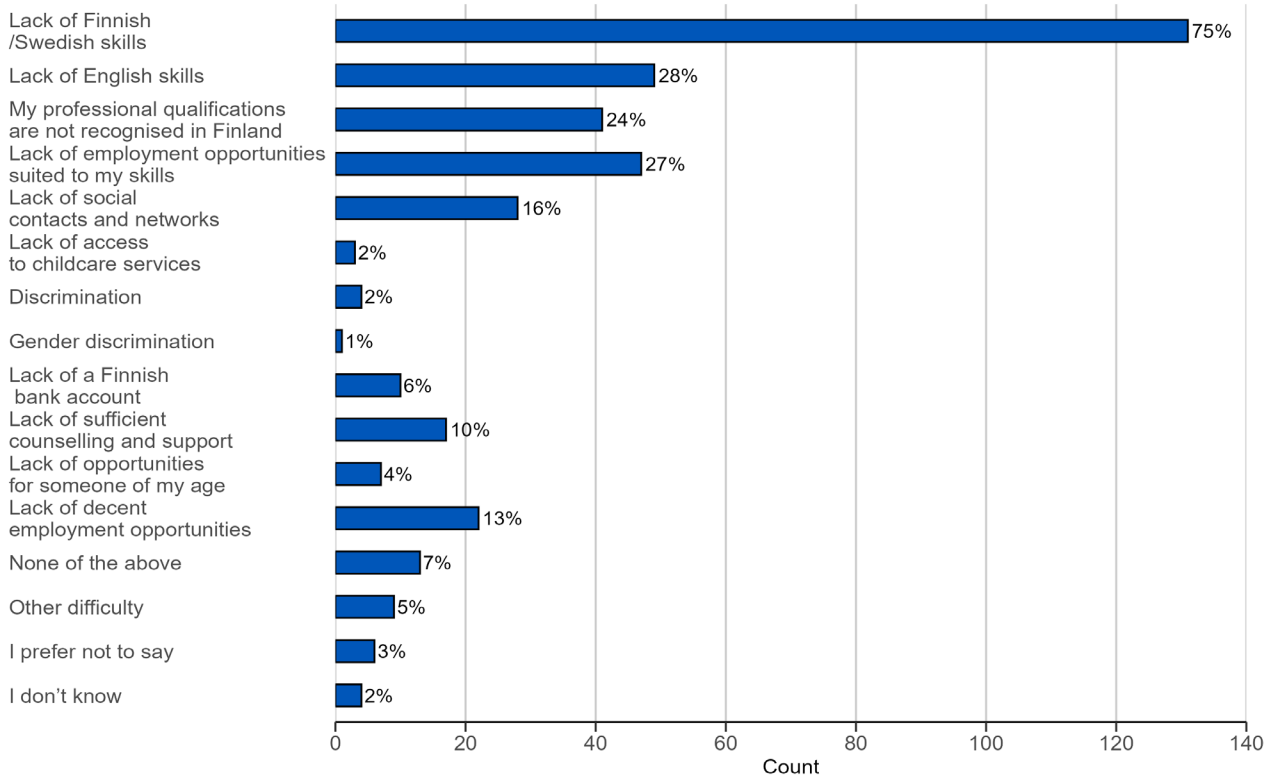


Interview participants had worked in a variety of jobs, including restaurant workers, construction and planning professionals, caretakers and cleaners, and berry pickers. Most were or had been employed in temporary or part-time jobs, often facing challenges such as job insecurity or even unfair labour practices. Others have struggled to secure employment due to language barriers, lack of recognition of foreign qualifications or childcare responsibilities. Some have pursued alternative opportunities, such as starting small businesses or network marketing, while others have focused on vocational training or language courses to improve their prospects. Some participants highlighted difficulties in navigating the Finnish labour market independently, while others benefited from community support or social services. Experiences ranged from few relatively successful stories of stable employment to frustration with limited job opportunities and structural barriers.

4.2 Problems in finding employment

Figure 18 shows that respondents most often consider a lack of Finnish or Swedish language skills to be a challenge when looking for a job in Finland (75%). Barriers related to skills and job matching are significant, with 27% citing a lack of job opportunities that match their skills and **24% reported that their professional qualifications are not recognised in Finland**. Social factors also play a role. The lack of social contacts and networks (16%) underlines the fact that some respondents believe that a lack of social capital is an issue. One in ten felt that insufficient guidance and support (10%) was a barrier. Practical challenges such as lack of decent employment opportunities (13%), lack of a Finnish bank account (6%) and lack of access to childcare services (2%) point to structural problems that hinder employment efforts for some groups. Discrimination (2%) and gender discrimination (1%) were reported by relatively few respondents.

Figure 18. Difficulties encountered when looking for work in Finland. Percentages and counts (N = 174).



Although a significant proportion of the survey respondents lived with children, only 2 percent thought that lack of childcare was an issue for employment. In Finland, all residents have access to public childcare, including those in the reception system, provided they are employed. However, one interviewee shared that she was unable to accept a job offer because it was too difficult to coordinate childcare and school logistics, as her children attended schools and nurseries in different locations:

> *"I was looking for work in cleaning companies, but at that time, […], my children were very young. It was a bit difficult for me to arrange childcare. One child was in one daycare, another child in a different daycare, and the third was in school. I found a job in a cleaning company, but I had to start work at seven in the morning, and the commute was long."*
>
> *Iryna*

Interviewees highlighted different reasons for their challenges in securing employment. Some felt that their age was a barrier, while others struggled with the lack of recognition of their professional qualifications. Economic conditions had also led to job losses for some individuals. **Many participants decided to focus on improving their language skills, while others decided to obtain a Finnish diploma, usually through vocational training, as a route to better employment opportunities.**

4.3 Quality of the jobs

The majority of the survey respondents (57%) reported working at a lower occupational level in Finland compared to their previous role in Ukraine (Figure 19). Only 11% said they were working at the same level as in Ukraine, while 14% said they were working at a higher level, which shows that some people have managed to progress professionally in Finland, or at least felt so. Some (9%) reported that they had not worked in Ukraine before migrating.

Figure 19. Occupational level in Finland compared to Ukraine of the employed respondents, self-estimation. Percentages and counts (N = 174).

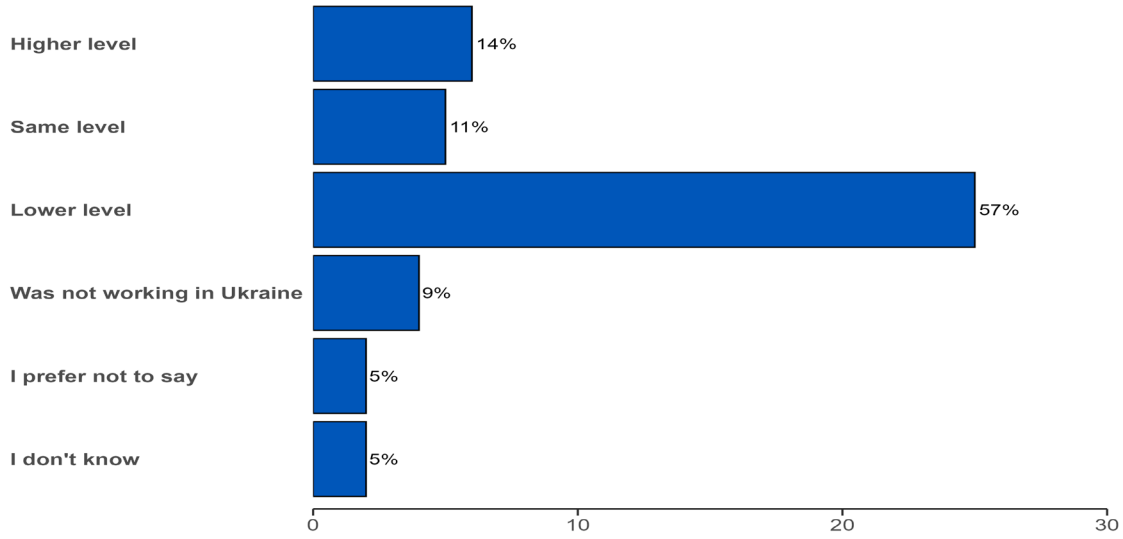
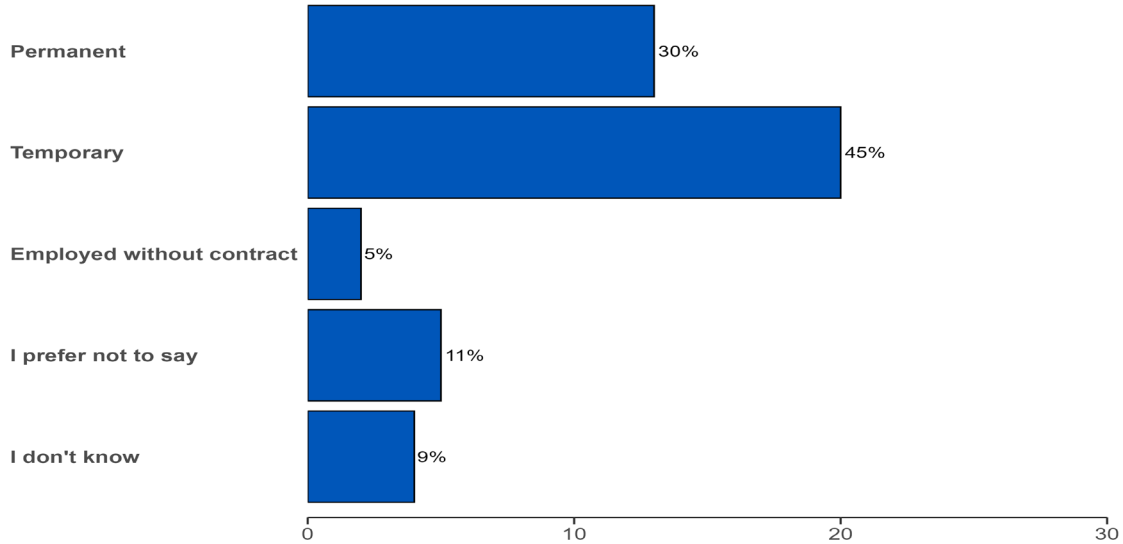


Figure 20 shows that the largest proportion of respondents, 45%, reported being employed on temporary contracts, indicating that short-term or fixed-term employment is the most common arrangement. In the general population, one person in six has a fixed-term contract[26]. A smaller proportion, 30%, had permanent contracts, reflecting a more stable and secure position in the labour market. In addition, 5% of respondents said they worked without a formal contract. 9% were unsure or did not know their employment status. The data highlight the prevalence of temporary work among respondents and their precarious labour market status.

Figure 20. Employment contract types. Percentages and counts (N = 174).



[26] Employment contracts can be made for a fixed term if there are justifiable grounds for it. An employment contract may be fixed term, for example, for reasons of temporary post, work experience placement, project work, or peak demand/season. https://www.infofinland.fi/en/work-and-enterprise/during-employment/employment-contract-and-terms-of-employment

A central concern for many interview participants was how to find a permanent, good quality job that would ensure both economic stability and a possibility to stay in Finland for long term. Many found this hard:

> *"I notice that the government talks a lot about employing immigrants and ensuring equality for everyone, but it doesn't work. Finns hire Finns. Maybe I want too much because I am an educated immigrant. I want to work in a job that matches my education and profile."*
>
> *Anna, Helsinki*

Anna felt it was unfair that despite her high level of education, extensive work experience, excellent command of English and studies in Finnish, she was unable to work in her own profession. Others shared concerns about the challenges of getting their qualifications recognised. One interviewee commented that the process in Finland seemed slow, even though they had not initiated it themselves.

As mentioned above some of the participants were critical towards local employment officials:

> *Yes, finding a job is really difficult. We are seen as immigrants, and we are mostly offered jobs as cleaners, in hotels, as waiters, or in construction. So, when I told the TE Office that I wanted to return to my profession, I was told that the TE Office does not accept this training. I found a course that lasted a year. They told me it was too long and to pick something from the list with the most job opportunities. A nurse... The course I wanted to take was in English for [business management]. It lasted a year and was offered by a university-I don't remember exactly which, Metropolia University or Haaga-Helia and the TE Office did not approve it.*
>
> *Anastasija, Helsinki*

Anastasija felt that both Finnish officials and employers saw migrant workers as suitable only for blue-collar jobs, overlooking their qualifications and work experience for more skilled positions.

> *Our basic needs are met. But then some decide to move forward and fight, while others might break. Here, you don't necessarily need to offer a highly educated person a job that matches their profession—they need to understand the path. I have chosen this path. I like it, and I can work as a school assistant for several years. It suits me; it's my field. Then I can study further there and so on. I talked to a guy who is a doctor. He has just graduated and now plans to study to become a masseur at a vocational school. He says he will continue learning and developing. But I also talked to an engineer in Järvenpää, and he doesn't see how he can move forward.*
>
> *Andrij*

Andrij felt that path in his own profession was impossible. The choice was between giving up completely or pursuing a new career in a job with lower qualifications:

Some interviewees shared experiences of precarious employment. One man had worked for a year and a half in a company providing caretaker and cleaning services, but his contract was renewed every three months. The employer had proposed a "light entrepreneurship"[27] (*kevytyrittäjyys*) type of contract for the future. His experience is an example of the insecure working conditions faced by many Ukrainian immigrants in Finland.

It is important to note that, for displaced Ukrainians, employment is partially tied to their ability to continue residing in Finland. Some participants considered applying for a residence permit on the basis of work if they could prove that they had a stable job. So far, this option has not been used

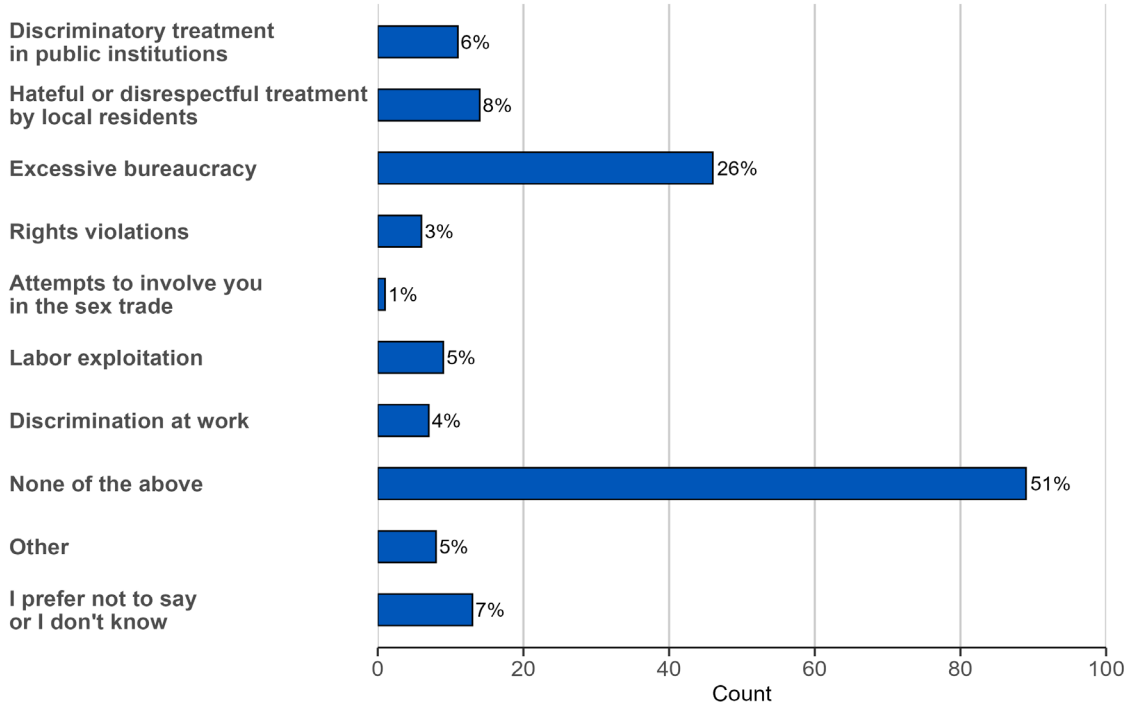
[27] A "light entrepreneur" is an entrepreneur who does not necessarily own a business or have a business ID. This entrepreneur invoices for his or her services via another company offering invoicing services. "Light entrepreneurship" frees the employer of certain obligations of a traditional employer, such as health insurance, pension contribution costs and paid holidays. Light entrepreneurship is a popular start to full-time entrepreneurship and a way to avoid bigger costs of starting a business.

extensively; in the last 12 months, 217 Ukrainian nationals have received a residence permit based on work (not all of them necessarily had temporary protection before).[28]

4.4 Experiences of inclusion and exclusion

Figure 21 shows that excessive bureaucracy was the most frequently reported challenge faced by respondents during their stay in Finland. With more than one in four respondents mentioning difficulties in dealing with administrative procedures, this issue appears to be particularly burdensome for many Ukrainians under temporary protection status. Hateful or disrespectful treatment by local residents was reported by 8% of participants. These experiences may in part be related to the complex dynamics with the Russian minority. One explanation, supported by some open responses in the survey and some anecdotes from interviewees, is that the hateful treatment was perpetrated by members of the Russian minority. Another explanation is that these experiences were the result of actions by the majority Finns who thought that their victims were Russians. Discriminatory treatment in public institutions and discrimination at work were reported by 6% and 4% of respondents respectively. Again, some respondents mentioned persons of Russian origin in these contexts. Smaller proportions of respondents mentioned labour exploitation (5%) and rights violations (3%), while 1% reported attempts to involve them in the sex trade. More than half of respondents didn't report any of the problems listed in the question.

Figure 21. Problems encountered in Finland during the stay. Percentages and counts (N = 174).



Only 5% reported labour exploitation which internationally is a relatively low proportion.[29]At the same time, the question was asked from all participants regardless of if they had worked or not. During 2024, the advice project for victims of labour exploitation by Finnish Refugee Council got

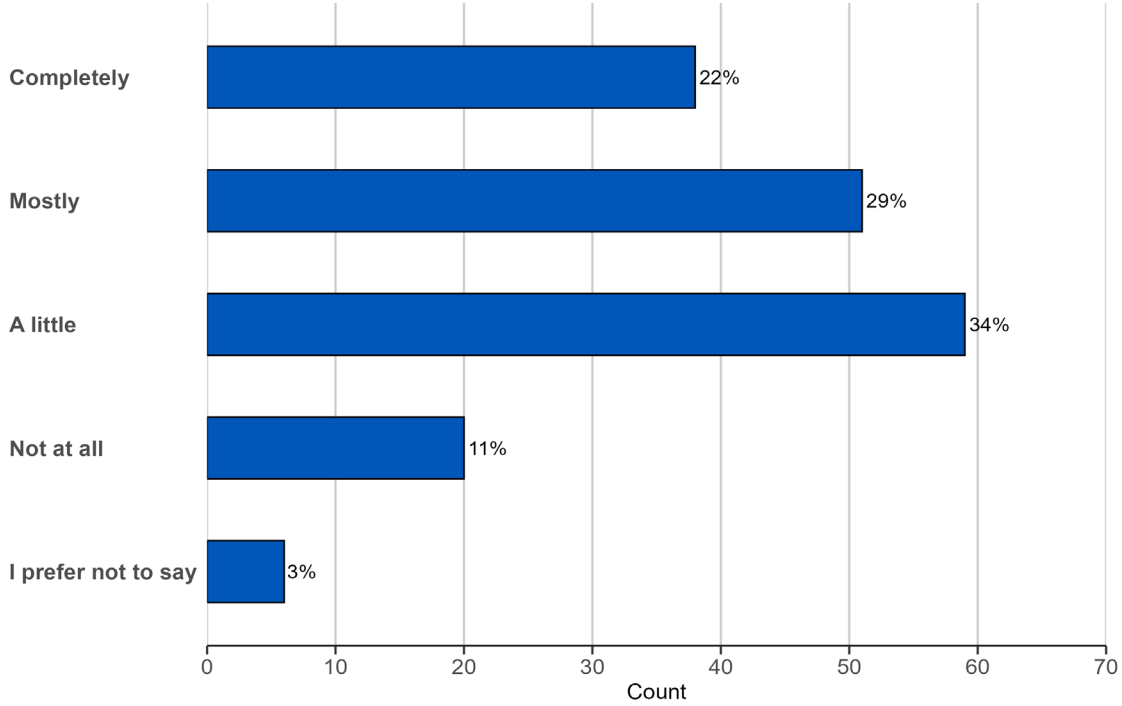
[28] Tilastot | Maahanmuuttovirasto (migri.fi).

[29] In FRA 2023 around 60 percent of those who had worked since leaving Ukraine had *not* experienced some form of labour exploitation.

170 contacts from Ukrainians with temporary protection.[30] **It is also important to note that when temporary protection ends, some of the displaced Ukrainians may find themselves in highly vulnerable situations. This increased vulnerability could heighten the risk of exploitation, particularly for those whose residence status may become dependent on securing employment.**

A significant proportion of respondents reported that their income was either completely sufficient (22%) or mostly sufficient (29%), meaning that more than half were able to meet their basic needs adequately (Figure 22). **However, 34% reported that their income was only slightly sufficient. In addition, 11% reported that their income was not sufficient at all, which may indicate that a proportion of displaced Ukrainian households are experiencing severe economic hardship.** It is likely that the respondents are better off than the total population of Ukrainians with temporary protection status in the Helsinki metropolitan area. Thus, these findings underline the varying degrees of economic stability among respondents and suggest that while some households are managing, others face considerable challenges in meeting their basic needs.

Figure 22. During the last 3 months, was your household's income enough to meet basic needs (housing, food, basic commodities, school or medical expenses) for you and the other household members currently living together? Percentages and counts (N = 174).



Interview participants shared experiences suggesting a potential connection between income challenges and difficulties navigating Finnish benefit bureaucracy. Some encountered issues with Kela benefits due to misunderstandings of instructions or rules. One concern highlighted in these discussions is the vulnerability of older Ukrainians, who may face greater risks of marginalization:

> *"I believe that many people find it [communication with authorities] very difficult. For example, my mother-in-law cannot manage anything. She doesn't speak English, and her Finnish is very basic. She struggles to find work and doesn't understand the system, such as what municipal housing is*

[30] Työntekijöiden alipalkkaus tulee saada rikoslain piiriin, Iryna Shcherbakova, https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000010687035.html.

and what it isn't. We have been supporting her and trying to explain everything in detail for almost three years now, but there are still many challenges. She is 58 years old."

Ivanna, Helsinki

"My Finnish friends say that I am persistent. In Finland, you have to be really active."

Anna, Helsinki

Other source of income issues was the low level of receptions benefits.[31] Especially when relying on public transport to attend a language course or traineeship, the insufficient level of the benefit presented a major barrier. One middle-aged male told that before transferring to municipality, he had issues with income that he tried to solve with the help of food banks, and he didn't want to complain either:

"Now all my basic needs are satisfied. When I lived in [the reception center], it was a bit difficult, but Finland is such a country. So, we went with the boys to get food from distribution points and thought that this is just a period we have to survive. And that's completely okay."

Andrij

Other participants, in addition to Andrij, particularly those who had not registered with municipalities, also reported regularly using the services of food banks. The Help Center consistently provided food assistance to Ukrainian refugees as well.

[31] Reception allowance is 300 euros per month or 88 euros per month if meals are provided by the reception center for a single adult without children. https://migri.fi/en/reception-allowance

5 Aspects of social cohesion in the community of displaced Ukrainians

Belonging, trust and friendship

- Many respondents reported a strong sense of belonging to Finland, with 38% saying they felt completely or rather strongly connected.
- 67% of the survey respondents reported that they had made friends with local non-Ukrainians whom they had met after arriving in Finland.
- Interviews reveal that the relationship of the displaced community with the Russian-speaking minority in Finland was complex as it involves both mistrust, experiences of discriminatory behaviour and co-operation in work and free time.

Solidarity and participation

- Findings from both the survey and interviews indicates that displaced Ukrainians in Finland are actively involved in both local and international efforts, contributing to their communities and maintaining strong ties to their homeland through various forms of support.

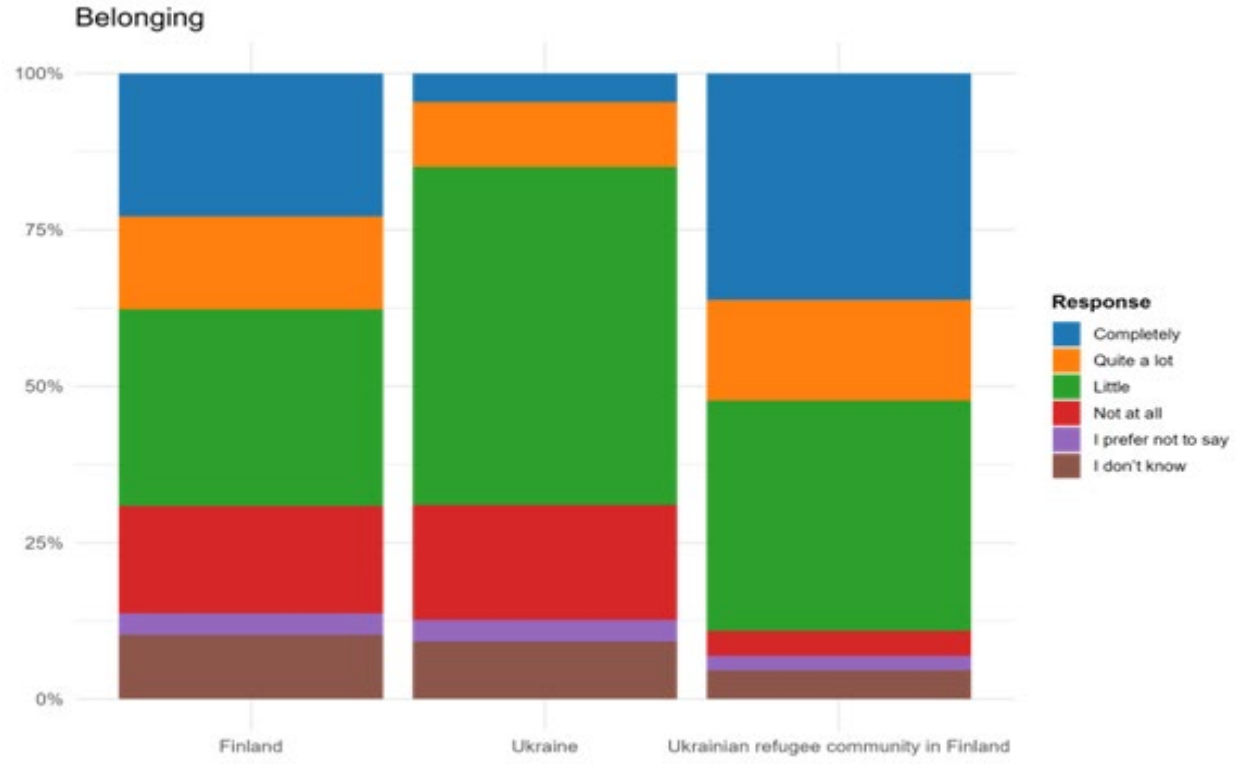
National exclusion and inclusion

- Both survey and interview respondents had an inclusive idea of the Ukrainian nation. 62% though that one can be truly Ukrainian without speaking Ukraine.
- However, some members of the Ukrainian diaspora expressed concerns about social divisions stemming from ethnicity, language, and varying experiences of the war. For example, some were worried about how men of military age living abroad might be received on their return.
- Based on the interview data both gender equality and treatment of minorities should be major concerns in all re-integration and reconstruction projects.

5.1 Belonging, trust and friendship

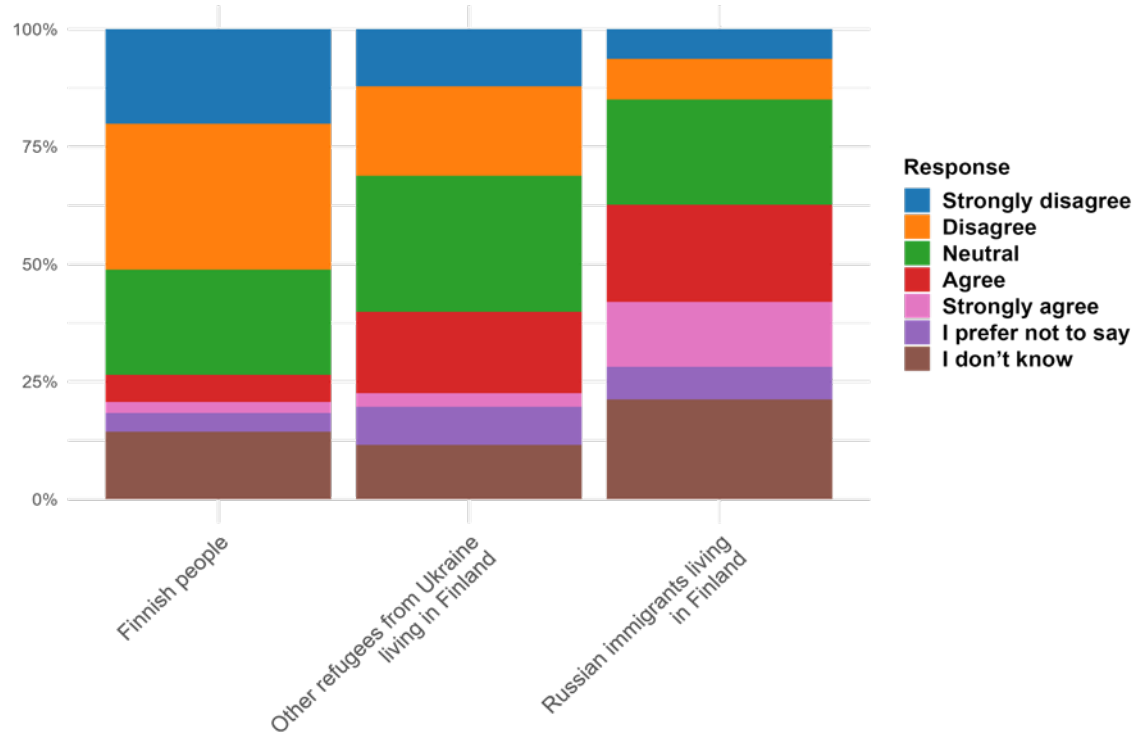
Many respondents reported a strong sense of belonging to Finland, with 38% saying they felt completely or rather strongly connected (Figure 23). However, a significant proportion expressed a limited sense of belonging (31%), while 17% reported no sense of belonging at all. -A similar proportion of respondents felt that they belonged to Ukraine as felt that they belonged to Finland. However, a surprisingly large proportion of respondents felt that they had only a weak sense of belonging to Ukraine. More than half of the respondents expressed a moderate to strong sense of belonging to the Ukrainian refugee community. Many respondents and interviewees hoped to stay in Finland for the long term (see section 6, below). This wish may have influenced how respondents defined their level of belonging to Ukraine and Finland.

Figure 23. Which of the following areas or groups do you feel you belong to? Percentages (N = 174).



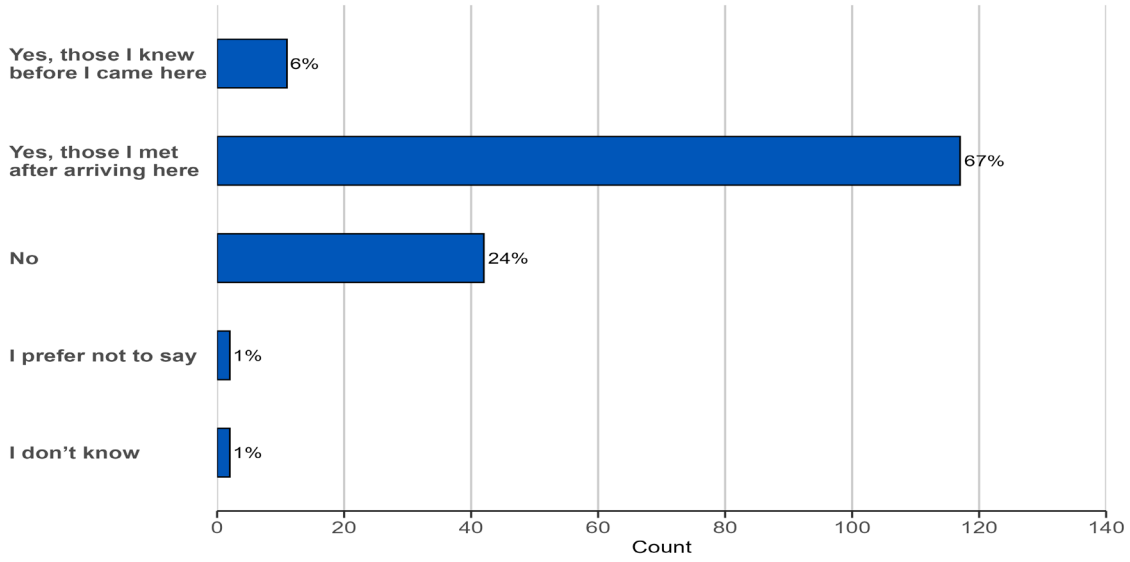
Trust in Finns by the survey respondents appears to be relatively high, as more than one in two of the survey respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that Finns are likely to take advantage of them (Figure 24). Most Ukrainians seem to find Finnish locals trustworthy. In contrast, perceptions of trust towards other displaced Ukrainian nationals are more divided. While a significant proportion disagreed with the likelihood of being taken advantage of by their peers, the majority were neutral or agreed. The highest level of mistrust is directed at Russian immigrants living in Finland. These perceptions are likely to be influenced by the ongoing war and related tensions. At the same time, only a minority of the respondents think that Russian immigrants are likely to take advantage of them, and relations between the Russian minority and the Ukrainian diaspora are multifaceted, as described below.

Figure 24. The following types of people are likely to take advantage of you. Percentages (N = 174).



The majority of the survey respondents (67%) reported that they had made contacts with local non-Ukrainians whom they had met after arriving in Finland (Figure 25). This suggests that many have been able to establish new social networks in their host country, which could help them integrate. A small proportion (6%) reported that their local connections were with people they knew before arriving in Finland. However, almost one in four of the respondents said that they had not made any friends or acquaintances with local non-Ukrainians. Both the desire to return to Ukraine as soon as possible and the short length of stay could have a negative impact on socialisation (although only less than 10 per cent of respondents had come to Finland after 2023).

Figure 25. Distribution of responses for friendships or acquaintances among local non-Ukrainians with percentages and counts (N = 174).



Interviews reveal that the relationship of the displaced community with the sizeable Russian-speaking minority in Finland was complex. For some, Russian speakers were less trustworthy than Finnish speakers:

> *Easy, with Finns it's easy [dealing with Finnish authorities]. But if you encounter someone who speaks Russian, then their attitude changes slightly [when they notice that they are serving a Ukrainian national]... but otherwise, everything is fine. We have never had any problems. We have dealt with them many times. Specifically, Finns are very warm-hearted people. It is very easy to communicate with Finnish officials.*
>
> *Darina*

A shared language significantly eased communication both at work and during free time. One middle-aged man explained that his friends were Russian-speaking Finnish citizens or residents, saying:

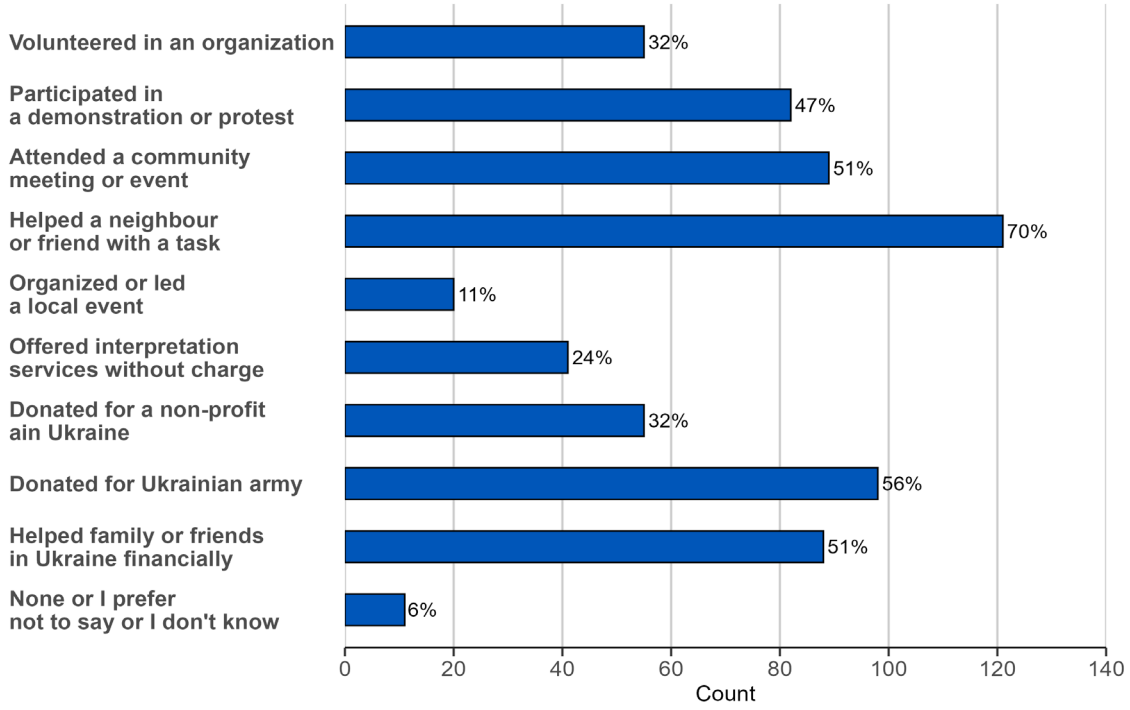
> *Yes, I have [friends who are] Russian-speaking Finns who moved to Finland a long time ago. I mean, they are Finnish, but they speak Russian, and they used to live in Estonia.*
>
> *Bohdan*

For some displaced Ukrainians, the Russian language and connections with Russian-speaking Finns, Estonians, or Russian immigrants served as a pathway to employment. Also, interviewees told that in some workplaces Russian speakers could instruct those Ukrainian workers who did not have English or Finnish skills.

5.2 Solidarity and participation

The most common participatory activity that respondents did during their stay in Finland was helping a neighbour or friend with a task, reported by 70% of respondents (Figure 26). This may reflect a strong sense of mutual help and informal support networks within communities, which was also evident from the interviewees' responses. Financial support was also significant, with 51% saying they had helped family or friends in Ukraine financially. Similarly, 56% said they had donated to the Ukrainian army, demonstrating a high level of commitment to supporting their home country. Participation in community activities was also widespread, with over half of respondents attending a community meeting or event. Volunteering in an organisation and donating to non-profit organisations in Ukraine were both reported by 32%, while 24% provided free interpretation services. Demonstrations or protests were attended by 47%. Fewer respondents, one in ten, organised or led a local event, and a small proportion (6%) said they did not participate in any of these activities or preferred not to disclose their involvement. These findings show that displaced Ukrainians in Finland are actively involved in both local and international efforts, contributing to their communities and maintaining strong ties to their homeland through various forms of support. It should be noted that both survey respondents and interviewees are likely to be somewhat more active than the rest of the Ukrainian displaced population, as both were largely recruited through the Help Center, which acts as a hub for the activities of the Ukrainian refugee community in Helsinki.

Figure 26. During my stay in Finland, I have… Percentages and counts (N = 174).



Most interview participants had not volunteered or been politically active before becoming displaced outside of Ukraine, although, some had been active during the war or in the political and humanitarian crisis before the current stage of conflict. In Finland, many had been active: The interviewees told us that they had supported each other by providing information, volunteering to varying degrees at Help Centers, helping with translation and helping with job searches, for example by helping with CVs. As the interviews were conducted at the Helsinki Help Center, it is likely that we met more active people than the average. People are also sending money and goods to Ukraine, for example directly to friends, family and relatives in the army or their units. Many had attended the weekly Ukrainian demonstration against Russian aggression in the center of Helsinki. However, one interview participant pushed back against the interpretation that the war had been crucial in creating solidarity and other forms of cohesion in Ukrainian society. She said:

> *"Ukrainians were friendly to one another even before the war. We had a normal society. I cannot say that the war can improve anything. Ukrainians help each other without a war, of course. I don't know—maybe I don't see some bad things, but I also don't want to mention anything negative. In Helsinki, this Ukrainian community is very good."*
>
> *Polina, Helsinki*

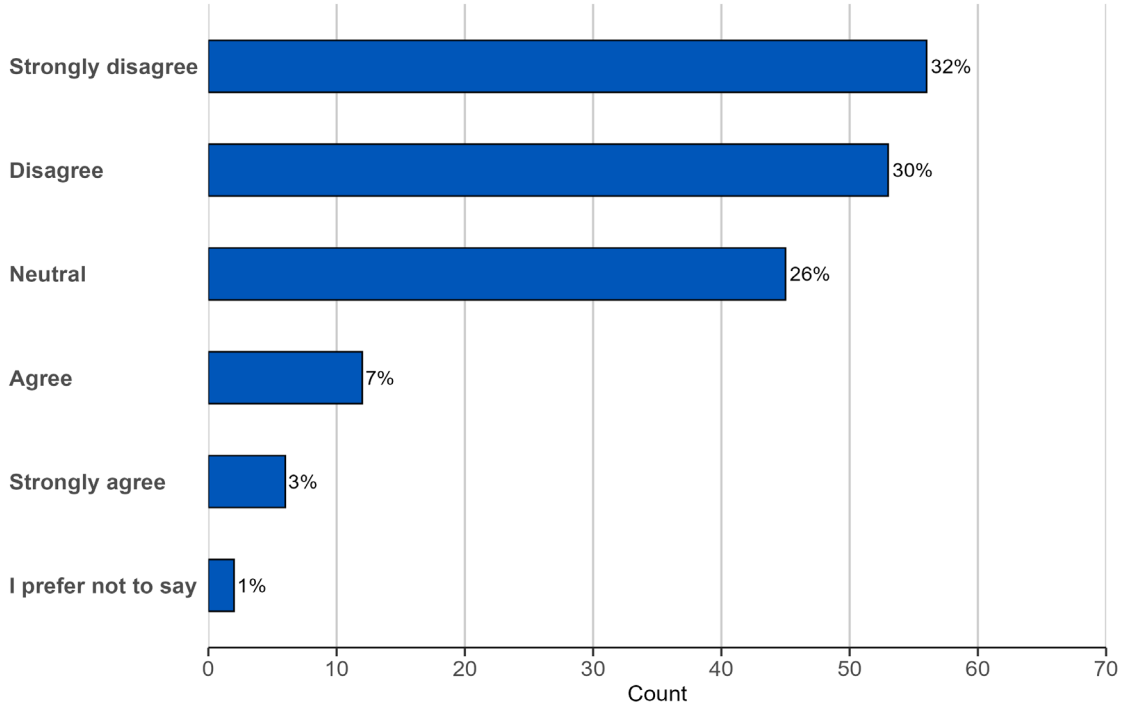
She clearly felt that it would be unfair to attribute the solidarity and mutual support within the Ukrainian diaspora and society solely to the war. Her comment is a good reminder that current unity should also be seen as an extension of the social cohesion and social capital that already existed.

> *"Now the country is divided, and I don't even know into how many camps. Ukrainian speakers, Russian speakers. Who fought, who didn't fight, who is staying there, and who is abroad. There are at least six groups [...] And generally, if nothing is done, if no actions are taken now, this will turn into a snowball effect in the future. And it will lead to major problems. Who helped, who didn't. This is already a big problem. It exists, and it is only growing."*
>
> *Anatolii, Helsinki*

5.3 National exclusion and inclusion

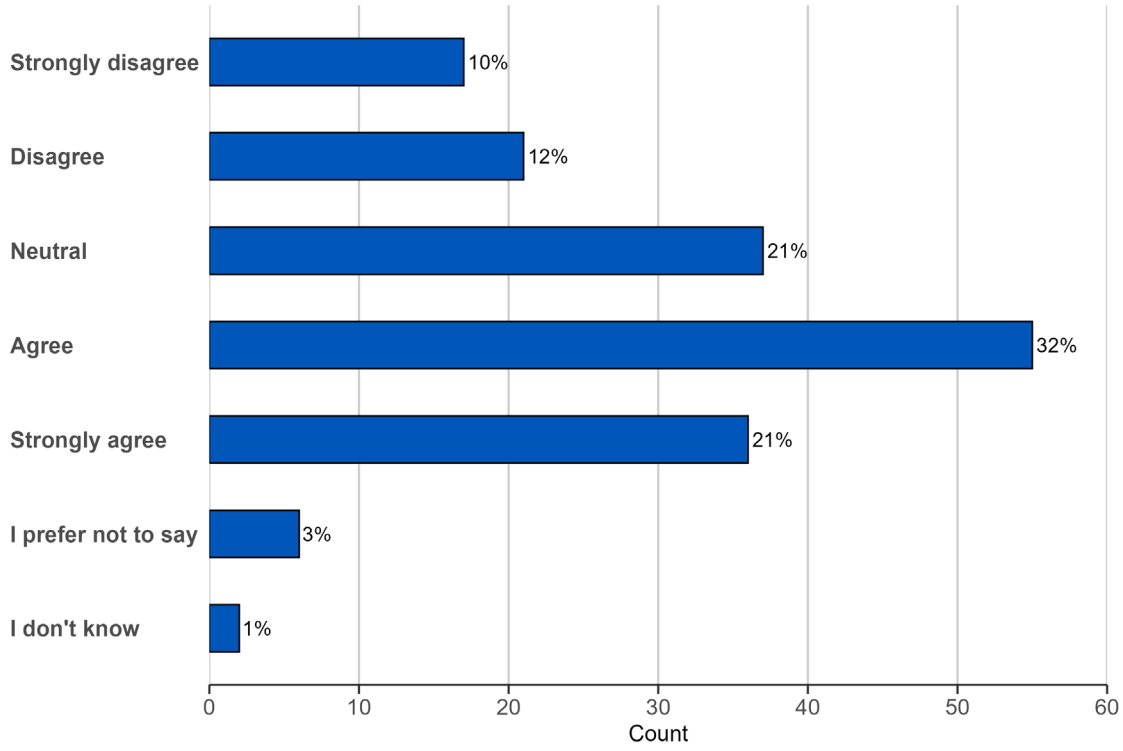
As the above quote shows, some members of the Ukrainian diaspora were very concerned about various social divisions. At the same time, both survey and interview respondents had an inclusive idea of the Ukrainian nation. **A significant proportion of respondents either strongly disagreed (32%) or disagreed (30%) with the statement "I think only those who speak Ukrainian can be called true Ukrainians", suggesting that most do not equate speaking Ukrainian with being truly Ukrainian (Figure 27).** In addition, 26% remained neutral, suggesting uncertainty or ambivalence about the issue. Only a small minority agreed (7%) or strongly agreed (3%) with the statement. Thus, a narrow view linking language with national identity was shared by only one in ten of the survey respondents. The result can be interpreted to mean that Ukrainian refugees living in the Helsinki metropolitan area have a relatively inclusive and pluralistic understanding of what it means to be Ukrainian.

Figure 27. I think only those who speak Ukrainian can be called true Ukrainians. Percentages and counts (N = 174).



The majority of respondents, **53%, agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I think all people living in Ukraine can be Ukrainian, regardless of their ethnic or religious background"** (Figure 28). This suggests significant support for an inclusive understanding of Ukrainian identity that transcends ethnic or religious boundaries. 21% respondents were neutral and 22% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the majority view, indicating a prevailing inclination towards a pluralistic and inclusive concept of Ukrainian identity. However, the range of responses demonstrates the complexity of identity issues, particularly in a multi-ethnic society facing the challenges of conflict and displacement.

Figure 28. I think all people living in Ukraine can be Ukrainians no matter their ethnic or religious backgrounds. Percentages and counts (N = 174).



The interviewees spoke with great nuance about issues related to the Russian and Ukrainian languages. At least four themes emerge from the data. **Firstly, many respondents repeated that it didn't matter whether a person spoke Russian or was ethnically Russian.** What mattered was how a person felt about the current conflict. For some, this meant losing friends or friendly relations with relatives because some had a different view of the war than they did. **Secondly, although they didn't want to condemn anyone for speaking Russian, for political reasons related to the current conflict, many wanted Russian speakers and bilingual people to use Ukrainian more:**

> *"You know, I didn't care before [if a Ukrainian speaks to you in Ukrainian or Russian]. We spoke Russian in Kherson. At work, we only spoke Ukrainian. But now, I really want everyone to speak Ukrainian. Honestly. […] Right now, people who speak Russian are fighting for Ukraine. Still, I would prefer that everyone spoke Ukrainian."*
>
> *Darina, Helsinki*

> *"If I had the chance, I would like to forget Russian completely."*
>
> *Andrij, Helsinki*

Thirdly, many pointed out that the use of Ukrainian had been suppressed in the past. Fourthly, many were realistic about everyday use of the language, even if they were motivated to use Ukrainian, because it was not so easy to change the language used by the family or one's own language when one had used Russian for most of one's adult life.

Similarly, difference between ethnic Russian and Ukrainians was talked via difference between political and ethnic citizenship:

> *"We basically have a paradigm that a Ukrainian is someone who wants to be Ukrainian. So, not someone who was born in Ukraine, but someone who wants to be, who strives to be."*
>
> *Ljubov, Helsinki*

At the same time, discussions about war could lead to painful conclusions:

> *"Those who are pro-Russia have already gone to Russia. Those who are against Russia are moving to Ukraine or Europe. My friend moved to Russia. He is there now. We spoke a couple of times on the phone, we argued, and that was it."*
>
> *Volodymyr, Vantaa*

Interviewees expressed different views on the traditional division of the country into western and eastern regions. Some saw these divisions primarily as linguistic, while others saw them as having a political dimension. A few participants dismissed the notion of an East-West division as significant:

> *"In some matters, yes, in others, no. Like everywhere else, people are different. Ukraine is a large country with many neighbours, so those who live closer to Belarus and Russia have more ties there, and those who live closer to Poland have more ties there. But overall, our country is unified."*
>
> *Elena, Espoo*

Others acknowledged that divisions might exist but downplayed their relevance, seeing them as minor differences in customs rather than a major issue.

Interviewees also reflect on the new social divisions within Ukrainian society created by the war and shaped by its differential impact on different groups of people. These divisions can be seen between local communities and internally displaced Ukrainians, as well as between those who lived in the occupied territories or near the battle zones and those who remained relatively unaffected by the conflict in areas far from the frontlines.

> *I think not well. Because I once wrote on Facebook about how I left and how difficult it was for me. […] It was stressful for me at that time. It's like you're sleeping, then you get up and have to go somewhere, leave everything, and leave home. And a friend of mine wrote to me, asking how it could be difficult for us when we fled Ukraine, while they stayed there, and it's difficult for them. After that, I have never brought up this topic again.*
>
> *Antonina, Helsinki*

A further divide exists between those who fled to European countries and those who chose to remain in Ukraine. A particularly sensitive case is that of men of military age living abroad:

> *"I believe that those who have not been to Ukraine and so on will face accusations and even questions about why they went there but did not defend it. I don't know how this will play out in the communities."*
>
> *Bojadan*

As noted in the quote, some participants were concerned about how they might be received on their return.

Respondents generally did not consider the situation of ethnic minorities to be a major concern for Ukrainian society. While some acknowledged that there was room for improvement in the treatment of minorities, the majority believed that all groups were treated equally in Ukraine. At the same time, when asked specifically about Roma, some participants expressed agreement with existing stereotypes:

> *"I have never encountered any discrimination against anyone. On the contrary, our Roma are wealthy; they have two-story detached houses. Well, they are always standing with their hands outstretched. That's probably their way... It's passed down from generation to generation."*
>
> *Darina, Helsinki*

The myth of Roma wealth and the view of begging as a cultural trait reflect common racist stereotypes targeting an extremely marginalised population. Given that most of the interviewees were educated women, it is particularly important to look critically at the treatment of ethnic minorities in Ukrainian society. Programmes for the reintegration of returning refugees and for

reconstruction should be designed to take account of minorities and structural prejudices against them.

In general, interview participants perceived Ukraine as an equal country in a formal sense. However, some participants identified economic inequality and corruption as significant sources of disparity. **Many thought that gender equality was not a major issue, some thought that position of men was weaker than women. At the same time, some found room for improvement in women's position:**

> *"There are certain issues here. I think we are still a patriarchal country. We have not yet reached a level where women and men are on equal footing."*
>
> *Elena, Espoo*

She thought that there is still work to be done before Ukraine would be equal society also in practice. Other participant gave some examples from her own life in studies and work:

> *"First of all, I studied in the mathematics department of engineering sciences, and even the professors there constantly told me that I was a woman, and my place was in the kitchen, making borscht, not studying mathematics. And this was constant. At work, it also appeared […] On the other hand, I know many very young women who adapt well to this field, and these issues haven't affected them at all. Companies that are more Westernized or operate in international markets do not practice any kind of discrimination."*
>
> *Ivanna, Helsinki*

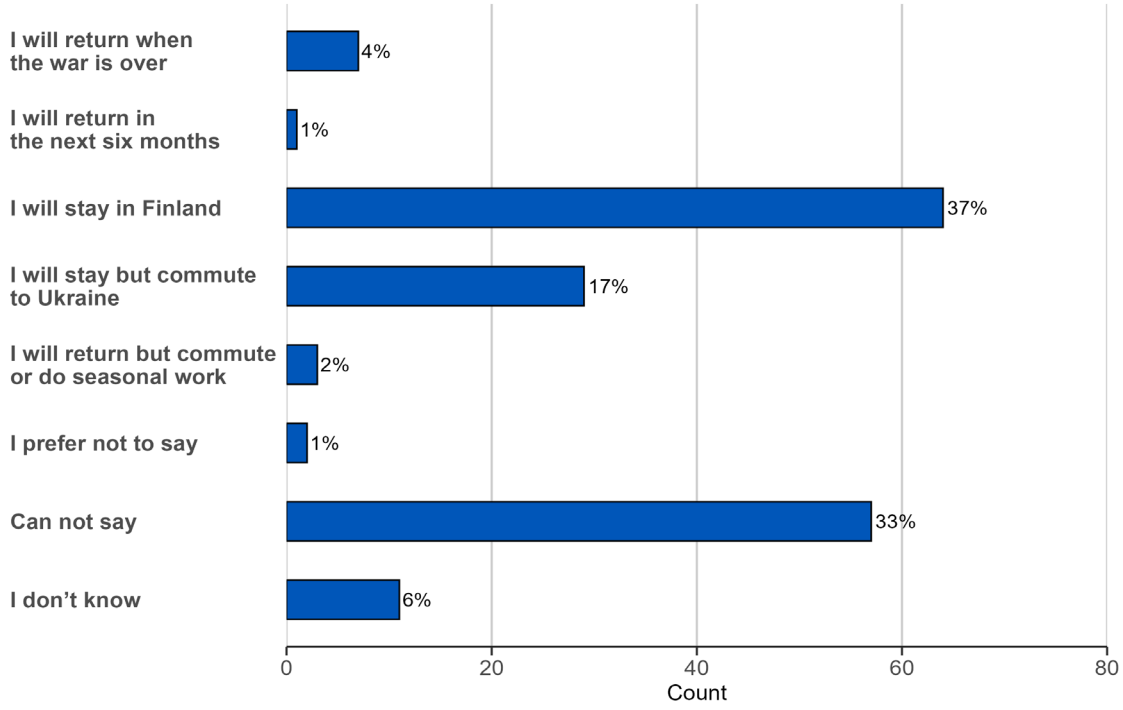
6 Plans and needs of Ukrainians under temporary protection in the Helsinki region

> *“Everything feels unstable for us. Today we are here, but tomorrow we don't know where we will be. It's a very hard thought that everything is temporary, temporary...”*
>
> *Anna, Helsinki*

6.1 Stay or return?

The largest group of respondents, 37%, said they planned to stay in Finland permanently (Figure 29). A smaller but significant proportion (17%) expressed plans to stay in Finland but commute to Ukraine, for work or other commitments. At the same time, 33% were unsure about their future plans at the time. Only a relatively small minority were certain that they wanted to return in near future or after the war. Our survey is consistent with similar research in Finland and elsewhere: the longer the conflict continues, the more reluctant displaced Ukrainians are to return.

Figure 29. Future plans of the respondents. Percentages and counts (N = 174).



When asked about their plans to stay or return, participants emphasised factors such as employment opportunities, family ties, sunken costs and their personal circumstances in Ukraine. Initially, many had prioritised simply finding some form of employment:

> *"In the beginning, I just wanted to earn a salary and help the army. But as time passed, I started thinking that I could build a career here. We'll see, I don't know yet."*
>
> *Polina, Helsinki*

Polina reflected that the length of her stay had led her to reconsider her options, although she remained uncertain about what the future might hold. Some participants who had previously been employed were, at the time of the interviews, studying Finnish and either applying for or planning to

apply for further education, often through vocational programmes. **They expressed the belief that continuing their education was a way to improve their position in the labour market, as they found it difficult to secure quality jobs, especially in their own fields. I**t is likely that the worsening situation in Finnish labour markets has influenced their calculations.

Those with families, especially with underage children, were thinking about the all the effort and work that the family had put in to integrate to Finland and learn the language:

> *I don't know anything yet. It depends on how the situation develops. I don't know. If my child has been studying here for almost three years, how can I just move them back and forth again? I want them to stay here because the education for children is excellent, and the living conditions are good. I feel safe here.*
>
> *Anna, Espoo*

Like Anna, most participants expressed overall satisfaction with the education provided by the municipalities. Others with family also voiced their concern of "moving them back and forth" again. For some, re-integration to Ukraine means starting from zero as many have lost their housing or came from occupied areas, whose future is unknown:

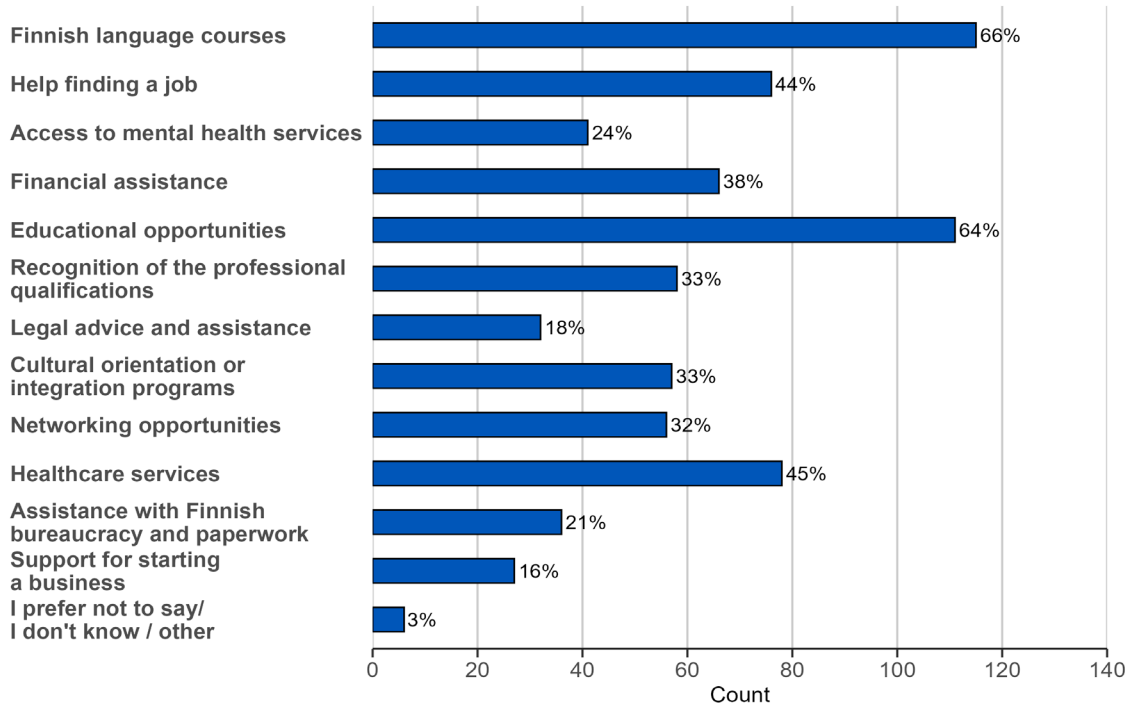
> *What is the situation for me and my family: I have three children and a wife. My mother is now with her sister in Germany. We have no place to return to because when our house flooded, it was under two meters of water for two weeks. […] We cannot go back home because there is no place to live.*
>
> *Anatolii, Helsinki*

In particular, families in situations similar to Anatolii's had to start all over again, finding new homes and jobs, and children had to continue their education in a new environment. Many families were mentally exhausted, which contributed to their reluctance to consider returning. Reintegration would require significant mental resources, which were strained due to the stress and trauma of the war, as well as the considerable efforts involved in adapting to their new circumstances in Finland.

6.2 Integration needs in Finland

Finnish language courses are identified as the most critical need, with 66% of respondents indicating that they would be most useful for successful integration into Finnish society (Figure 30). This was closely followed by educational opportunities, with 64% expressing the need for access to further education to facilitate their integration. Help with finding a job was also a high priority, with 44% of respondents saying it was essential. Health services were identified as an important need by 45%, while 38% mentioned the need for financial support. Recognition of professional qualifications and access to cultural orientation or integration programmes were each cited by 33% of respondents, suggesting the importance of validating prior experience and promoting cultural understanding. Networking opportunities were also mentioned by 32%. Mental health services were mentioned by 24% of respondents, while help with Finnish bureaucracy and paperwork was seen as useful by 21%. Help with setting up a business was considered important by 16%.

Figure 30. What kind of help would be most useful for you to succeed in Finnish society? Percentages and counts (N = 174).



Also, the interview participants highlighted needs related to job seeking, language education and other education possibilities:

> *"The truth is that the Employment office (TE-toimisto) doesn't provide much help in finding jobs. People need practical advice. Currently, they are given a plan to send a few applications each month, but this is something they could do even without a plan. Perhaps they need tips on how to write applications or prepare a CV, or guidance on how to handle video interviews, which are rarely discussed but pose a significant challenge. Many people from our country are unfamiliar with video interviews. Back home, it's somewhat easier to secure employment."*
>
> *Polina, Helsinki*

Polina's perspective illustrates the considerable diversity within the Ukrainian community. While some individuals are highly educated and have experience of working for international companies, others are older, lack English language skills and may be unfamiliar with essential digital skills. Navigating the modern labour market can be extremely challenging for such individuals, and employment services need to take this diversity into account when providing support.

Many felt that the uncertainty related to the temporary protection system was hindering their integration:

> *"First and foremost, these people need to understand that if they make a significant effort in their work and studies, they won't be forced to leave. Currently, everyone is under temporary protection, and there is a fear that we will simply be thrown out, and that's it. I believe that those who truly need it, who are all working and genuinely need to build their lives here, would do their best if they understood that they could rely on being able to stay."*
>
> *Ivanna, Helsinki*

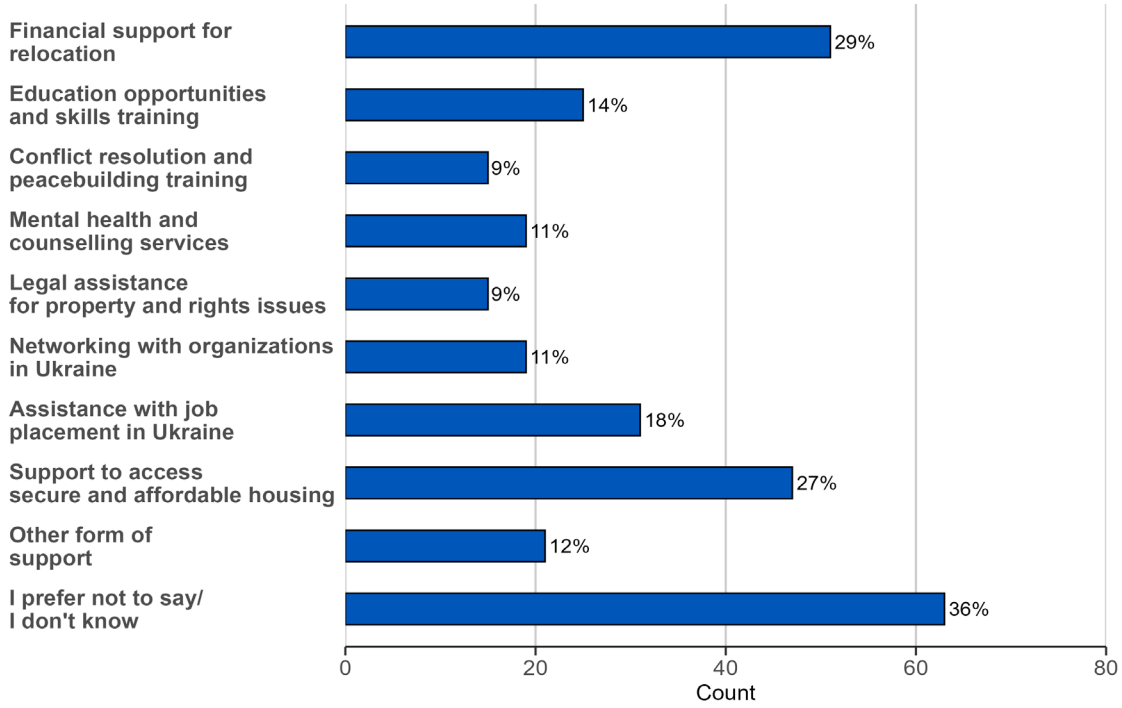
It is probable that many Ukrainians in the Helsinki metropolitan area will seek other residence permits once the temporary protection program ends. However, many are likely to face challenges meeting the requirements for work, study, and family permits due to their precarious financial

situation and weak labour market position. This is a significant issue that requires attention from decision-makers at both national and European levels.

6.3 Needs for successful return

Financial support for relocation is the most frequently mentioned need, with 29% of respondents highlighting its importance when asked about the types of support that could be provided in Finland for a successful return to Ukraine (Figure 31). Support in finding safe and affordable housing is the second most important need, mentioned by 27% of participants. Help with finding a job in Ukraine is also a notable priority, mentioned by 18% of respondents. Educational opportunities and skills training were seen as important by 14%, while 11% identified the need for networking with organisations in Ukraine. Legal support for property and rights issues and training in conflict resolution or peacebuilding were each mentioned by 9% of respondents. One in ten cited the need for mental health and counselling services. A further 12% mentioned other forms of assistance, suggesting a diversity of individual needs beyond the categories listed. A significant proportion of respondents, 36%, either preferred not to state their preferences or were uncertain about their needs. This may reflect the reluctance to plan for their return. These responses suggest that Ukrainians in the Helsinki area believe that financial stability, housing security and employment opportunities are critical to facilitating reintegration, while education, mental health and legal support could play a complementary role.

Figure 31. What types of support in Finland would be important for a successful return to Ukraine? Percentages and counts (N = 174).



Interview participants emphasised the need for support in securing employment and housing for individuals planning to return. They also highlighted the importance of financial assistance for relocation:

> *"Many people are tired of sitting here; they are waiting for this to be over and just want to go home. They don't go anywhere outside their homes […] Maybe we could offer them courses to encourage them to leave their homes. These should be in Ukrainian or Russian. Of course, it would also be*

> *nice to provide some financial support. You know, so they could return to Ukraine and bring something with them, rather than coming home empty-handed."*
>
> *Anatolii, Helsinki*

> *"There is no social program in Ukraine like in Finland. If a person loses their home in Ukraine, the country cannot provide them with housing, work, or similar support."*
>
> *Olena, Helsinki*

There is a clear need for training and education programs that would be beneficial in both scenarios. Additionally, some emphasised the importance of providing psychological support.

Some felt that they would need to build the social networks from scratch:

> *"This is a difficult question. First of all, I can personally say that I have completely lost all ties with my friends, as many have gone abroad, and those who stayed consider me a traitor. I will have to reintegrate into Ukrainian society, find a new job, and go through this whole process that we are now experiencing in Finland, starting from scratch in my home country."*
>
> *Anastasija, Helsinki*

This situation highlights the need for reintegration support that is sensitive to the social cohesion of communities. Additionally, the differing experiences and traumas caused by the war must be carefully considered:

> *You understand that many boys have died. And now, in society, people compare whose son died and whose did not, who has received help and who has not. And this causes arguments. This is what my mother-in-law tells me. That your son is not at war, but my son is. Or that you receive help, but I do not. I don't know, I think there will still be problems. Everyone is very tired of this war, very tired.*
>
> *Antonina, Helsinki*

7 Conclusion

This report has discussed both the solidarity and cohesion within the new Ukrainian diaspora community living under temporary protection, as well as the various challenges its members face in navigating the Finnish service system and labour markets.

We identified several significant challenges to equality and integration that go beyond the temporary protection system itself. Lack of knowledge about available services and opportunities emerged as a major barrier.

The findings also suggest that the weak labour market position of Ukrainian refugees is not sufficiently addressed at the moment.[32] While many respondents prioritised improving their Finnish language skills, others sought to acquire Finnish qualifications, often through vocational training, as a route to better employment. However, these qualifications may limit their ability to use their existing skills and resources. These challenges - particularly in the areas of language acquisition, employment opportunities and recognition of qualifications - continue to hinder full participation.

The looming expiry of the temporary residence status, combined with tight labour markets and the relatively low position of Ukrainians with temporary protection in the labour market, may also increase the risk of exploitation in the workplace.

Addressing these issues is essential to ensure the long-term resettlement of Ukrainian refugees and their meaningful contribution to Finnish society.

The social cohesion of displaced Ukrainians in Finland shows encouraging signs, with many respondents reporting a sense of belonging. Some 38% of participants reported strong ties within their local communities and 66% had formed friendships with Finnish residents.

Regarding the reintegration of returnees and social cohesion in Ukraine, participants demonstrated a flexible and inclusive understanding of Ukrainian nationality and identity. However, concerns were expressed about potential divisions, both new and old, particularly as a result of different experiences of the war. The inclusion of groups that have traditionally been marginalised in Ukrainian society is also a concern. These findings echo previous research and highlight the need to address emerging societal tensions in order to promote a cohesive, resilient and equal post-war Ukrainian society.

[32] Government has set an action plan for years 2024-2027 to improve inclusion and employment for displaced Ukrainians: http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-327-957-5.

Appendixes

Table 1. In which region did you live in Ukraine? Distribution absolute counts and percentages.

Region	Count	Percentage
Autonomous Republic of Crimea	1	1
Cherkasy Oblast	6	3
Chernivtsi Oblast	1	1
Chernihiv Oblast	2	1
Dnipropetrovsk Oblast	14	8
Donetsk Oblast	18	10
Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast	1	1
Kharkiv Oblast	34	20
Kherson Oblast	13	7
Khmelnytskyi Oblast	4	2
Kyiv Oblast	11	6
Kyiv City	16	9
Kirovohrad Oblast	2	1
Luhansk Oblast	7	4
Lviv Oblast	1	1
Mykolaiv Oblast	5	3
Odesa Oblast	8	5
Poltava Oblast	2	1
Rivne Oblast	2	1
Sumy Oblast	6	3
Vinnytsia Oblast	7	4
Zakarpattia Oblast	1	1
Zaporizhzhia Oblast	6	3
Zhytomyr Oblast	3	2
I prefer not to say	3	2
N =	174	