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NATIONAL REPORT ON LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION OF UKRAINIAN REFUGEES: MARKET ANALYSIS AND BEST PRACTICES

Slovak Republic

SMART UA



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PART ONE – LABOUR MARKET ANALYSIS

1. Introduction

- Objective

The aim of the research was to obtain an overview of the employment of Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia through a combination of several research methods. The research included the collection of qualitative data through focus groups, individual interviews, and the collection of quantitative data through questionnaires, supplemented by basic mapping of relevant actors and available secondary sources.

The research focused on the scope and nature of employment services provided, cooperation between individual actors, identification of barriers to labor market integration, and formulation of proposals for possible solutions.

The findings and analyzed data are intended for:

- state and public institutions of the Slovak Republic responsible for the creation and implementation of policies in the field of employment and integration of Ukrainian refugees,
- non-governmental, church, and non-profit organizations and community centers providing employment and accompanying integration services to Ukrainian refugees,
- European Union institutions, in particular the European Commission, which support the integration of persons under temporary protection through EU policies and funds,
- experts, researchers, and donors monitoring the impact of national and European policies on the employment and integration of refugees in Slovakia.

The aim of the report is to provide a basis for strategic decision-making, effective financing, and the creation of long-term sustainable solutions in the field of employment of Ukrainian refugees in accordance with the policies of the Slovak Republic and the European Union.

The research was conducted in accordance with the methodological standards of the SMART UA project, which ensure the comparability of results between Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania. Qualitative data was collected in September 2025, and the data obtained was subsequently processed and analyzed. The quantitative phase of the research was carried out during December 2025 and January 2026.

- **Research questions**

The research focuses on understanding the conditions of employment of Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia and identifying the factors that influence their integration into the labor market. The main research questions focus on:

- what barriers to employment are most significant for Ukrainian refugees,
- what measures and support mechanisms have been adopted by public institutions, employers, and other actors,
- which employment support models are proving to be the most effective and inclusive.

- **Methods used**

The analysis of the employment of Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia was carried out using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. The research included an analysis of available sources and desk research, as well as the identification of examples of good practice in various types of organizations working in the field of refugee employment.

Qualitative data collection was carried out through focus groups with representatives of stakeholder groups and labor market actors. Recordings from the focus groups were transcribed and analyzed using ATLAS.ti software. Four focus groups were conducted, with a total of 34 respondents from public administration and local government, non-governmental and church organizations, the research sector, and the private sector. At the same time, three individual interviews were conducted with stakeholders to identify good practices.

Quantitative data collection was conducted in the form of an online questionnaire among Ukrainian refugees, with 39 respondents participating. The questionnaire was compiled in Slovak and distributed via the vylnto.cz platform, which enabled anonymous completion and secure archiving of responses. The data were processed and analyzed in SPSS software using basic descriptive statistics and open-ended response analysis.

- **Ethical considerations**

The research was conducted in accordance with applicable personal data protection legislation (GDPR), as well as with the standards of sociological research ethics and the Code of Research Integrity and Ethics of Trnava University in Trnava¹.

¹ https://www.truni.sk/sites/default/files/rektor/kodex-pre-vyskumnu-integritu-a-etiku-na-trnavskej-univerzite-v-trnave_predpis_12_2025.pdf

Before participating in the research, all respondents were informed about its purpose and scope, the method of data collection and processing, and the possibility of refusing to participate in the research at any time without any consequences.

Respondents involved in focus groups and individual interviews were also informed in advance that the discussions and interviews would be recorded and that the data obtained would be used exclusively for research purposes and for the preparation of the national report.

In the case of the questionnaire survey, the informed consent of the respondents was implicitly expressed by completing and submitting the questionnaire.

All data obtained were anonymized and processed exclusively in aggregate form so that it was not possible to identify individual respondents, organizations, or their representatives.

2. Demand analysis

Labour Demand

Employers in Slovakia, especially in the automotive industry (e.g., Peugeot), logistics, and services, are increasingly seeking and hiring refugees from Ukraine, who mainly fill physically demanding positions that domestic workers are not interested in. In addition to manual professions, Ukrainian workers are also employed in healthcare as skilled personnel. However, the most vulnerable and problematic group are seniors over 50, who face significant difficulties in finding work and, due to low Ukrainian pensions and insufficient financial support, often leave to work in neighboring countries such as the Czech Republic or Poland.

- Employers are increasingly stating explicitly in job advertisements that they are open to hiring refugees from Ukraine. Demand is particularly high in the automotive industry (e.g., Peugeot) and in services such as cleaning.
- Respondents confirm that Ukrainian refugees are mainly employed in the automotive industry (specifically Peugeot), where they worked, for example, after an initial period of volunteering. There was also significant demand for specialist positions such as social rehabilitation instructors and rehabilitation nurses, who found employment at Trnava Hospital.

"There are companies that explicitly state in their advertisements that they are 'also suitable for refugees from Ukraine'. For example, in logistics parks or at Peugeot, they are hiring them in large numbers because our people are not so interested in these positions."

- Migrants often fill positions in demanding operations that locals are not interested in, with conditions perceived as "dirty jobs."

"Even the jobs that the state actually does, like the automotive industry, well, those are basically dirty jobs... Slovaks don't work there anymore, foreigners do..."

- The most problematic group is older people and seniors. It is much more difficult for older people to find work, so they often leave to find work in neighboring countries such as the Czech Republic or Poland.

"The older a person is, the harder it is for them to find work. So many people over the age of 50 left us, for example to Poland or the Czech Republic."

"Seniors are a pretty disadvantaged group because, for example, they get their pensions from Ukraine, and they're really low, and they don't really have any other income. There used to be help from the state, but that's going away, so these people are even worse off than moms with kids because their income is totally minimal."

Sector trends

In the employment sector for Ukrainian refugees, informal work is a significant trend, especially in the area of cleaning services, which women prefer because of the immediate income, flexible hours for childcare, and the possibility of avoiding demanding administration or the recognition of their education. Although many of them are highly qualified, they choose this path as an effective way to cover their living expenses. At the same time, there is a critical shortage of labor in key sectors such as services, construction, transport, education, and especially healthcare, where there is a lack of doctors, pharmacists, and nurses.

- A significant trend is informal employment (e.g., cleaning services), which Ukrainian women perceive as an effective way to cover their living expenses without the need for difficult nostrification of their education.

"Cleaning is the best for them. Many women who have degrees at home prefer to clean houses or businesses here. They have cash in hand, flexible hours because of their children, and no paperwork to deal with."

- Respondents identified services, construction, healthcare (doctors, pharmacists, nurses), education (teachers), and transportation (drivers) as key sectors with labor shortages.

"Services, construction, doctors, and pharmacists. Then nurses, maybe even schools. There could be more Ukrainian teachers at those schools."

Forward-looking projections

Future forecasts indicate that, after an initial phase of adaptation and exhaustion, Ukrainian refugees settled in Slovakia will become increasingly motivated to obtain legal recognition of their qualifications and return to their original professions, which usually occurs within three years. At the same time, a significant increase in demand is expected in the social services sector, especially for caregivers and care for people with disabilities. Given the aging population, this area is seen as a critical challenge, which the text refers to as a "time bomb."

- In the future, we can expect an increase in efforts to find work in the field among those who have already adapted to life in Slovakia and whose children attend school here. Initial exhaustion is giving way, and within two to three years, motivation to obtain legal recognition of qualifications will begin to increase.
- Refugees who have been here longer (approximately 3 years) are beginning to move from initial unskilled jobs to areas that correspond to their original expertise.
- Significant demand is expected in the area of social services, especially for caregivers, and in the care of inclusive people, which is perceived as a "time bomb" due to the aging population and increasing disabilities.

"...there is still high demand for caregivers... care for people with disabilities."

3. Supply analysis

Refugee workforce profile

A survey of the workforce profile among refugees shows that the largest age group is people aged 35 to 44 (13 respondents) and, in terms of gender, women significantly dominate (29 out of a total of 39). Most of the respondents currently live in Trnava (28), and in terms of length of stay in Slovakia, the majority have been here for more than three years (20), with another eight respondents arriving before the war began. The data indicate the stability of this group, as only a minimal number of respondents have been in Slovakia for less than one year. In terms of marital status, most respondents are married, with 19 of them having a partner with them in the country, and they most often live with children (25) in their households. The most common households are those with two to four members, which completes the picture of this group's stable background in Slovakia. In terms of the age of children in households, older pupils aged 11 to 14 dominate (13 children), followed by secondary school pupils and younger schoolchildren. Most respondents (32) report good health with no limitations in their daily activities, while a smaller proportion (5) report health problems. This demographic structure suggests a need to focus

integration efforts primarily on supporting women with school-age children who are already settled in the country.

a) Age groups

18-24 years (9 respondents)
25-34 years (7 respondents)
35-44 years (13 respondents)
45-54 years (6 respondents)
55-64 years (3 respondents)

b) Gender

Women (29)
Men (9)

c) Respondents' place of residence

Trnava (28)
Suchá nad Parnou (1)
Bratislava (3)
Banská Bystrica (2)
Zvolen (1)
Čhtelnica (1)
Biely Kostol (1)
Gáň (1)

d) Length of stay in Slovakia

Less than 3 months (1)
3-6 months (0)
6-12 months (1)
1-2 years (3)
2-3 years (5)
More than 3 years (20)
Before the war started (8)

e) Family situation

Married – spouse is in this country (19)
Married – spouse is not present (1)
Divorced/separated (4)
In a relationship (12)

f) Number of people living in one house, including the respondent

1 (1)
2 (10)

3 (9)
4 (11)
5
6 (2)
7

g) Respondent lives with:

Spouse (6)
Child/children (25)
Parents (5)
Brothers/sisters (1)
Partner (9)
Other relatives (1)
Friends/acquaintances (2)
Other: neighbors in the dormitory (1), 2 women and another child

h) Number of children in age groups

0-3 years:

- 0 children (35)
- 1 child (2)
- 2 children (1)

4-6 years:

- 0 children (33)
- 1 child (5)
- 2 children (0)

7-10 years:

- 0 children (33)
- 1 child (3)
- 2 children (2)

11-14 years:

- 0 children (25)
- 1 child (10)
- 2 children (3)

14-18 years old:

- 0 children (31)
- 1 child (7)
- 2 children (0)

i) Respondents with health problems limiting daily activities

- I have a health problem (5)
- I do not have a health problem (32)
- I do not want to answer (1)

Skills, education, recognition

Most respondents are currently employed, with the largest group being full-time workers, supplemented by a significant proportion of entrepreneurs, accounting for almost a fifth of the total. In terms of sectors, the service sector clearly dominates, employing more than half of the workforce. Although the unemployment rate in this group is relatively low, the results indicate the existence of barriers to entering the labor market, such as the unavailability of places in kindergartens or the need to resolve the recognition of qualifications. Overall, the survey paints a picture of an economically active group with a predominance in the tertiary sector, but with a need for better infrastructure to reconcile family and working life. The survey results also indicate that although most respondents have an official employment contract (19), a significant proportion work in the gray zone, either without a contract at all or with a combination of official and informal cash wages. A critical issue is the process of recognizing education, as the vast majority of respondents (28) have never applied for recognition of their qualifications in the country, which is directly reflected in the nature of their employment. Only a minority work in positions that exactly match their previous education, while a significant proportion of respondents perform work that requires no qualifications or is below their skill level. Currently, about one-third of respondents (12) are looking for work, which, combined with the previous data, points to a persistent mismatch between their education and their actual employment in the labor market.

a) What is your current status on the labour market?

- Self-employed / entrepreneur (7)
- I work part-time (3)
- I work full-time (18)
- I work full-time, but online in another country (1)
- Unemployed and actively looking for work (3)
- Unemployed, child not enrolled in kindergarten (1)
- Informal/casual work (3)
- I am on maternity/parental leave (1)
- I do not want to answer (1)

b) If you are employed or self-employed: in which sector do you mainly work?

- Services (17)
- Information and communication (4)
- Education (3)
- Industry/manufacturing (4)
- Waste sorting (1)

Finance (1)
Jewelry sector (1)
Logistics operator (1)
Accounting (1)

c) Type of contract/payment

Official contract (19)
I don't want to answer (9)
No contract, completely unofficial (4)
With a contract, but part of my salary is paid in cash/unofficially (6)

d) Have your qualifications been recognized in this country?

Yes, fully recognized (5)
Partially recognized (3)
No, I did not apply for recognition (28)
I don't want to answer (2)

e) If you are currently working, to what extent does your job correspond to your previous education or work experience?

Fully qualified—exactly the job I am qualified for (8)
Partially relevant—I can use some of my skills/knowledge (6)
I can do the job without any qualifications (12)
Requires lower qualifications than I have (3)
I have never worked (4)
I don't want to answer (6)

f) Are you currently looking for work?

Yes (12)
No (26)

g) Most common areas where respondents look for work:

- Office work/administration
- Services
- Beauty industry
- IT sector
- Education

Participation of household members

The composition of Ukrainian refugee households has a significant impact on their integration into the Slovak labor market, with the presence of a man in the family acting as a stabilizing factor. Conversely, single mothers face enormous stress in juggling multiple jobs with raising adolescent children, who are often isolated in the digital world. The situation is further complicated by accommodation barriers for students under the age of 18 and the existence of a specific group of young people in the NEET category who are studying online in Ukraine, which means they lack social integration and are at risk of exclusion from the domestic labor market.

- Household composition significantly influences labor market participation. Families with a male presence show greater stability. Conversely, single mothers face helplessness in raising adolescent children (teenagers), who are often "lost" in the digital world, preventing mothers from fully focusing on their careers.

"The men who are here are an anchor for these families. When there is a man here and he is working, the family stabilizes much more quickly. But single mothers are under constant stress between work and what their children are doing at home on their own."

- Most Ukrainian refugees are women with children. These mothers are often university educated, but work in several places at once to support their families. There is also a new problematic group – students under the age of 18 who are refused accommodation in dormitories, which complicates their situation.
- A separate category is made up of young people in the NEET category, who are often educated online in Ukraine but lack social integration and participation in the Slovak labor market.

4. Skills gap analysis

Mismatch between refugee qualifications and labour market needs

The main problem with integrating refugees into the Slovak labor market is the significant mismatch between their actual qualifications and the work they perform, which leads to a waste of professional potential. Due to the lengthy and costly process of diploma recognition, which costs hundreds of euros and requires demanding language tests, highly qualified professionals (especially doctors, teachers, and chemists) end up in the employment office system with only a basic education status. Many of them therefore give up working in their field and opt for informal work, for example in cleaning or retail, where they can earn money immediately and without bureaucratic obstacles to provide for their families' basic needs.

- It is common for refugees to end up in the employment office system with the status of "basic education" because the process of nostrification of university diplomas (especially in healthcare) is lengthy, financially costly (€500-600), and requires specialized language tests.

- Many women with medical or teaching qualifications give up working in their field and choose informal work (e.g. cleaning), where they can earn around €10 per hour. This "informal" livelihood covers their living expenses without the need for a difficult process of document recognition. It also appears that highly qualified refugees are willing to work in positions below their level of education just to provide for their families. This suggests that there is a significant mismatch, where highly qualified professionals (e.g., teachers) work as unskilled laborers (e.g., cleaners) due to the non-recognition of certificates and language barriers.

"We have a doctor here who decided to start her own cleaning business. She told me: 'Until I pass those exams and pay €600 for nostrification, I'd rather work for €10 an hour and support my family right away.'"

"...one of them, for example, is a university graduate, I think she studied chemistry, but she works as a saleswoman in Jednota because she can't find a job that is adequate to her education."

"...Ukrainian teachers, but they work as cleaners. Yes. Because it's recognized and the language barrier and these things."

Digital and green skills gaps

The main problem in the area of digital and green skills among refugees is not their complete absence, but rather their untapped potential, with administrative and language barriers pushing qualified people into manual positions. At the same time, it appears that the digital environment poses a certain risk to young people, as it becomes a form of escape from reality for them. Instead of integrating into local communities, children remain isolated in the online space connected to Ukrainian schools, leading to their social exclusion and inability to communicate with the outside world.

- It appears that the problem is not an absolute lack of skills, but rather their underutilization in digital or highly skilled sectors. Refugees have skills, but administrative barriers and language prevent them from applying them, leading to their relegation to manual positions.
- The digital sphere is perceived more as a risk in relation to young people who resort to social networks instead of integrating into groups.

"Children are trapped in a digital trap. They sit at home, connected to Ukrainian schools online, and do not communicate with our world. It's not that they don't know how to use a computer, but that the digital world is an escape from reality, where they feel lost."

5. Competitive analysis

The competitiveness analysis highlights growing social tensions among long-term unemployed Slovak citizens, who perceive the arrival and employment of refugees from Ukraine as a form of discrimination against themselves. This sense of injustice stems mainly from the belief that employers favor Ukrainian workers because of state subsidies, which causes dissatisfaction among socially disadvantaged groups of the domestic population.

- Long-term unemployed Slovak citizens feel that Ukrainians are given preferential treatment in employment due to subsidies. Advertisements stating that they are also open to migrants from Ukraine are interpreted by part of the domestic population as a form of discrimination against their own citizens, which increases tension in socially disadvantaged groups.

"Our people (Slovaks) who are long-term unemployed are sensitive to this. They say, 'Look, the ads say they're hiring Ukrainians, but they're forgetting about us.' There is a quiet hostility because of the feeling that employers are receiving subsidies for hiring them."

Employers, wage levels, benefits

Ukrainian workers are seen on the labor market as a necessary substitute for the lack of domestic labor in low-paid sectors, but they face low wages and minimal benefits, which barely cover their accommodation expenses.

- The labor market perceives Ukrainian workers as a necessary substitute for the lack of domestic labor, especially in low-paid sectors. Benefits are often minimal and wages are set at a level that barely covers market rents.
- State-subsidized housing is seen as a key benefit, the loss of which when switching to commercial rent often discourages workers from taking better-paid full-time jobs.

"They know exactly how to calculate it. With a net salary of around €800–900, they would have nothing left after paying €600–700 in commercial rent. That's why they prefer the allowances and free accommodation."

Existing training pipelines

Current educational programs for refugees from Ukraine face two major barriers: non-recognition of prior education and language barriers. Although employment offices offer retraining courses, without official recognition of their diplomas, applicants are perceived as having only a basic education, which significantly limits their options. In addition, technical terminology in Slovak is often a barrier even for experienced experts, which reduces the effectiveness of the courses. On the positive side, there are initiatives focused on teaching the Slovak language and tutoring children, which, through community centers and a peer-to-peer approach, contribute to better inclusion and gradual integration into society.

- Employment offices offer retraining and business courses, but the problem remains that without recognition of previous education, applicants are perceived as having only basic education, which limits their choice of courses. Another problem is language, as the courses offered by the employment office are in Slovak, and the technical terminology in Slovak can be problematic for most Ukrainians.

"The employment office offers them courses, but the problem is the language. If a person does not understand technical terms in Slovak, the course is meaningless to them, even if they are a top expert in their field."

- There are initiatives such as Slovak language courses or tutoring for children (peer to peer) that help with inclusion.

"...I work here at the family center as a Slovak language teacher, so I am in contact with Ukrainians and I help them to become rooted in the Slovak language."

6. Barriers to access and retention

The main barriers to employing Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia include, in particular, the language barrier combined with significant psychological fatigue among women after years of conflict, which prevents them from learning effectively and advancing their careers. Another significant problem is the process of diploma recognition, which is financially and administratively demanding and forces educated people to work in low-skilled positions. The situation is further complicated by childcare, where mothers face a dilemma between working and losing state housing assistance, while adolescent children often remain socially isolated outside the Slovak school system, increasing the need for comprehensive psychological and social support for entire families. The situation in society is further exacerbated by a sense of discrimination on both sides: while the local population perceives support for migrants as unfair preferential treatment, Ukrainians face systemic problems with the immigration police, bullying of children in schools, and social isolation of adolescents. Mothers with children thus find themselves in a vicious circle, where the financial disadvantage of full-time employment, combined with the lack of extended family support, prevents them from fully participating in the labor market.

Language

- One of the main barriers to accessing and retaining employment is the language barrier, especially for older people.

"...the language barrier is one of the key issues."

- Three years after the start of the conflict, women are showing signs of significant mental fatigue. This exhaustion often prevents them from continuing their education or having their qualifications recognized, as learning a language and taking exams represents an unbearable cognitive and emotional burden for many women.

"There is enormous mental fatigue. After three years, these women say they no longer have the strength to learn a new language or start from scratch. They are in survival mode, not career-building mode."

Qualifications

- The main barrier is the financial and administrative complexity of nostrification (around €500-600) and the need for specialized language tests, which discourages healthcare workers in particular.

"Most of these people, even if they have a college degree, are registered with the employment office as having only a basic education because their diplomas are not recognized. It's a vicious circle, because without that, they can't move on to a better job."

Childcare

- Mothers with young children face a dilemma between employment and receiving welfare benefits. In many cases, it is not financially viable for them to take on full-time work because they would lose their entitlement to subsidized housing and state assistance, while commercial rents would exceed their net income from work.

"Most of the time, those Ukrainians, those mothers, have a problem because of their children, because they can't get a full-time job."

- A significant barrier is the helplessness of mothers in raising adolescent children (aged 13–15), who are "lost" in the Slovak school system and often resort to digital networks. And to prefer online learning. Mothers therefore need not only work, but also psychological support and a background that would replace the missing extended family (husbands and grandparents).

"These mothers are particularly helpless when it comes to teenagers. Children aged 13–15 don't go anywhere, they just stay at home on their phones, in the Ukrainian online system, and completely lose touch with reality here in Slovakia."

- For women, the lack of places in nurseries and high rents, which are often unaffordable, are also critical issues.

"If she gets a nursery place, she needs to pay for that nursery, then for accommodation. So overall, it's all very interconnected."

Transport

- In this case, the availability of transportation is a decisive factor in employability. Even with a strong motivation to work, these people are limited by infrastructure; if the timetable does not respect work shifts, work becomes physically unattainable for them.

"When they live somewhere in a dormitory outside the city, they are dependent on public transport. If the bus doesn't fit in with the end of their shift at the factory, they simply can't take the job, even if they want to."

Discrimination

- There is a feeling of "reverse discrimination" in society, where local unemployed people interpret companies' willingness to employ Ukrainians as favoring them because of subsidies, which increases tension.

"Our people (locals) perceive this as unfair. They say, 'They get everything, and we, who have lived here all our lives, get nothing.' This tension is palpable in communities with high unemployment."

- Discrimination against Ukrainian migrants can also be observed in a systemic form—an example of this is the immigration police. Respondents describe corrupt behavior and abuse of power when processing documents.

"...I know they paid to get that number, that code for the police. 100, 200, 300 euros just to get that number."

- Discrimination also occurs in the school environment in the form of bullying of Ukrainian children.

"...the problem of bullying in schools and in society in general... they feel discriminated against."

Legal barriers

- Key legal and administrative barriers include the loss of entitlement to material assistance and subsidized housing when a certain income threshold is exceeded, which creates a "poverty trap."
- Another significant problem is nostrification, i.e., the official recognition of the validity of foreign educational documents.

"They'll tell you straight up: 'Why would I pay €500 for nostrification when I don't know if I'll still be here in a year?' It's a huge amount of money for them, which they'd rather invest in food or their children."

- Legislative changes and a critical shortage of accommodation (especially for students) are perceived as major barriers to the stability needed to find work.

"...some kind of higher power would help us with that, but that would require some kind of

legislative change."

7. Support mechanisms

Respondents perceive a wide range of services as useful, and most of the services surveyed are in the "moderately needed" category. The main finding of the analysis is that respondents consider language courses to be the most urgent form of support, as they were the only ones to receive a "very needed" rating. The category of moderately necessary services is dominated by interest in education and retraining (17), followed by the need for mediation with employers (16) and translation services (15), which indicates a strong focus on entering the labor market and overcoming communication barriers. Conversely, the least interest is in childcare assistance, which respondents rated as completely unnecessary. A specific case is the recognition of qualifications, where the community's opinions are divided exactly in half between moderate need and complete unnecessary.

a) What kind of support would be most useful to you?

- Translation/interpreting services – moderately needed (15)
- Legal advice - moderately needed (13)
- Mediation with employers – moderately needed (16)
- Information services (where to find work, procedures) – moderately needed (12)
- Social work/mentoring support – moderately needed (9)
- Language courses – very necessary (13)
- Help with job search – moderately needed (9)
- Recognition of qualifications – moderately needed (10), not needed at all (10)
- Childcare assistance – not at all necessary (12)
- Education or retraining – moderately needed (17)
- Career counseling – moderately needed (11)

Public employment services

The Slovak system for registering job seekers faces barriers in classifying refugees' education, where the absence of recognized diplomas automatically places university graduates among those with basic education, thereby preventing them from accessing vocational courses. Despite this, employment offices are successfully helping with initial contact with the labor market through internships and mentoring, although field workers identify cases where refugees work in the gray economy for fear of losing benefits and accommodation. A specific challenge is providing advice to severely disabled persons from Ukraine who, without their original documents, find it difficult to navigate the new system of compensatory aids and assistance.

- **Status and registration:** Employment offices register refugees as job seekers, but encounter a systemic problem in classifying their education. If an applicant does not have a recognized diploma, they are listed in the system as having only "basic education," which prevents them from accessing higher-level professional retraining courses. However, measures taken by employment offices (e.g., reimbursement of internships and mentoring) were crucial for initial contact with the labor market. Thanks to these measures, many refugees found employment in hospitals or social

facilities.

"At the employment office, we encounter the problem that the system won't let us do anything. We have university graduates in our database, but they are listed as people with basic education. Then we can't offer them adequate courses because they don't meet the requirements."

- **Fieldwork and monitoring:** Officials conduct regular checks on material assistance and state social benefits. They find that many refugees are only formally in the system, while in reality they are seeking livelihoods in the gray economy (informal services) so as not to lose their benefits and subsidized housing. It is also important to mention that, in terms of field work, the Space project appears to be positive—single points of contact that are supposed to operate on the principle of field work and accompanying clients "by the hand."

"We visit families in need of financial assistance. We see that many of them are skilled and resourceful, but the system forces them not to admit everything, otherwise they would lose their benefits."

- **Advice for persons with disabilities:** There is a specific compensation department that addresses the needs of severely disabled persons from Ukraine, which includes assessing claims for compensatory aids and assistance in the home environment. It is often very difficult for such persons to navigate a completely new system of compensation and diagnoses.

"We work with people with severe disabilities. It is extremely difficult for them because they have to navigate a completely different compensation and diagnosis system, and they often do not even have basic documents from Ukraine."

NGO and training interventions

It is important to emphasize the key role of non-governmental and church organizations in the integration of refugees, which, compared to state institutions, provide more accessible assistance based on trust and an informal approach. These entities not only provide material and social support through projects such as "Ekošatník" (Eco-Closet), which also serve to strengthen psychological well-being and networking, but also focus on education. Language courses are seen as an essential tool for overcoming social isolation and gaining the courage to participate in everyday life, with an increasing search for innovative forms of informal education that would maintain the motivation of participants.

- **Mediation and trust:** Assistance is provided mainly by non-governmental and church organizations (e.g., tutoring children, providing material support, translating at the doctor's office). Systemic support from the state is perceived as insufficient and administratively burdensome. Non-governmental organizations (e.g., Family Assistance Center) also serve as the first point of contact, where those who have left feel less of a barrier and greater trust than with state institutions.

"The Family Assistance Center and Ekošatník are places where these women open up. At the office, they are tense, afraid that we will take something away from them. Here, in an informal setting, we learn the truth about how they really live and what troubles them."

- **Material and social support:** Projects such as "Ekošatník" not only address material needs, but also serve as a space for informal networking and psychological support. At the same time, it is clear that, in addition to material assistance, the feeling of usefulness itself is very important.

"Ekošatník is not just about clothes. It is a place where women can relax, talk, and realize that they are not alone. The psychological support provided by the community is sometimes more important than the clothes themselves."

"It's important that they feel they are not just passive recipients, but that their skills have value in the market and in the community."

- **Language courses as a tool for socialization:** Educational programs focused on Slovak are perceived not only as preparation for work, but as an essential means of overcoming social isolation, especially for women who stay at home with children. There are various forms of language courses (short, long, intensive), but their effectiveness is hampered by declining participation and motivation among participants. Respondents are looking for a "third way" of learning, for example through informal conversation clubs.

"The Slovak language course is a gateway out of isolation for them. If they just stay at home with their children and Ukrainian television, they will never feel at home here. The language gives them the courage to go to the store or to the doctor."

Employer initiatives

Employers' initiatives show a proactive approach to integrating Ukrainian refugees into the domestic labor market, with targeted communication and the removal of language barriers as key tools. Companies, especially in the Trnava region, directly declare their openness to foreigners in their advertisements and use Ukrainian coordinators to interpret instructions, thus making work accessible to people with a weaker knowledge of Slovak. At the same time, a high degree of flexibility in qualifications is applied in practice, with employers willing to temporarily hire

highly qualified workers for less demanding positions with the prospect of later career growth once they have mastered the language.

- **Active targeting of migrants:** Employers (e.g., in the Trnava region, the automotive industry and cleaning companies) directly declare their willingness to employ Ukrainians in their advertisements, thereby eliminating the fear of initial rejection.

"HR managers in Trnava already know how to work with them. Some factories even have Ukrainian coordinators who interpret instructions for them so that people with poorer Slovak language skills can also join the workforce."

- **Flexibility in qualifications:** Some companies are willing to temporarily accept lower qualifications (e.g., teachers working in warehouses) with the promise of later promotion within the company after learning the language.

Unmet needs

We can identify some key unmet needs of Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia that hinder their successful integration and economic independence. The main barriers include weak systemic support from the state and a lack of long-term strategy, as well as a critical shortage of programs for adolescents, which isolates teenagers and prevents mothers from being fully employed. A significant obstacle is the high cost of diploma recognition, which is unaffordable for families in need, and problematic housing policy, where the setting of benefits discourages people from increasing their legal income, as once they exceed a certain threshold, they lose their support and are unable to cover commercial rents. The overall situation is exacerbated by declining state aid and the transfer of responsibility to an overburdened non-profit sector, creating a vicious circle of housing and financial insecurity.

- **Systemic support from the state:** Systemic support from the state is perceived as weakening and insufficient. There is a lack of a long-term integration strategy that would replace the assistance provided by non-governmental organizations.
- **Lack of support for families with teenagers:** A critical need that has been identified is the absence of programs for adolescents (aged 13–15). This group often does not attend school and isolates itself in the digital space, which puts enormous pressure on mothers who are afraid to fully engage in the labor market because they fear for their children.

"Adolescents are most at risk. They don't want to go to our schools, they feel excluded, and their mothers are unhappy about it. They are afraid to leave them home alone, lest they fall into a bad crowd or become depressed."

- **The financial barrier to nostrification:** The cost of recognizing diplomas (€500–600) is insurmountable for families in financial need. There is no mechanism in place to reimburse or subsidize these costs for professions that are in short supply in Slovakia (e.g., doctors).

"Nostrification is a huge scare tactic. They'll say, 'Why should I pay €500 to have my diploma recognized when I don't know if I'll still be here in six months?'. They'd rather spend that money on food or their children."

- **Housing policy:** The system of housing subsidies (for private or public accommodation) is not linked to progressive income growth. Once a refugee finds a better job, they lose their entitlement to subsidized housing, and commercial rent "eats up" the entire difference in salary, leading them to give up on higher earnings. Another critical issue is declining housing support and a lack of assistance for specific groups (seniors, people with disabilities). State capacities are exhausted and assistance is shifting to overburdened non-profit organizations. However, without stable housing, stable employment is not possible. After the cancellation of housing subsidies for many apartment owners, those who have left find themselves in housing distress, forcing them to take any job, even if it is unfavorable.

"They know exactly how to calculate it. As soon as they get a legal full-time job and earn more, the state takes away their housing benefits. In the end, they would have less money than if they didn't work or worked illegally. The system doesn't motivate them to grow."

"...subsidies for housing and so on... unfortunately, lately, they've been cut back quite a bit."

"Affordable housing for these families, because that is actually the basis for these families to continue to function together and move forward."

8. SWOT analysis

The analysis points to the significant human potential of Ukrainian refugees, who, thanks to their high qualifications and strong work ethic, represent an opportunity to stabilize Slovak healthcare and education, but their full integration faces systemic and psychological barriers. While the strength of the community lies in its internal cohesion and support from the non-governmental sector, the main obstacles are the language barrier, complicated recognition of diplomas, and psychological exhaustion, which, combined with uncertain funding for assistance, creates a risk of social isolation. The key to success is therefore the effective adaptation of children in schools and better links with the local community, which would transform the current crisis into a long-term economic and social benefit for Slovakia.

Strengths

- The high level of education among Ukrainian refugees (an estimated 80% have a university degree) and their willingness to work long hours when necessary.

"Their hard work is a huge asset. If necessary, they will work 12 hours a day just to provide for their children. But isolation is a threat – if the children do not learn Slovak and start attending our schools, the whole family will remain on the margins of society."

- The community's internal capacity to help each other (peer-to-peer support).
- The willingness of the non-governmental sector to cooperate and the ability to create a safe and welcoming environment for those who have left.

Weaknesses

- Mental exhaustion among women and language barriers preventing them from working in professional occupations.
- Strict legislation, lack of affordable housing, and low recognition of diplomas.
- The dependence of non-profit organizations on project funding, low long-term motivation of course participants, and fees for some services.

Opportunities

- Filling vacant positions in healthcare and education with Ukrainian professionals.
- The adaptation of children in schools increases the likelihood of their parents staying long-term and fully integrating into the Slovak economy.
- Greater connection between the Ukrainian community and the Slovak public (e.g., joint activities for mothers) and the development of prevention among young people.
- Using refugees as coordinators and assistants in the system.

"We can use their time while they wait for nostrification to do what they know how to do in the community."

Threats

- Disintegration of families (children leaving for third countries, e.g. Denmark) and a strong desire to return to spouses in Ukraine, which may lead to a sudden outflow of labor after the end of the conflict.
- Illegal employment, young people dropping out of the system (NEET), and an increase in the number of homeless people if the housing crisis is not addressed.

"The biggest threat is that a parallel society will be created here. People who are physically here but mentally live in Ukraine, work illegally, and their children do not attend our schools. It's a ticking time bomb."

- Funding from major donors is being cut back and state projects are coming to an end, creating uncertainty about the sustainability of the results achieved.
- The problem of socialization of young Ukrainian refugees (mainly due to the language barrier) and the threat of increasing isolation.

"...there is a proportion of Ukrainians who have left, but they are out of the system, out of that socialization, and they don't know what to do next."

9. Policy and regulatory review

As of January 2024, there were almost 40,000 Ukrainians employed in the Slovak Republic, with most working as machine operators, assistants, or unskilled workers, and women making up the majority of the workforce (56%). . These data are summarized by UNHCR according to statistics from the ÚPSVaR.² According to UNHCR and IOM, the language barrier is the most frequently cited obstacle to finding work (52%), followed by family responsibilities and health problems.

According to the Eu socio-economic insights survey (2024), employment is one of the main problems for Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia, with 66% of the working-age population employed, but the language barrier and recognition of qualifications remain key challenges for full integration into the labor market. A report by the Slovak Academy of Sciences (SAV) points out that although more than two-thirds of refugees say they are working, many are employed on a short-term basis or in positions that do not match their qualifications.³

- Labor laws

² <https://www.unhcr.org/europe/resources-employers-slovakia>

³ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/slovakia-progress-and-challenges-integration-people-displaced-ukraine-2025-02-28_en

The legal framework governing Ukrainian refugees' access to work is based on a temporary protection regime (known as Lex Ukraine — Act No. 92/2022 Z. ⁴), which grants persons with temporary asylum the right to work without the need for a special work permit or confirmation of the possibility of filling a job vacancy. The employer is only required to notify the relevant labor office of the start of employment within seven days and to submit proof of refugee status.

This regime simplifies the employment of Ukrainian refugees compared to ordinary citizens. Despite these simplifications, the problem of recognition of qualifications and professional examinations persists, which may prevent more qualified refugees from working in positions commensurate with their education and experience.

- Migration policies

Slovak migration policy in the context of Ukrainian refugees is based primarily on the European Temporary Protection Directive, which has enabled the rapid granting of temporary asylum and related rights (including the right to work).⁵ Refugees can apply for this status upon entry or after arrival in the Slovak Republic.

Current migration plans focus on a longer-term integration strategy, not just emergency assistance. For example, the Response Plan for the Arrival of Refugees for 2025–2026⁶ reflects the transition from short-term humanitarian aid to the provision of systematic support, including access to the labor market, education, and healthcare.

Migration policy also stipulates that Ukrainian citizens do not have legal working rights during their stay under the visa-free regime (90 days); the right to work only arises after temporary asylum has been granted.⁷

- Incentives for hiring refugees

Support for the employment of Ukrainian refugees is provided through various measures aimed at facilitating their access to the labor market and improving their job placement.

The Office of Labor, Social Affairs and Family can provide subsidies to employers, for example to finance volunteer activities by refugees (e.g., language teaching, social work).⁸

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) provides refugees with job workshops, CV assistance, interview preparation, and other services that improve their chances of finding suitable work.⁹

⁴ <https://www.ip.gov.sk/zamestnavanie-utecencov-z-ukrajiny/>

⁵ <https://www.unesco.org/en/ukraine-war/education/slovakia-support>

⁶ <https://www.unhcr.org/sk/27625-slovensko-spusta-plan-reakcie-na-prichod-utecencov-z-ukrajiny-na-roky-2025-2026>

⁷ <https://www.mic.iom.sk/sk/novinky/188-rodina/763-podmienky-zamestnania-sa-na-slovensku-pre-utecencov-odidencov-alebo-ziadatelov-o-azyly>

⁸ <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/publications/all/policies-support-refugees-ukraine>

⁹ <https://www.iom.sk/en/news-events/2036-migrants-and-refugees-are-given-a-better-chance-to-secure-a-decent-job>

Organizations such as UNHCR emphasize that employing refugees helps fill jobs in sectors with labor shortages and contributes positively to the Slovak economy.¹⁰

10. Conclusion

After the initial adaptation phase, the integration of Ukrainian refugees into the Slovak labor market faces a critical point where the professional potential of qualified people (especially women) is wasted due to the administratively demanding process of diploma recognition, language barriers, and increasing mental fatigue. Although refugees effectively fill labor shortages in low-skilled sectors and the automotive industry, systemic support faces barriers in the form of unaffordable housing, a lack of places in kindergartens, and the social isolation of adolescents in the online space. For sustainable success, it is therefore essential to move from crisis management to the continuous funding of professional integration teams and to simplify the processes for recognizing qualifications, thereby preventing the frustration of both refugees and the local population from deepening.

PART TWO – BEST PRACTICES

(3 good practices)

11. Introduction to Good practices section

Criteria for good practices (innovation, inclusiveness, impact, scalability)

Based on interviews with three organizations, we can divide the criteria for good practices as follows:

a) Innovation

Manifested by the introduction of new methodologies and responding to current technological trends.

- **Encanto groups:** Companies are bringing a novelty to the market in the form of facilitated circle discussions, which enable open feedback within teams, thereby preventing conflicts from escalating.
- **AI training:** Responding to high demand for artificial intelligence training demonstrates an organization's ability to adapt to digital transformation.
- **Mental health through craftsmanship:** Organizations use workshops as an innovative social work tool that combines mental health with material rewards.
- **New models of integration:** The establishment of the Integration Center represents a relatively new type of social service in Slovakia, focused on long-term support for foreigners.

b) Inclusiveness

Organizations focus on removing barriers and creating an environment that embraces diversity.

- **Multicultural teams:** A proven practice is to combine Slovak and Ukrainian workers, which increases client trust and ensures expertise in the domestic system.
- **Support for vulnerable groups:** Specific focus on seniors and women approaching retirement age, who have minimal chances on the regular labor market.
- **Connecting cultures:** Organizing cultural days, communal cooking, and community activities helps break down social "bubbles" and promotes a family spirit.
- **Language inclusion:** Providing interpretation, document translation (e.g., occupational

health and safety) and language courses for adults and children reduces barriers to entry into society. c) Impact on the labor market

c) Impact

The impact of activities can be measured by the success rate of job placements and the stability of the people supported.

- **Filling shortage positions:** The agency successfully supplements human resources in sectors such as manufacturing and logistics, which would otherwise remain unfilled.
- **Stabilization of the workforce:** Ukrainian employees show lower turnover and high work motivation, which has a positive impact on company performance.
- **Social security:** The motivation to work legally under contract protects foreigners from illegal employment and ensures their access to social insurance.

d) Scalability

The possibility of expanding these practices depends on methodological support and continuity of funding.

- **Methodological assistance:** Cooperation with international organizations (UNHCR, League for Human Rights) has provided an important framework that can also be applied in other regions.
- **Need for continuity:** To maintain scalability, continuous funding (e.g., through the National Integration Project) is essential to avoid service disruptions.
- **Use of social networks:** Recruitment via Facebook or Bazoš is a low-cost and easily scalable model for finding candidates.
- **Lack of systemic support:** Scalability is limited by the lack of methodology on the part of the state and the language barrier of state portals, which could be improved through systemic changes.

The profiles show that the key to success is a combination of expertise and cultural proximity. The ideal model in teams is to connect Slovak experts who are familiar with the legislative system with Ukrainian colleagues who build trust and break down barriers with clients. Cultural and linguistic similarity is seen as a key advantage that facilitates communication and job placement.

- Interview sources

Selected examples of good practice were obtained from three organizations directly involved in

supporting the employment of Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia. These were a recruitment agency, a non-profit organization, and a municipal organization that provided support education programs for Ukrainians and assistance in the area of social services.

The aim is to highlight specific approaches and initiatives that supported refugees in entering the labor market, including the development of professional skills, supplementary educational programs, and integrated social services. Examples of good practice were drawn from interviews with actors involved in these programs and provided concrete illustrations of innovative, inclusive, and effective approaches to the employment of Ukrainian refugees.

For this section, individual interviews lasting 45-60 minutes were conducted with three respondents from each organization. Respondents were asked to provide specific examples of programs, partnerships, or personal experiences, particularly with regard to labor market barriers, digital and green jobs, and examples of good practice.

12. Good practice 1

Actor profile (employer)

- An established Slovak personnel and training agency that bases its profile on the interconnection of two main activities: talent search (HR) and their subsequent development (training). The agency is a member of the Association of Adult Education Institutions (AIVD), which underlines its professional focus on the quality of human capital, not just the quantity of workers placed. The agency offers comprehensive services in the areas of human resources, job placement, and educational training programs. It focuses on comprehensive HR services, which include:
 - **Permanent Placement:** Searching for employees for permanent employment (often for middle and senior management or specialized technical positions).
 - **Education:** Organizing training programs and soft skills training, as members of the Association of Adult Education Institutions (AIVD).
- The agency primarily deals with filling job positions directly in the permanent staff of client companies, which means that it does not employ people under its own name, but acts as an intermediary. The team consists of four permanent colleagues and approximately 30 external lecturers with psychological training who are dedicated to education in the areas of communication, IT skills, and soft skills. Their clientele consists of companies operating in Slovakia. The agency does not primarily present itself as a "large importer" of workers from abroad (like some international corporations), but it does regularly mediate employees from Ukraine. As part of its services, it also offers assistance with legislative processes related to the employment of foreigners (i.e., legalization of residence and work). Ukrainian employees are mainly placed in industrial parks around Trnava (manufacturing, logistics), but given their focus, they are also placed in more skilled positions if the candidate is proficient in the language.

Model description

- The agency's operating model is based on complexity and synergy. It is not a classic "mass recruitment" model, but one that includes:
 - a) **Permanent Placement:** Targeted search for employees for the core staff of companies (from management to technical specialists).
 - b) **Experiential learning:** Their training model uses not only theory, but also personal experiences and training programs (soft skills, coaching), which increases the added value for both companies and employees.
- **Job positions:** After the outbreak of war, the agency focused on the natural increase in the number of Ukrainian candidates, to which employers also had to adapt. The agency assesses this experience positively, emphasizing that these are often qualified people who are willing to accept less skilled positions. Ukrainian workers have helped companies fill gaps in their workforce. Most often, these are positions in warehouses, logistics, manufacturing, and other lower-level positions. Employers are willing to hire Ukrainian workers with less experience for positions such as welders, machinists, and metalworkers.

"We have had good experiences with Ukrainians. They are often skilled people who are willing to take on less skilled positions."

"It has helped companies to gain the capacity and human resources that they have lacked until now."

"They are willing to work and appreciate the job."

- **Recruitment channels:** When searching for candidates, the agency mainly uses the social network Facebook (work groups) and the Bazoš portal.
- **Employee onboarding:** Employee onboarding is not provided by the agency, but by the employer itself. However, most companies are well prepared for Ukrainian employees because the necessary work documents have been translated into Ukrainian, which makes the integration process easier. This integration process is also facilitated by coordinators who communicate with foreigners in companies and help them with the necessary formalities.

"Logistics companies have coordinators who are Ukrainians and speak Slovak and Ukrainian well. Companies are adapted to accepting Ukrainians."

- **Courses and training:** In addition to recruitment, the agency provides specific forms of training for companies and their employees. These mainly include training in

communication, IT education, and AI.

Outcomes and effectiveness

- **Filling company capacities:** The agency has been successful in filling long-term vacant positions (production, logistics, warehousing) by employing Ukrainian candidates, thereby helping Slovak companies to obtain the human resources they lack.

"They are not blocking jobs for Slovaks, but filling positions that are in short supply or otherwise unfillable in our country."

- **Low turnover of Ukrainian employees:** Effectiveness is measured by the low rate of Ukrainian candidates leaving their assigned positions. Placed Ukrainian employees have a lower turnover rate, which increases stability for the employer and can serve as a motivating example for Slovak candidates.

"They are motivating for Slovak employees."

"Slovaks have a problem with wages and job conditions. They demand greater comfort, while Ukrainians are more adaptable."

- **Effective recruitment and placement:** The agency uses modern and proven channels to quickly reach candidates. In the case of foreigners, especially Ukrainians, communication and job offers via Facebook groups or Bazos work best. The result is the direct placement of qualified and less qualified people in employment.
- **Educational progress:** In addition to recruitment, the agency provides professional training (soft skills, IT, AI), thereby increasing employee competencies and team cohesion.

Partnerships

- **Corporate partnerships:** Close cooperation with companies operating in Slovakia allows the agency to tailor conditions, for example through Ukrainian coordinators directly in logistics centers.
- **Network of expert lecturers:** The agency has a network of approximately 30 lecturers with psychological training who ensure the professional level of educational activities.
- **Cooperation with the non-profit sector:** A key partner is the non-profit sector, with which the agency cooperates on language training and runs courses to help job seekers better navigate the market.

Sustainability

- **Demand for Ukrainian employees:** There is ongoing demand for Ukrainian employees, as they help fill job positions that are not attractive to Slovaks.
- **Economic motivation:** Placing employees from Ukraine is financially attractive for the agency, which ensures the further development of these services and continued demand for Ukrainian clients.
- **Cultural and process integration:** Focusing on cultural proximity and supporting integration activities (e.g., cultural days, joint lunches) reduces barriers and promotes long-term employee retention.

"We have experience with them organizing cultural days. They organize parties where, for example, people from Ukraine cook their typical dishes, everyone from the production department is there, they eat something, and they talk. This way, they can connect with each other."

"There is greater demand to go inside for greater team cohesion."

- **Encantro groups:** So-called encantro groups also contribute to greater sustainability and stability among employees in companies. This is a new, innovative element where employees, led by a facilitator, openly discuss conflicts and comments on management or the atmosphere in the team in a circle. This element has received very good feedback.

"Any issue that bothers the team can be brought up, for example, they can say, 'I don't like your management style,' and it is resolved there."

"There is a facilitator who can keep the communication at a level where it doesn't escalate, and they just know how to resolve it."

- **Cooperation with other entities:** Mutual cooperation with other entities contributes to greater efficiency and sustainability in job placement.
- **Legislation and barriers to sustainability:** While the status of a departing employee made it easier to work with candidates, the current processes involved in changing jobs are more complicated in terms of administration and legislation. The process is somewhat simpler for the agency, as the bulk of the legislative burden is borne by the end employer, but better information about legislative changes would nevertheless contribute to greater sustainability. The agency does not feel any support from the state. They criticize in particular the state job portal, which is only available in Slovak. Better information about legislative changes from state authorities would help them.

"If the state could provide better information, if it could better inform us about legislative changes, that would obviously be better."

Replicability

The possibility of applying this model or parts of it in other environments or by other entities through:

- **"My Way to Work"** methodology: The program focused on preparing resumes and communicating with authorities is easily applicable in other regions or for other vulnerable groups.
- **Integration model through coordinators:** The use of bilingual coordinators directly at the employer's premises is a proven practice that can be adopted by other industrial parks.
- **Clear rules and communication:** The agency's success is based on precisely defined rules between employees and employers, which is a universally applicable recommendation for any recruitment process.

"...clear communication with these people about what is going to happen. Or even for employers. The rules need to be clearly defined."

- **Use of social networks:** The strategy of recruiting through specialized groups on social networks is a low-cost and highly repeatable model for other recruitment agencies.
- **Selection methodology:** The use of psychodiagnostics and proven procedures in analyzing client needs allows the agency to successfully apply the same quality model to various industries (from logistics to medicine).

12. Good practice 2

Actor profile (non-governmental organization)

- A non-governmental organization that operates an integration center, which is a relatively new model within the Slovak social services system. The center's team is led by a coordinator and consists of a social work assistant, lecturers, and psychologists (including a school psychologist specializing in children). The center currently provides services to approximately 150 clients.
- This non-governmental organization focuses on comprehensive support, with a priority on **language integration** and teaching Slovak to adults and children. Activities undertaken by the organization:
 - a) **Community life:** Activities to connect cultures, building a "family spirit" and a sense of acceptance for everyone.

- b) **Workshop:** A unique project is a workshop for repairing old furniture, which is mainly used by older women. It is difficult for this group to find employment, so they earn shopping vouchers in the workshop.

...,it is not realistic for such women to find employment on the labor market."

- c) **Material assistance:** The organization provides food assistance through the employment office for people in material need. For others, it provides its own assistance from the solidarity warehouse in the form of food and drugstore packages every three months.

"All those who receive welfare benefits receive this assistance. Those who do not receive welfare benefits receive food assistance from our solidarity warehouse in the form of a food package and a package of toiletries every three months."

- d) **Counseling:** Clients come with questions about healthcare and other life situations.

Model description

The organization's integration model is based on an approach that combines social services, education, and community development. It functions as a safe space where the emphasis is on accepting everyone without distinction. The model consists of several elements:

- **Personnel structure (Slovak-Ukrainian team):** A key element of the model is the mixed team. The Slovak social worker provides expertise on the local system, while Ukrainian colleagues (social work assistants, lecturers) build greater trust and openness among clients.
- **Navigating the problematic environment of agencies:** The organization helps clients navigate the risky environment of employment agencies, which often fail to provide the necessary documents (residence permits, papers), causing people stress and existential problems.

"What I perceive differently is the work of employment agencies. From the perspective of someone coming to Slovakia, and this also applies to students, it's as if they are creating problems for these people."

"They pay the agency money and rely on it to arrange everything for them. Often, people come here and have nothing arranged."

"We have a person who was independent, educated, and knew how to get things done on his own. He applied to Peugeot on his own and received a ban from Peugeot, meaning that he can never apply for a job there again because he did not go through an agency."

- **Use of informal networks:** When looking for a job, the model combines modern tools (Facebook groups, the Profesia portal) with the use of one's own network of acquaintances and contacts, which increases the chance of finding fair employment.
- **Language training:** The model places strong emphasis on language courses, which are a prerequisite for obtaining skilled work. Support is also provided to children, which indirectly helps parents integrate into the labor market.
- **Psychological support pillar:** The model integrates professional psychological assistance that specializes not only in adults but also in working with children.
- **Solidarity warehouse and material assistance:** The model includes supplementary food and drugstore assistance. This is intended specifically for people who do not meet the conditions for state assistance in material need, thereby filling a gap in the system.
- **Networking and mediation:** The organization does not solve all problems in isolation, but actively connects clients to specialized counseling (legal, health) or other non-governmental organizations and low-threshold centers.
- **Community development:** Activities aimed at connecting cultures and breaking down barriers between the foreign community and the majority society are an important component.

Outcomes and effectiveness

Based on qualitative data, it can be assessed that the organization achieves better results and effectiveness in relation to Ukrainian refugees thanks to several key aspects:

- **Empowering disadvantaged groups:** The organization addresses the issue of unemployment among older women through a workshop. It is unrealistic for these women to find employment on the open labor market, so the workshop provides them with meaningful alternative activities and remuneration in the form of shopping vouchers. This model thus utilizes a unique element of mental hygiene and employability support through the repair of old furniture.
- **Social stabilization:** The organization successfully educates clients about the risks of undeclared work and motivates them to seek legal employment with statutory benefits.

"We explained to them that working illegally is not good, that they should try to get a contract, that they would have benefits, that it is better because of insurance, etc."

Partnerships

The organization's operations are based on a strong network of internal and external cooperation:

- **Internal network:** The organization works closely with specialized counseling and low-threshold centers within the organization's structures.
- **Expert methodological assistance:** Strategic partners in the establishment of the integration center included partners such as the League for Human Rights and UNHCR, which provided important methodological support.

"We received excellent methodological assistance in setting up the integration center."

- **Operational cooperation:** They cooperate with the Equita civic association in addressing healthcare issues. Other partners include Connect and the Family Assistance Center.
- **State administration:** They cooperate with the Labor Office in distributing food aid to people in material need.

Sustainability

- **Maintaining continuity:** After the initial financial support ends in mid-2024, there are concerns about the stability and further financing of the integration center's operations. To maintain continuity, it is essential that the National Integration Project continue without any gaps.

"It would help me greatly if the national integration project continued without interruption and without any gaps in the financing of these people."

- **Personnel issue:** Sustainability depends on finding suitable personnel. A combination of knowledgeable Slovak experts (system orientation) and Ukrainian workers (trust building) seems to be a necessity.

"We really need a knowledgeable Slovak social worker who can cover everything that works in Slovakia and how it works. It is difficult for our colleague from Ukraine to understand the Slovak system."

,,,...it's also about finding the right personnel."

"Clients feel more confident when we have Ukrainians on our team. They open up much more."

- **Gradual disappearance of state forms of assistance:** In terms of the sustainability of quality and availability of services, the organization faces critical pressure due to the gradual disappearance of state and external forms of assistance. Specifically, these aspects are:

a) Lack of interpreting services at offices: Until now, the integration model has been partly dependent on the presence of interpreters at employment offices, but these positions are currently being phased out. This lack of interpreters places an administrative and

communication burden directly on the organization's capacity.

b) Absence of field workers: The current risk to the sustainability of process continuity is the lack of a "field worker" position to accompany clients directly to the offices. Without this component, there is a risk that clients will not be able to independently handle the necessary matters in the Slovak system.

"What we don't have and would be nice to have is a field worker who can go with them to the employment office and can go. Because there used to be interpreters at the offices and they were available, but that's no longer the case, everything is coming to an end, including this form of assistance."

- **Systemic limitations:** Persistent problems with housing (especially for seniors) and the unavailability of appointments at the immigration office are significant obstacles to sustainability.

"It is impossible to find decent housing. That is a big problem."

"I don't have the tools to help them. There is no accommodation facility, no organization, and the city does nothing."

"No organization has yet filed a complaint with the Attorney General's Office that this is coming from above, that it is set up so that there are no appointments at the immigration police?"

- **The fight against exploitation and undeclared work:** An important part of this is raising awareness about the benefits of legal employment. Workers actively explain to clients the risks of undeclared work and the benefits of a proper employment contract (insurance, social benefits).

"...we explained to them that undeclared work is not good, that if you try to get a contract, you will have benefits, it is better because of insurance, etc."

- **Methodological assistance:** Since the integration center is a relatively new element, the organization would greatly benefit from methodological assistance in terms of sustainability, i.e., clear steps and instructions on how to proceed.

"It would help me or us a lot if we really knew methodically how to proceed."

Replicability

The organizational model contains elements that are inspiring and transferable to other environments:

- **Multicultural team:** The basis for replicable success is the creation of a team composed of Slovaks and foreigners (in this case, Ukrainians). This approach breaks down barriers and

increases clients' willingness to open up.

"...definitely have a multilingual and multicultural team, and within that team, be prepared and open so that there is an opportunity to build trust with clients."

- **Community building:** Focusing on connecting cultures and creating a "family spirit" through joint activities is a universally applicable approach to integration.

"We create a family spirit and acceptance for anyone who comes to us."

- **Positive communication towards the majority:** The recommended strategy for other organizations is to actively spread positive stories about integration among the majority society, which helps change perceptions of foreigners.

"I see a great need to tell Slovaks positive stories about integration, about how these people are getting involved, how they are trying. To tell Slovaks about the good things these foreigners are doing, so that the perception of the majority society changes at least a little bit for the better."

- **Targeted assistance for specific groups:** The workshop project shows how activities can be effectively targeted at marginalized subgroups (e.g., older women).

13. Good practice 3

Actor profile (municipality organization)

The municipal organization operates at the local level and, since 2023, has been intensively involved in issues related to foreigners, especially Ukrainian migrants. The organization responds to the needs of the local labor market and integration through educational, integration, and support activities.

Its activities are closely linked to the city, employers, and other actors in the area. The target group is mainly working foreigners who need language and administrative support in adapting to the Slovak environment.

Model description

The model of the city organization is based on practical, flexible, and locally anchored integration support that links education, employment, and community integration. A key element of the model is its direct overlap with the work environment and its ability to respond to the real time and work constraints of Ukrainian migrants.

Main pillars of the model:

- **Language education as a key element**

The organization's greatest success is its Slovak language courses for Ukrainian migrants, which are designed to be practical and focused on work situations. Language is understood as a basic prerequisite for stable employment, independence, and social integration.

- **Training provided directly by employers**

An innovative element of the model is the implementation of language courses directly at employers, in cooperation with specific companies. This approach significantly reduces barriers to participation and increases employee motivation. The courses are:

- adapted to work shifts,
- held during or after working hours,
- content-focused on a specific work context.

- **Administrative and integration support**

The organization aims to provide assistance in the areas of administration, translation, and orientation in the system, responding to the everyday practical needs of foreigners.

This support is especially important for working migrants who do not have the time or capacity to deal with complex administrative processes on their own.

- **Psychosocial and community support**

The activities also include art therapy and support for people coping with trauma. The organization also works to integrate foreigners into the wider local community, thereby strengthening social ties and a sense of belonging.

- **Cooperation with the research sector**

The organization cooperates with a research institution and has set up working groups to map the needs of employers and Ukrainian employees. This element allows for better targeting of activities and the transfer of knowledge into practice.

Outcomes and effectiveness

Based on qualitative findings, it can be concluded that the organization's model is particularly effective in the area of language integration and stabilization of migrant workers. The highest added value lies in the fact that the training is:

- time-realistic,
- closely linked to the work environment,

- implemented in cooperation with employers.

This approach increases the sustainability of participation, improves language skills in real-life situations, and indirectly contributes to lower employee turnover. For employers, the model is a practical tool for stabilizing the workforce, while for leavers it is a path to greater independence and security.

Partnerships

The model works on the basis of strong cooperation at the local level:

- **Employers** – key partners in the implementation of language courses directly in the workplace.
- **The city and municipal institutions** – provide the framework, support, and legitimacy for the activities.
- **Research organizations** – contribute to the analytical background and better understanding of the needs of target groups.
- **Community and integration actors** – support in the area of psychosocial assistance and community development.

Sustainability

The sustainability of the model depends mainly on:

- stable funding for educational activities,
- continued cooperation with employers,
- personnel capacities capable of working with foreigners in various areas (language, administration, psychosocial support).

The advantage is that the model is low-cost compared to traditional integration services and has the potential to be used in the long term, provided there is political and financial support at the local level.

Replicability

The municipal organization model contains several elements that are easily transferable to other cities and regions:

- language courses held directly at employers' premises,
- time flexibility adapted to shift work,
- linking training to specific work situations,
- combination of language, skills, and community support.

This approach represents a practical best practice that can serve as inspiration for other cities and local organizations working with foreigners and refugees.

14. Cross-case lessons

A key lesson learned from practice is that direct employment by companies is more effective than agency employment for the successful integration and stability of candidates. Experience shows that Ukrainian workers are often highly qualified, but are willing to accept lower positions in order to get a job, and their turnover is lower than that of domestic employees. The processes in the field are greatly facilitated by the presence of bilingual coordinators directly in the companies and an emphasis on clear, transparent communication of the rules to all parties. At the same time, it has been confirmed that cultural proximity and lower language barriers are a key advantage which, in combination with integration activities such as joint cultural days, contributes to better networking and motivation in work teams. The practices of organizations reveal serious systemic failures, where non-transparent practices of employment agencies often lead to legal uncertainty for clients and unprocessed documents. Experience points to the existence of discriminatory mechanisms in the labor market, where applicants are penalized for seeking independent employment outside the agency network, and confirms the critical dysfunctionality of the foreign police reservation system. Foreign students are a particularly vulnerable group, exposed to extreme stress due to the bureaucratic vacuum, which, combined with the risks of undeclared work, underscores the need for professional legal and social navigation in the Slovak system.

The importance of direct employment: Candidates find it more attractive and stable to be placed directly in a permanent position with a company than to be employed through an agency.

Qualifications versus willingness: Experience has shown that Ukrainian applicants are often highly qualified, but in order to get a job, they are willing to accept lower-skilled positions, which helps them integrate more quickly.

Risks associated with employment agencies: Practical examples show that relying on agencies often leads to legal uncertainty. Clients arrive without residence permits and documents, even though they have paid for these services.

Transparency as a means of preventing turnover: Clear and direct communication about future steps and precisely defined rules for both employees and employers have proven to be the best protection against misunderstandings.

Cultural proximity as an advantage: Experience has shown that cultural and linguistic similarities with Ukrainian workers greatly facilitate the integration process compared to migrants from other, culturally more distant countries.

The role of coordinators: In logistics companies, Ukrainian coordinators who are fluent in both languages have proven to be a key element, serving as a bridge between management and employees.

Bureaucratic barriers: An extreme lesson is the dysfunctionality of the appointment system at the immigration police, which raises suspicions that this is a deliberately set barrier from higher levels of management.

15. Final conclusions

The findings confirm that Ukrainian employees do not represent competition for the domestic market, but effectively fill long-term unfilled and scarce positions in logistics and manufacturing. Despite complex administration and a lack of support from the state in providing information about legislative changes, Slovak companies are well prepared to integrate these workers, which is also facilitated by cultural proximity and lower candidate turnover. The agency sees high innovative potential in connecting cultures and introducing new methods of team communication, such as encounter groups, which increase motivation within the team. Although Ukrainian workers are often willing to accept lower-skilled jobs, their contribution lies in their diligence and greater ability to adapt to market conditions compared to domestic applicants. It is also important to note that for organizations to function successfully, it is critical to maintain the financial continuity of projects without time gaps so that the professional team does not fall apart. The most effective approach in practice has been a mixed Slovak-Ukrainian team model, which combines expert knowledge of the Slovak system with a high level of trust from clients. Despite the successful work of organizations with many clients, serious systemic barriers remain, particularly in the area of inadequate housing for seniors, the ineffectiveness of appointments at the foreign police, and problematic practices of employment agencies. The future of integration in the region depends on the ability to replace disappearing state support services (e.g., interpreters) with its own field workers and on actively breaking down social bubbles by spreading positive stories about foreigners to the majority society.

Economic and social benefits: Foreign employees do not take jobs away from Slovak citizens, but fill positions that have long been in short supply or unfillable on the Slovak market (welders, machinists, production workers).

Need for better state support: The agency perceives a lack of support from the state and identifies a need for better information about legislative changes and multilingual versions of state job portals.

Risk of illegal employment: Experience confirms the need for ongoing education, as working without a contract ultimately does not pay off for clients due to the absence of insurance and protection.

Adaptability of companies: Most cooperating companies are already well prepared for the arrival of foreigners, have the necessary documents translated, and have integration processes in place.

Innovation potential: The arrival of new employees also has a motivating effect on domestic staff. Companies are successfully introducing innovations such as "encounter groups," which help resolve team conflicts and improve corporate culture.

Market stability: Despite the administrative challenges following the change in status of those who have left, the labor market is expected to remain stable in the near future, with only minimal changes.

Need for continuous funding: In order to maintain the organization and retain the team, it is absolutely essential that the National Integration Project continues without financial gaps that would lead to the loss of professional staff.

The role of trust in the team: The most effective model has proven to be a combination of a Slovak expert who knows the system and a Ukrainian worker who, thanks to a shared culture, paves the way for client trust.

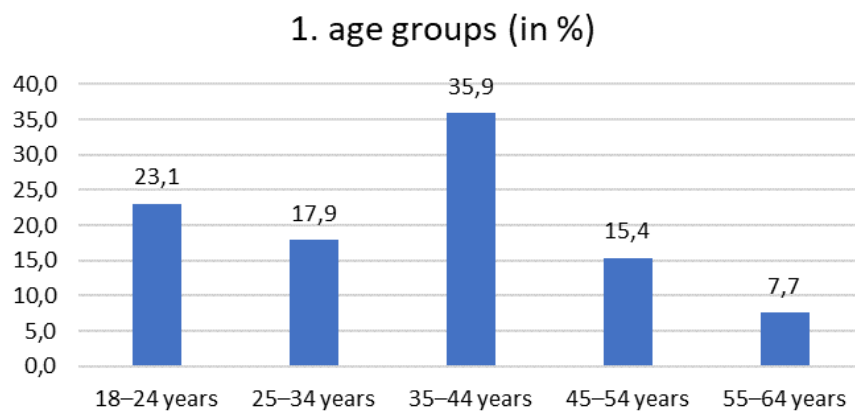
Critical shortage of accommodation: The biggest unresolved problem remains decent housing for seniors. Currently, there is no systemic tool, organization, or support from the city to address this issue.

Need for methodology and fieldwork: To further improve services, clearer methodological guidance and the introduction of a field worker position to compensate for the lack of interpreters in government offices are essential.

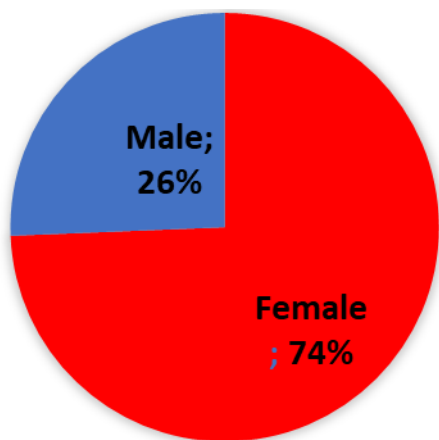
The importance of communication with the majority: Working only with foreigners is not enough for successful integration. It is essential to break down social bubbles and actively communicate positive stories about integration to the Slovak public in order to change the perception of the majority.

Attachments

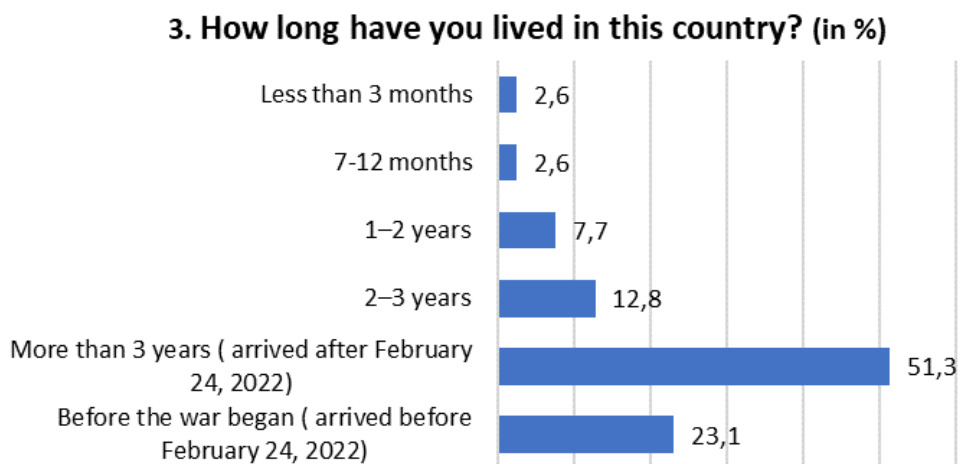
Graph 1: What is your age group?



Graph 2: What is your gender?



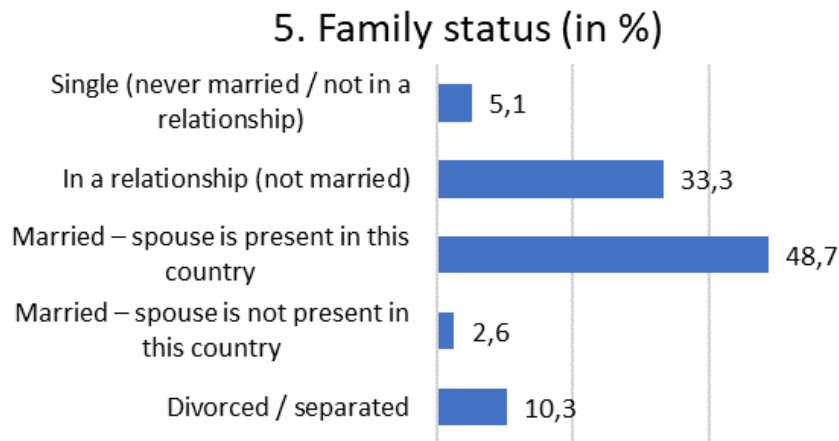
Graph 3: How long have you lived in this country?



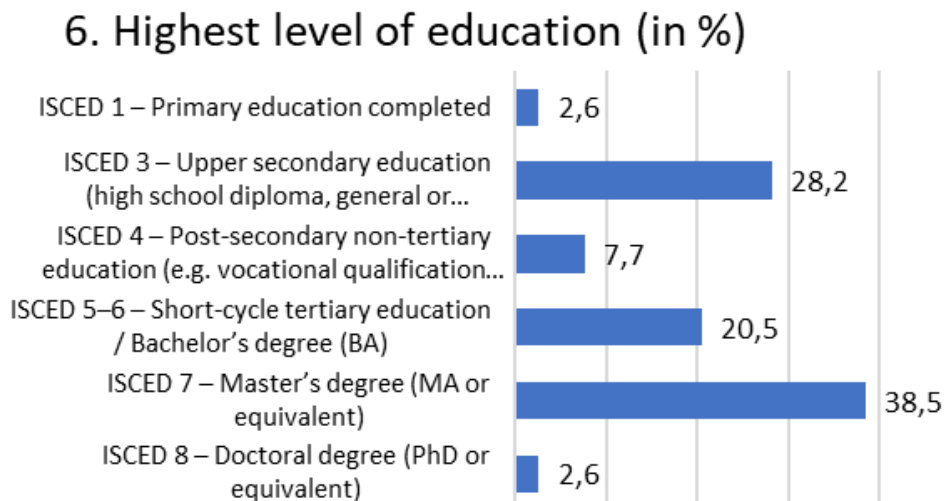
Graph 4: How many people live in your household, including yourself?

4. Household members	
1	2,6%
2	28,2%
3	23,1%
4	28,2%
5	12,8%
6	5,1%
mean	3,36
median	3,0

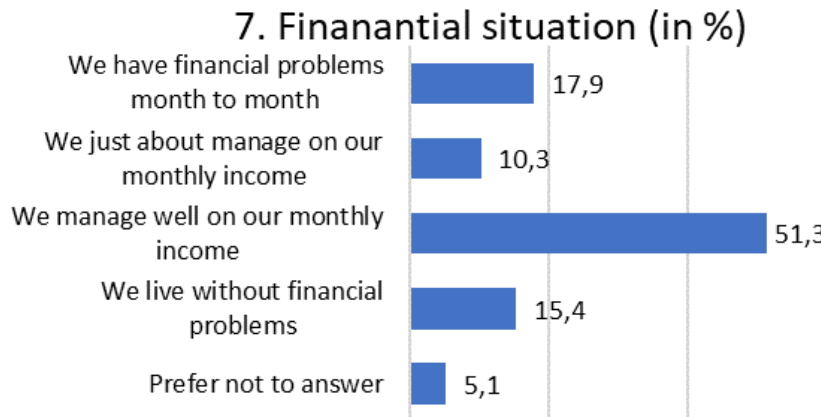
Graph 5: What is your current family situation, in this country?



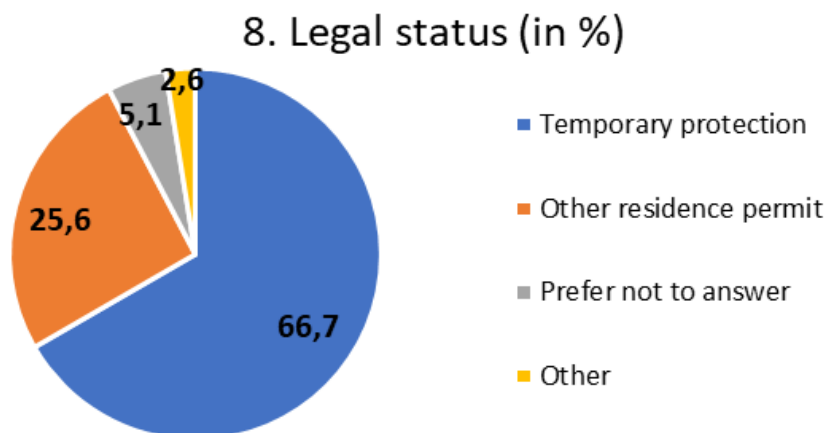
Graph 6: What is your highest level of education completed?



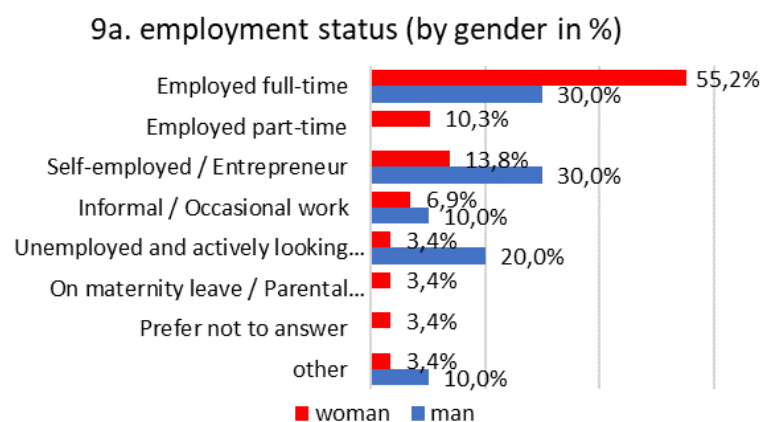
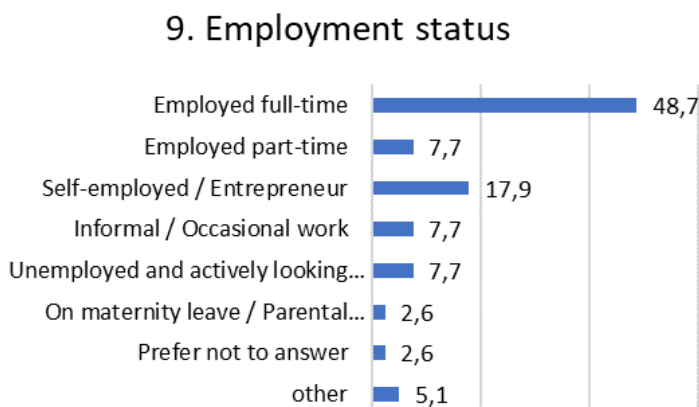
Graph 7: How would you describe your household's financial situation?



Graph 8: What is your current legal status in this country?

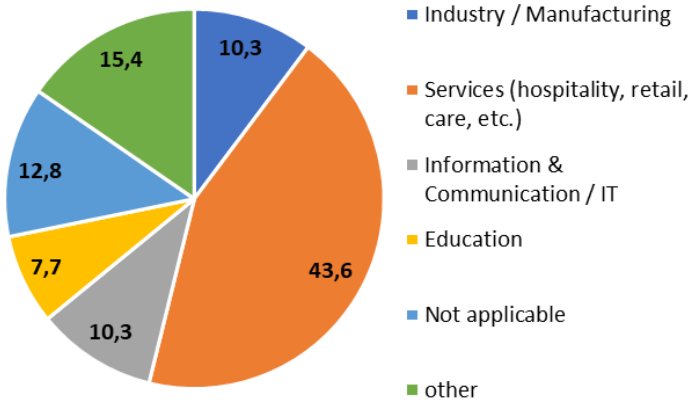


Graph 9 and 9a: What is your current labour marketstatus? (by gender)

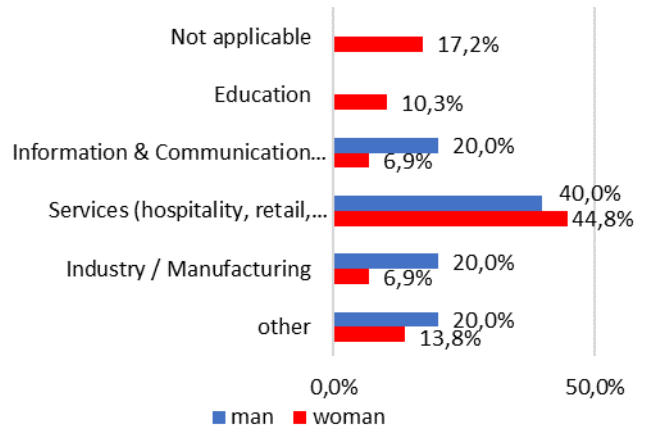


Graph 10: In which sector are you mainly working?

10. In which sector are you mainly working? (%)

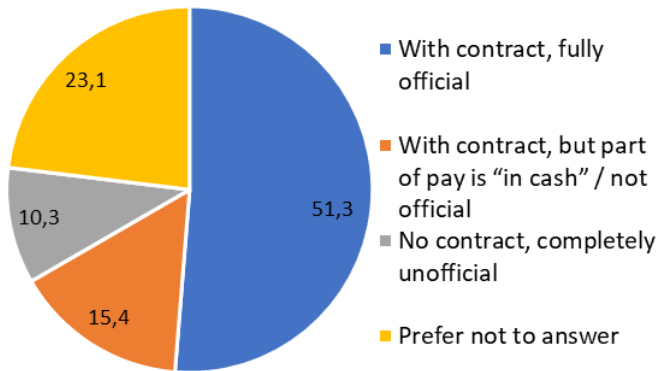


10a. In which sector are you mainly working? (by gender)



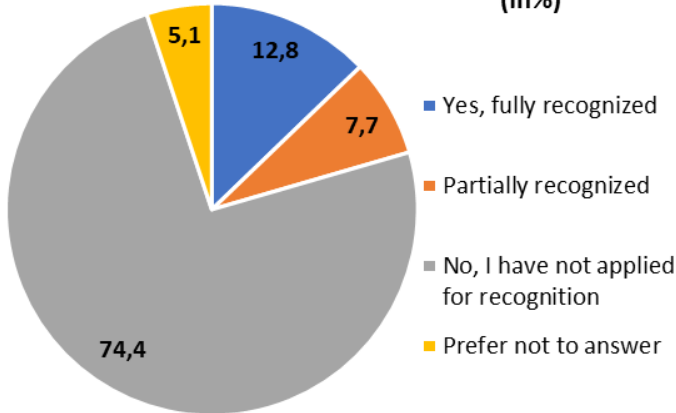
Graph 11: How is your job registered?

11. How is your job registered? (in%)



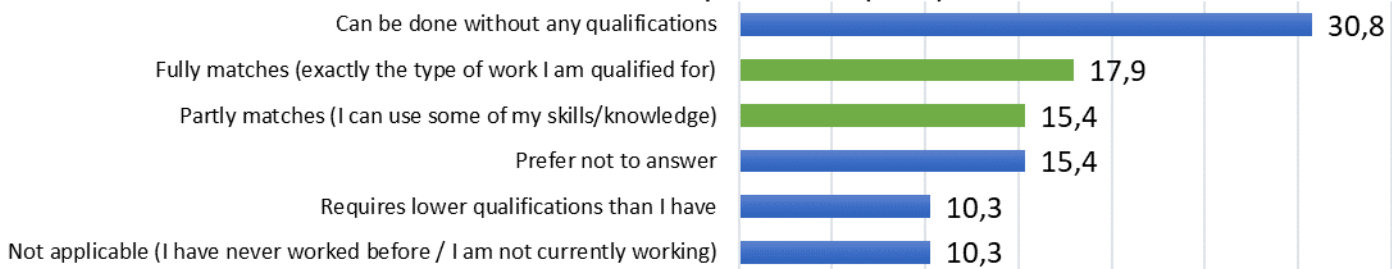
Graph 12: Has your qualification been recognized in this country?

12. Has your qualification been recognized?
(in%)



Graph 13: If you are currently working, how well does your job match your previous education or work experience?

13. If you are currently working, how well does your job match your previous education or work experience? (in %)



Graph 13a: If you are currently working, how well does your job match your previous education or work experience?

13 a. If you are currently working, how well does your job match your previous education or work experience? (by gender)



Graph 14: To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

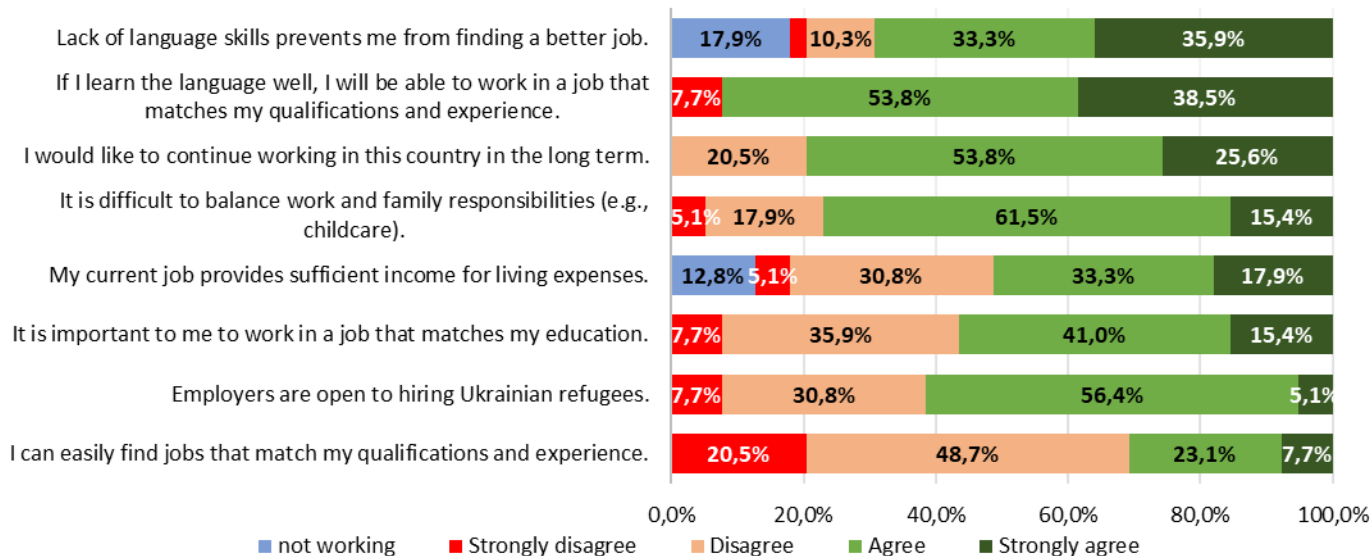


Table 15: To what extent are the following barriers significant for you in finding and keeping a job? average of responses from 1-10 (10=most significant)

15. To what extent are the following barriers significant for you in finding and keeping a job?	finding job		keeping job	
	finding job	keeping job	finding job	keeping job
Language barrier	5,97	6,28		
Poor working conditions (low pay, long hours, instability)	5,90	6,28		
Lack of available jobs	5,64	6,00		
Lack of recognition of qualifications	5,62	5,59		
Lack of appropriate qualifications	5,51	5,41		
Lack of support (from organizations, employment services, employers)	5,21	5,38		
Difficulties with transport/ distance to workplace	5,26	5,15		
Lack of work experience in this country	4,85	5,00		
Discrimination (e.g., nationality, gender, age)	4,64	4,97		
Lack of digital/computer skills	4,62	4,62		
Legal work restrictions	4,41	4,56		
Health or disability issues	4,10	4,21		
Lack of childcare	4,95	4,08		
Other (please specify):	3,23	3,64		

Table 16: What type of employment support have you received and from whom?

16. What type of employment support have you received and from whom?	Did not receive support	Public employment service (PES)	NGO / non-profit organization	Training centre / school / university	Employer	Friends / family / informal network	Other
Recognition of qualifications	69,2%	2,6%	2,6%	12,8%	7,7%	0,0%	5,1%
Job placement / matching	51,3%	2,6%	2,6%	2,6%	15,4%	17,9%	7,7%
Job counselling / career guidance	48,7%	5,1%	7,7%	5,1%	17,9%	7,7%	7,7%
Other	48,7%	2,6%	2,6%	10,3%	7,7%	15,4%	12,8%
Training / upskilling	43,6%	0,0%	7,7%	7,7%	17,9%	20,5%	2,6%
Language course	30,8%	2,6%	25,6%	15,4%	5,1%	15,4%	5,1%
mean		2,6%	8,1%	9,0%	12,0%	15,8%	6,8%

Graph 17: What kind of support would help you most?

17. What kind of support would help you most?

