



MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

REPORT, 2023 | BY THE LATVIAN RED CROSS



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the European Union



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Provision of quality and
timely psychological first aid

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| KEY ABBREVIATIONS | 2 |
| INTRODUCTION | 3 |
| OBJECTIVES OF THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT | 5 |
| METHODOLOGY | 5 |
| SITUATION OVERVIEW | 6 |
| RESULTS: DIFFICULTIES FACED BY PEOPLE COMING FROM UKRAINE | 8 |
| CHALLENGES IN MEETING ESSENTIAL NEEDS | 8 |
| MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL WELLBEING | 15 |
| RESULTS: AVAILABILITY OF ASSISTANCE | 20 |
| RECOMMENDATIONS | 21 |
| CULTURAL AND CONTEXTUAL ASPECTS REGARDING MENTAL HEALTH | 22 |
| THE ROLE OF LATRC IN IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH | 23 |
| KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS..... | 25 |
| SUFFICIENT MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT | 25 |
| CARING FOR THE LATRC TEAM..... | 26 |
| STRENGTHENING COOPERATION..... | 26 |
| CONTACT US..... | 27 |

KEY ABBREVIATIONS

IFRC - International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

LatRC - the Latvian Red Cross

INTRODUCTION

Two days after Latvia declared its independence on November 20, 1918, the Latvian Red Cross (LatRC) was established by doctors, lawyers, engineers and public officials. Originally, the LatRC's goal was to aid wounded soldiers, prisoners of war, injured civilians, refugees, and orphans. Over the years, LatRC's assistance has expanded to include various forms of support, such as social crisis centers, humanitarian aid, first aid training, home care, and distribution of European support packages. The organization now has around 4,500 members, over 1,000 volunteers, and more than 2000 employees, operating across Latvia's regions and subdivisions to provide help where needed.

LatRC's focus is on providing social services, health reinforcement, education, and first aid during mass events. It actively participates in state, local, international, and EU social programs, managing 26 social centers throughout Latvia. LatRC stands as one of Latvia's largest humanitarian and non-governmental organizations, offering support across the nation for daily assistance and emergencies, including armed conflicts.

Latvia is primarily recognized as a transit country. Additionally, as of March 2023, according to information from the Latvian Ministry of Interior, over 252,555 citizens of Ukraine have transited Latvia by crossing either the Russian or Belarusian border, with the aim of reaching other EU Member States or returning to the government-controlled territories of Ukraine. Latvia continues to host and provide refuge for relocated Ukrainians (further used as Ukrainians) displaced from Ukraine. Currently, 45,744 displaced individuals from Ukraine are officially registered with the Latvian Ministry of Interior (CAK- Civil Support Information Registry) for temporary protection, with numbers expected to rise in 2023 and beyond.

Our response strategy focuses on addressing the evolving needs of displaced individuals from Ukraine in Latvia, including:

- Provide basic humanitarian aid,
- Provide support under the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) program to reduce material insecurity (food and hygienic packages). Continuous evidence-based advocacy for increased support,
- Provide housing - dormitories for displaced people from Ukraine,
- The inclusion of Ukrainians in socio-cultural integration into Latvian society through language courses and cultural awareness events,
- Efficient provision of Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA),
- Inclusive Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) through Child-Friendly Spaces (CFSs) and social integration, particularly for vulnerable individuals (parents and children) via Case Management,
- Development of First Aid and public health awareness.

Inclusive Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) has been a cornerstone of our efforts, primarily facilitated through dedicated programs such as Child-Friendly Spaces (CFSs) and initiatives focused on social integration. With a special emphasis on supporting vulnerable

individuals, including parents and children, our MHPSS activities have evolved over time. Originally designed to address emergency and short-term needs during transit, these efforts have transitioned to meet the evolving and longer-term requirements of the community. This needs assessment has been undertaken to gain insights into the changing dynamics of MHPSS needs, aiming to gauge the impact of our initiatives and tailor our support accordingly.

Our operation prioritizes Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) and Protection, Gender, and Inclusion (PGI), while also strengthening capacities in CVA, resource mobilization, case management, migration, and information management.

Since March 2022, LatRC has provided housing - dormitories for up to 200 displaced people from Ukraine. Living in LatRC dormitories, displaced people from Ukraine receive basic humanitarian aid, mentoring, psychosocial support, employment guidance, school enrolment, after school activities, language course and more.

The majority of these displaced individuals, particularly vulnerable groups like single mothers and the elderly, face challenges in securing legal employment and income, relying on social benefits due to limited job opportunities. Negotiations for employment are ongoing, and some displaced individuals have already secured employment with LatRC.

Beyond practical assistance, LatRC promotes integration through activities for children, language training, and creative workshops. In 2022 alone, LatRC provided assistance to about 10,000 displaced individuals from Ukraine each month.

Table 1: LatRC team involved in helping people from Ukraine.



LatRC is an active participant in the Refugee Support Coordination Group, collaborating with other non-governmental organizations to address the needs of displaced individuals from Ukraine.

In the course of its operations, the LatRC relies on an extensive network of local committees and regional branches, enabling it to offer services nationwide and establish a more direct connection with each beneficiary. This localized approach ensures that the support provided

is tailored to the specific needs of displaced Ukrainians in Latvia, addressing the challenges they face in their new environment.

Table 2: LatRC social support services and other activities in the territory of Latvia.



OBJECTIVES OF THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The aim of this current needs assessment is to collect data on the following aspects:

- the challenges encountered by individuals arriving from Ukraine due to the ongoing international armed conflict;
- strategies for coping with stress employed by these individuals;
- the availability of mental health and psychosocial support;
- resources provided by the LatRC and the activities within the Mental Health Programme. (objective is to find out what activities to prioritize for MHPSS programming based on findings).

A crucial goal of this assessment is to ascertain the success and relevance of the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) activities conducted by the LatRC, aiming to understand whether these initiatives are making a meaningful impact on the well-being of the respondents. Additionally, the assessment aims to capture the perspectives of the respondents regarding these activities, offering valuable insights to prioritize and tailor future MHPSS programming based on the findings.

METHODOLOGY

The needs assessment survey was conducted between June and July 2023. The questionnaires used for the survey were developed by the LatRC team based on the IFRC Psychosocial Support Centre guidelines and were substantively adapted. The survey encompassed a diverse range of respondents, collecting data on age, gender, and other relevant diversity factors. Displaced Ukrainians were a specific group targeted during data collection. The survey was

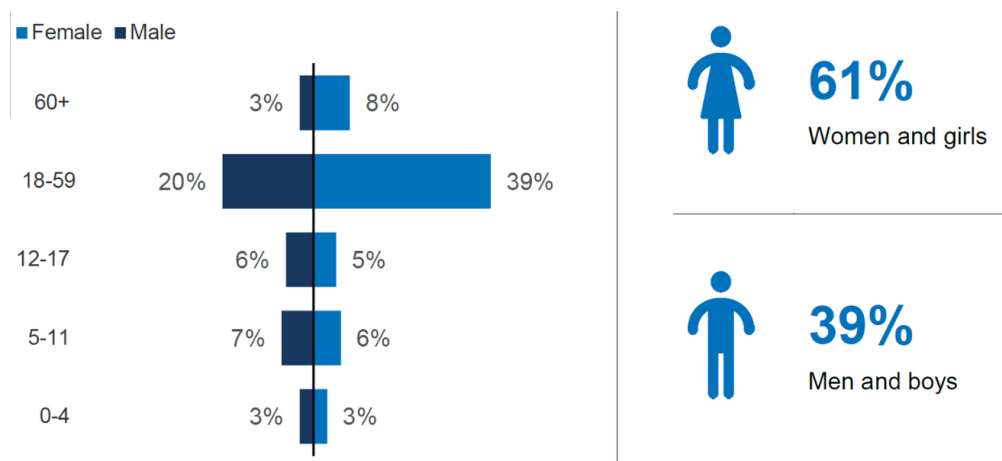
accommodated with questionnaires available in Russian as a third language for communication between Ukrainians and Russian speaking LatRC's staff. Survey was executed through personal interactions at LatRC local branches throughout Latvia and social accommodation centers in Adamova and Vecbebri, where LatRC hosted more than 200 displaced Ukrainians. Respondents were engaged only individually, utilizing a mix of online links and traditional paper forms.

The LatRC team developed the questionnaires based on the IFRC Psychosocial Support Centre guidelines, with substantive adaptations to suit the specific context. The monitoring process involved 407 voluntary participants, with up to 90% engaging in face-to-face interactions and the remaining 10% participating online. Throughout the process, all participants were thoroughly briefed on the goals and objectives of the monitoring, emphasizing transparency and informed consent.

SITUATION OVERVIEW

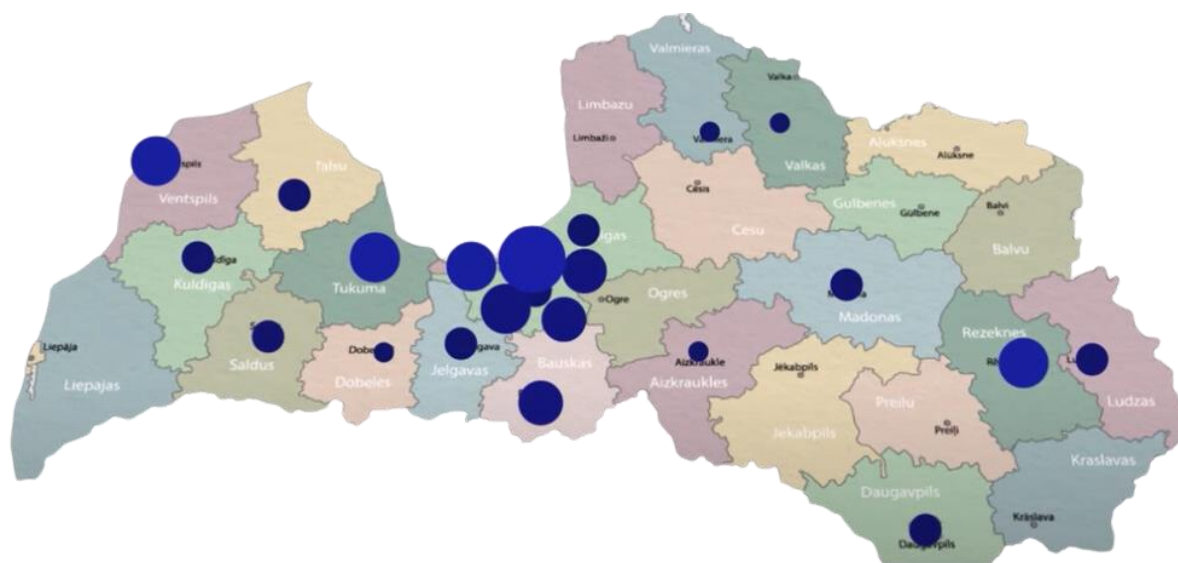
Since February 24, 2022, due to the ongoing war Ukrainians have been escaping from Ukraine, seeking refuge in neighboring European countries. From the commencement of the conflict a significant number of Ukrainians —252,555 to be exact—have been documented entering Latvia via its external (non-EU) borders, as reported by the Latvian Ministry of Interior in March 2023. Among them, over 51 000 individuals have been officially registered with the Latvian Ministry of human system FPRIS, but according to the latest information 45,744 individuals are believed to be present within the country.

Table 3: Breakdown by age and gender of people arriving from Ukraine and registering in Latvia. Source: Ukraine situation regional refugee response plan created by UNHCR for Latvia January 2023.



According to Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for providing temporary protection, the right to freedom of movement is not limited, and there are no legislative restrictions on the regional residence possibilities for Ukrainians in Latvia. As a result, Ukrainians have the freedom to declare their place of residence anywhere within the territory of Latvia. The most popular cities include Riga, Jurmala, Jelgava, Tukums, Daugavpils, Ventspils, Bauska, and Rezekne. This trend is linked to the existence of industrial and business clusters on one hand, and the availability of social centers on the other.

Table 4: Breakdown of arrivals from Ukraine in Latvia by place of registration. Source: Statistics Ministry of the Interior of Latvia March 2023.



In 2022-2023, the Latvian Red Cross (LatRC) provided assistance to displaced individuals from Ukraine, including humanitarian aid, delivery of food parcels, first aid, information on health issues, and online and in-person information support. LatRC's volunteers and staff members offered psychosocial and practical support in regional branches for displaced individuals from Ukraine.

In addition to practical and psychosocial support, LatRC offered significant support for various integration activities for displaced individuals from Ukraine, including activities for children, language training, integration events, creative workshops, and more.

Since February 2022, LatRC has been providing support to approximately 10,000 displaced individuals from Ukraine each month through the distribution of ESF+ food packages, hygiene and other donated supplies.

LatRC also provided accommodation, mentoring, support for finding employment, individual housing, school and kindergarten services for children, afterschool activities, and more for approximately up to 200 displaced individuals from Ukraine, who are living in LatRC accommodation centers permanently since March 2022. 80% of them have not moved to private housing since arrival (12 months and more).

LatRC continued to provide support for establishing independent places of residence, which became increasingly important, especially for vulnerable groups, such as single mothers with children, the elderly, and disabled individuals, who make up the majority of displaced individuals from Ukraine in Latvia. Most of them don't have legal employment and income in Latvia, with most relying on social benefits. Uncertainty about the future, limited income, and a lack of affordable private housing options were the primary reasons for living in communal accommodation.

To provide coordinated and targeted support to Ukrainians, LatRC collaborates closely with local municipalities, governmental institutions, and other NGOs.

In July-December 2022, IOM Latvia carried out a needs and intentions assessment of Ukrainians involving 997 participants (61% women, 39% men). The main needs identified by the survey participants were declared that financial issues were one of the main challenges, followed by challenges finding long-term housing (32%), lack of information (18%), and language barrier (14%).

In June - July 2023, the LatRC carried out a needs assessment of Ukrainian refugees living in Latvia. The survey was organized online and involved 407 participants (67,08% women, 32,92% men) ages from 18 and up to 81. Its aim was to find out the types of difficulties faced by people arriving from Ukraine in areas such as health care, including psychological services, education, information, language courses, work and income – and the reasons for these difficulties.

In the realm of psychological services, a comprehensive needs assessment survey conducted by the LatRC revealed the following key findings:

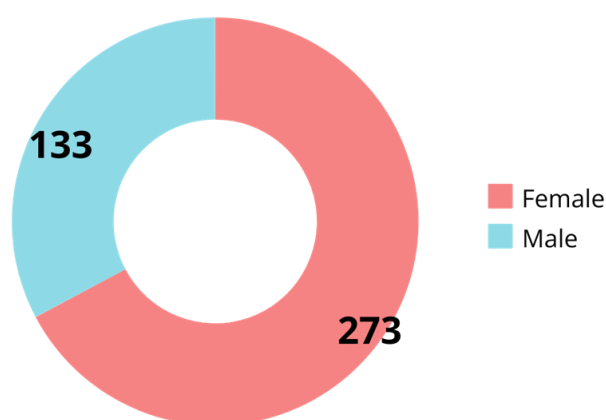
- a significant 60% of the respondents reported grappling with emotions of fear, depression, and profound distress upon their arrival in Latvia;
- critically, only 20% of those surveyed had either already sought assistance or were aware of the need for psychological support;
- an overwhelming 76% of the respondents indicated that they had not received any form of psychological support at all, underscoring a considerable gap in access to such services.

RESULTS: DIFFICULTIES FACED BY PEOPLE COMING FROM UKRAINE

CHALLENGES IN MEETING ESSENTIAL NEEDS

During June-July 2023 were interviewed 407 Ukrainians, who were receiving different services from LatRC to meet essential needs, including (insert one or two examples).

Table 5: Gender profile of surveyed Ukrainians.



67.02% of the survey respondents are women, who can be classified as a vulnerable beneficiary group due to gender inequality and discrimination. According to a 2023 UNFPA report on the

situation of Ukrainian refugees, women were even more vulnerable to discrimination in the workplace and in society (citation for report). This was further confirmed by survey respondents who reported experiences of discrimination in the workplace to the survey administrators. As a result, various protection challenges unique to women and children have become evident. Women with infants and young children encounter difficulties in finding employment and gaining meaningful access to the job market. There is an ongoing requirement to increase awareness regarding child protection issues and the risks of gender-based violence, not only among refugees but also among the staff and volunteers who interact with them.

The majority of survey respondents are working-age adults, but there is also a portion of retirees. In Ukraine, the retirement age can start at 60 years, which means that 16.21% of survey respondents can be categorized as being of retirement age.

Table 6: Age profile of surveyed Ukrainians.

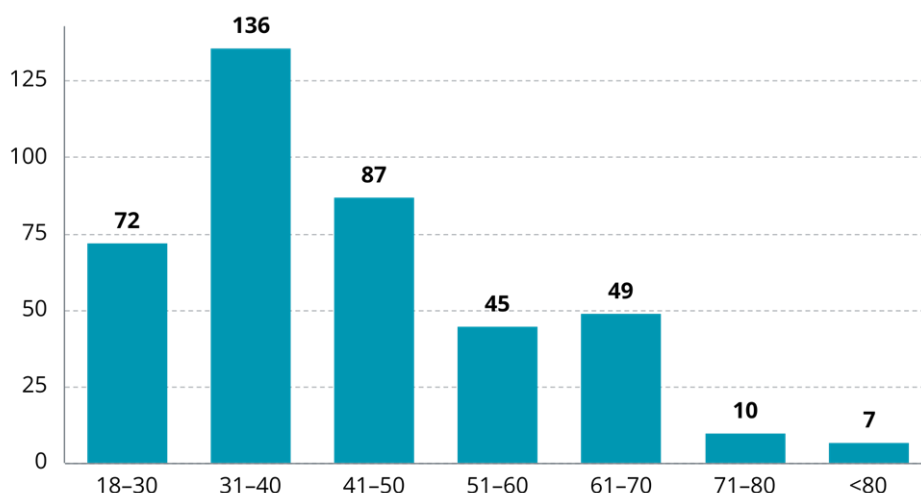
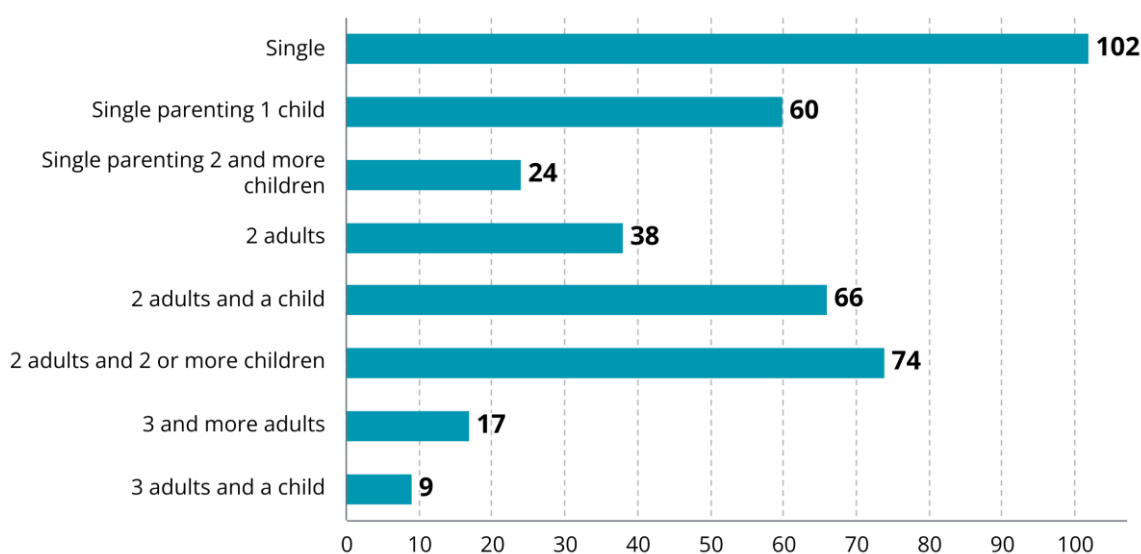


Table 7: Household profile of surveyed Ukrainians.



In Ukrainian culture, the family plays a significant role, what was indicated at *The Ukrainian Mentality An Ethno-Psychological, Historical and Comparative Exploration* written by Ukrainian

psychotherapist Aleksander Strashny. According to the conducted interviews, 25% of survey respondents are in Latvia on their own. On one hand, this allows them to be more independent, but at the same time, these individuals may lack familial or social support systems, potentially making it more challenging for them to cope with life's difficulties. Another vulnerable group is single parent households, where there is a lack of support in raising and caring for a child. Among survey respondents, such households accounted for 20.64%.

Table 8: Children's care.

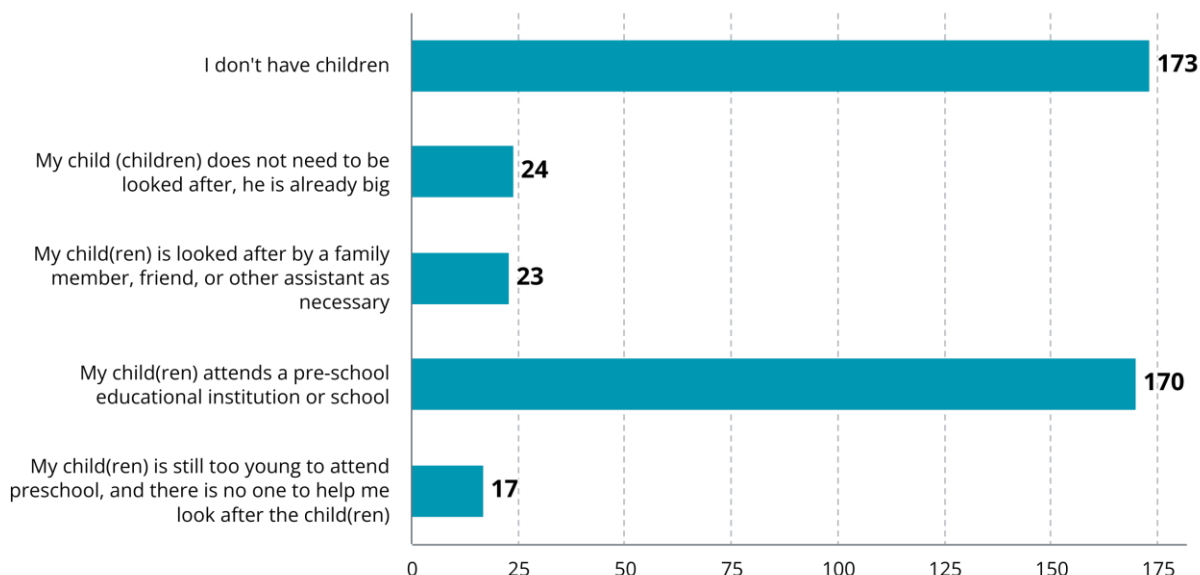
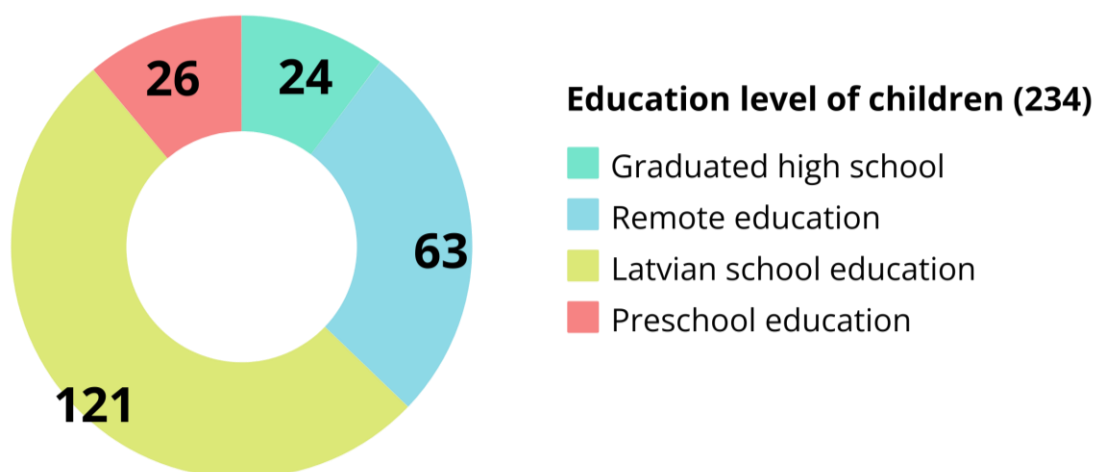


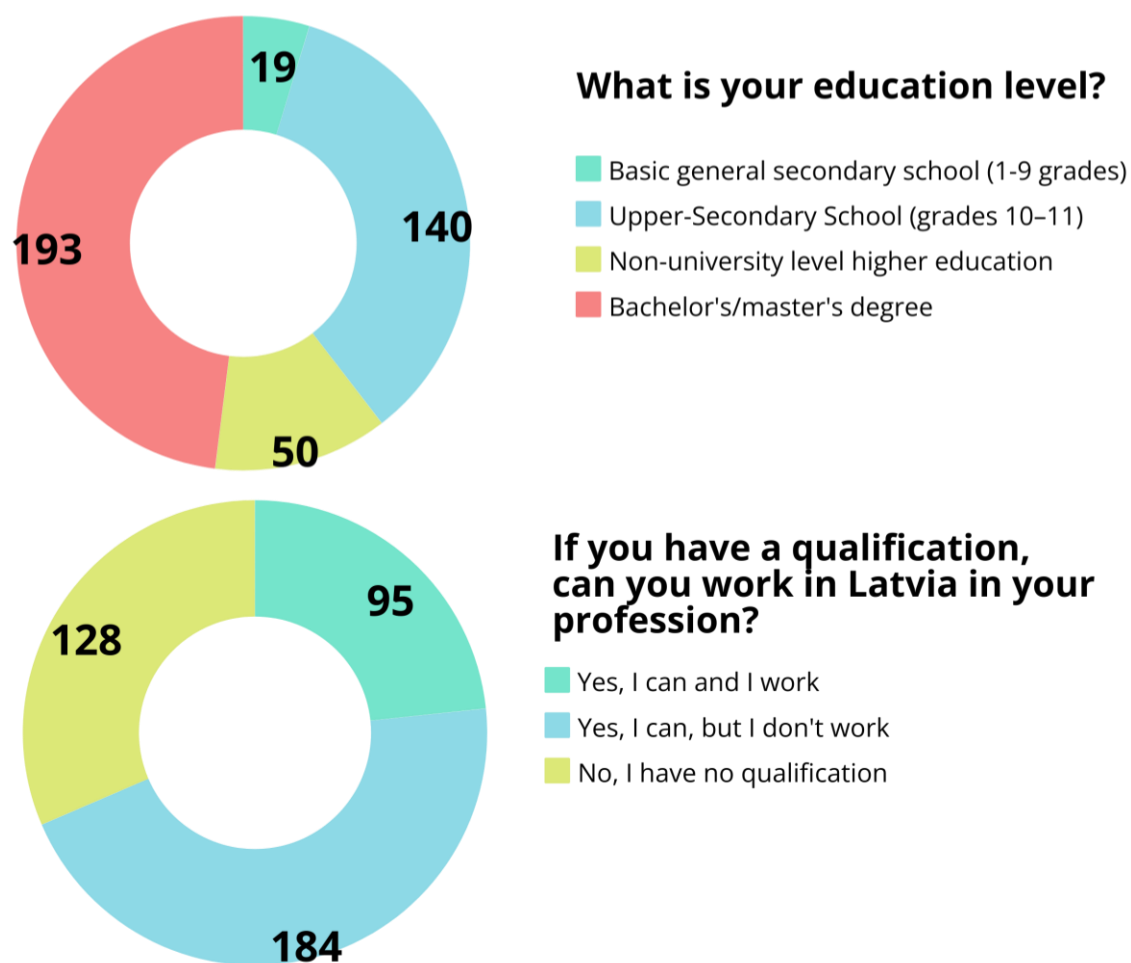
Table 9: Education level, children.



44.68% of respondents care for school-age and preschool-age children. Only 9.82% are able to rely on relatives for childcare, while 72.64% children are part of the educational process. 51.7% attend Latvian schools, and 26.92% continue remote learning at Ukrainians schools and other education institutions.

Survey participants' reasons for this include a desire to return home, maintaining a Ukrainian environment, bullying, language barriers, and education program differences. Ukraine's Ministry of Education is enhancing remote learning, but many parents choose this option, requiring support for their children's school preparation.

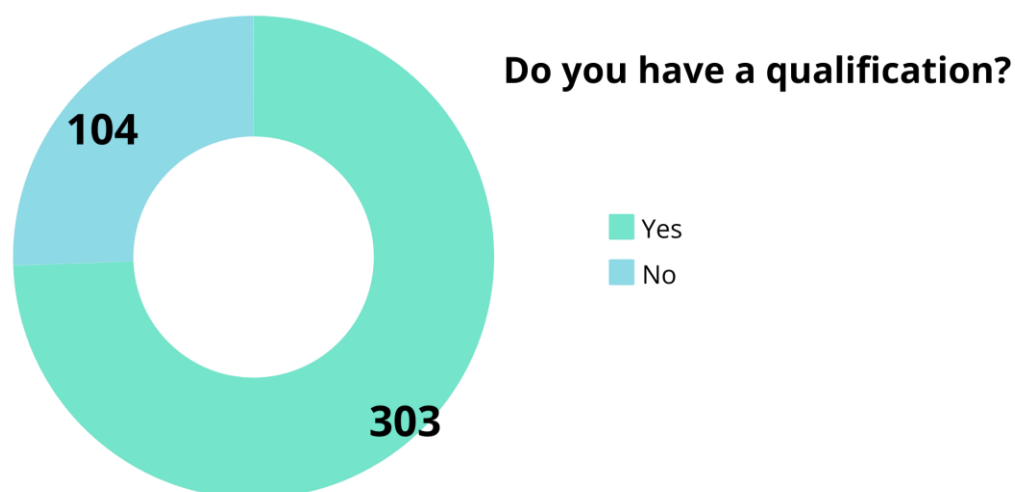
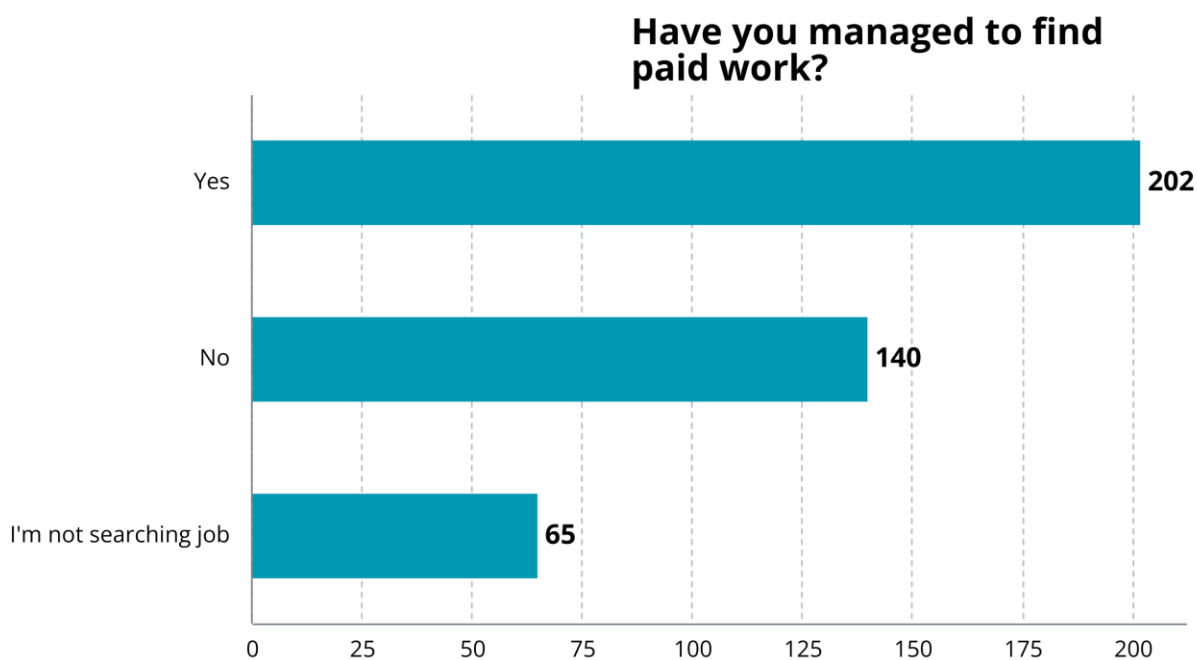
Table 10, 11: Professional profile of surveyed Ukrainians.



Based on the survey, over 59.7% of respondents possess higher or specialized education that enabled them to work in Ukraine. Out of these, 49.6% have successfully secured employment in Latvia. Nevertheless, information regarding the alignment of their jobs with their qualifications is currently unavailable.

The remaining 65 respondents, who mentioned they are not actively seeking employment, include individuals of retirement age, students, and women with children. These groups are considered the most economically vulnerable such as individuals of retirement age, students, and women with children are considered the most economically vulnerable.

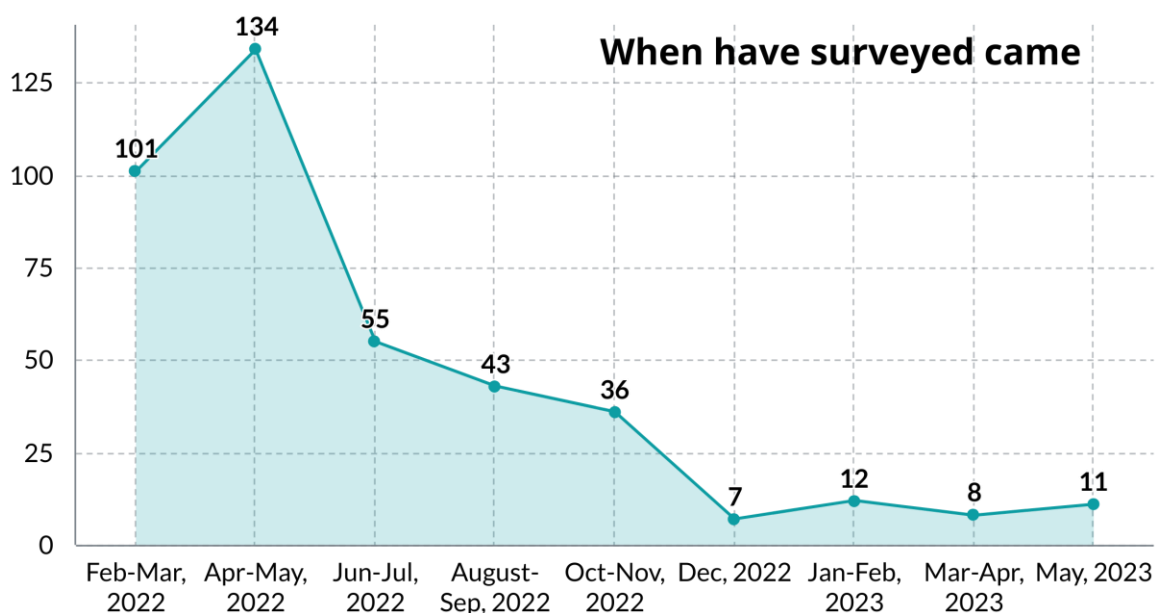
Table 12, 13: Professional profile of surveyed Ukrainians.



The European Commission has underscored the advantages of early employment for both individuals displaced by the conflict in Ukraine and the host communities. According to a 2023 UNFPA report on the situation of Ukrainian refugees, in June 2022, the European Commission provided guidance on accessing the labor market, vocational education and training, and adult learning. The European Commission likewise acknowledged these benefits and urged Member States to tackle employment and skill-related issues, including qualification recognition.

The spectrum of challenges faced by Ukrainians in Latvia is not significantly different from those encountered by Ukrainians in other countries that were forced to move due to the armed conflict in Ukraine. These challenges include meeting basic needs, language barriers, accommodation, employment, access to social services, and education. Many of these difficulties have been overcome by Ukrainians within a year of the start of the full-scale invasion, but most still require support.

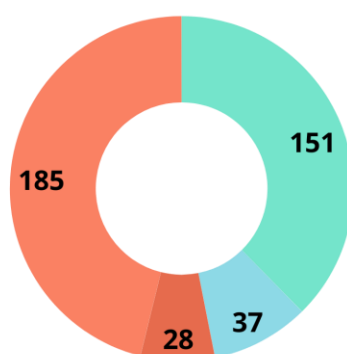
Table: the period of arrival of surveyed Ukrainians in Latvia.



Starting a new life in Latvia, each Ukrainian family had a different initial level: some arrived with nothing but documents, while others had some savings that helped them in the first weeks. The cost of living in Latvia is higher than in Ukraine, so Ukrainians turned to humanitarian aid points to set up their new places of residence. Some are still forced to seek assistance at humanitarian aid points to meet their basic needs.

Table 15: How surveyed Ukrainians acquire clothing, footwear, and household goods, as well as the types of social support services they have utilized.

How surveyed Ukrainians acquire support

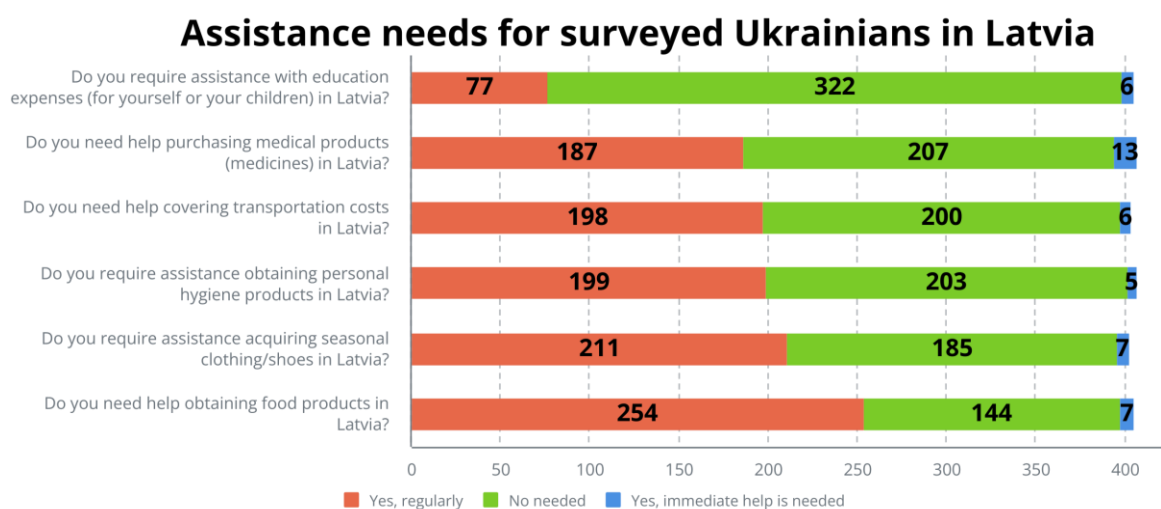


- Initially, I received clothing, footwear, and household goods for free at humanitarian aid distribution points, but now I can provide for myself.
- I bought everything myself and did not visit humanitarian aid distribution sites.
- I could purchase clothing, footwear, and household goods on my own, but now I mainly receive them for free at humanitarian aid distribution points.
- I'm receiving clothing, footwear, and household goods for free at humanitarian aid distribution points.

While 46.19% of respondents can independently meet their essential needs, a significant portion still depends on support. The establishment of over 60 humanitarian points by LatRC in Latvia demonstrates a collective commitment to providing assistance. Nevertheless, the

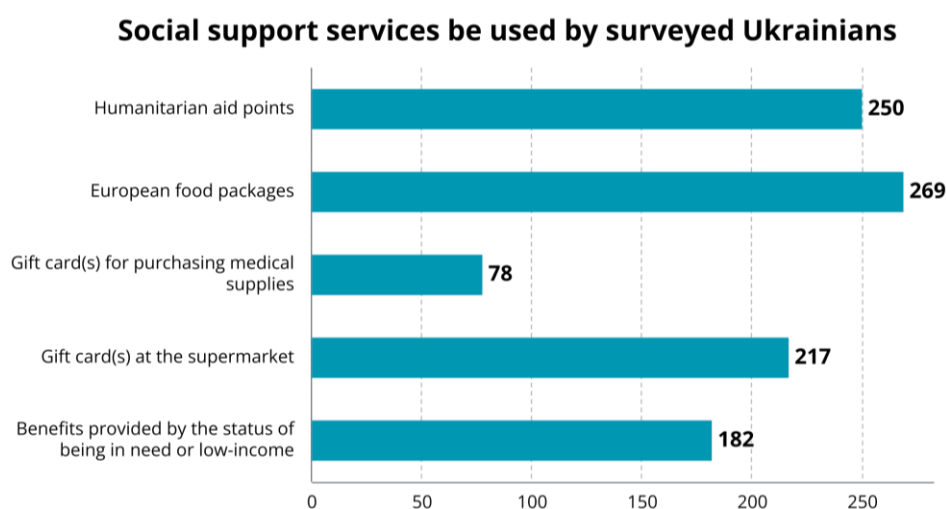
LatRC recognizes that continued reliance on this aid may impact individuals' self-esteem and potentially diminish their human capital over time. It is imperative to acknowledge that assistance at humanitarian points is not a sustainable, long-term solution for Ukrainian refugees in Latvia. The heavy reliance of Ukrainians on humanitarian assistance underscores the critical need for longer-term programming to facilitate their integration into Latvia.

Table 16: Assistance needs for surveyed Ukrainians in Latvia.



Among the surveyed respondents, the majority continue to rely on humanitarian aid for meeting their basic needs, which include food, clothing, personal hygiene items, transportation expenses, medical supplies, medications, and education. Access to suitable housing is available to only 50.1% of them. Despite over 80% of the respondents being in the working-age group, employment opportunities have been secured by only 49.2% of them. In accordance with the [Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians](#), the state and local government are obligated to offer a range of support tailored to the specific needs of Ukrainian civilians. This support encompasses educational services, integration courses, social assurances, housing provisions, access to healthcare facilities, job opportunities for individuals facing language barriers, and a streamlined process for confirming professional qualifications.

Table 17: Social support services used by surveyed Ukrainians.

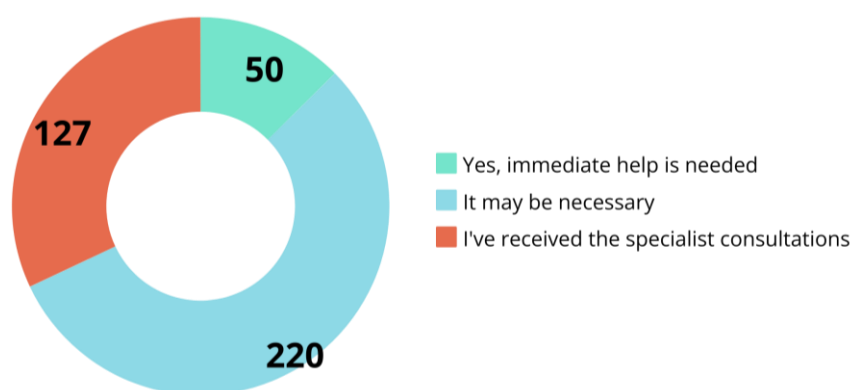


The ongoing challenge for Ukrainians to meet their basic needs highlights the difficulty of addressing mental health among competing priorities.

Despite the opportunity to receive treatment free of charge, Ukrainian refugees encounter several healthcare-related challenges: a shortage of qualified personnel, language barriers, and a lack of trust in the healthcare system due to different treatment approaches. The Latvian government is striving to address these issues by allowing Ukrainian doctors to work with a basic knowledge of the Latvian language and diploma verification as part of their education.

Table 18: Healthcare assistance needs for surveyed Ukrainians in Latvia.

Healthcare assistance needs for surveyed Ukrainians in Latvia



According to the Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians, Ukrainians have the option to reside either in communal living facilities such as social or crisis centers or to rent housing. The state social department can provide compensation for housing costs when necessary. Accommodation is expected to become an increasingly pressing need due to rising rental costs and energy prices in refugee-hosting countries. Currently, 52,7% of survey respondents are renting housing, but the number of those receiving compensation from the social department is unknown. Additionally, more than 64.5% of surveyed Ukrainians have requested cash or voucher support for housing, and 7.9% have requested assistance with furniture or other housing goods. All other respondents (47,3%) are still residing in communal shelters.

MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL WELLBEING

The term "mental health and psychosocial well-being" is globally recognized and encompasses both the psychological and psychosocial impacts of emergencies, as highlighted in the IASC Guidelines on MHPSS in Emergencies. There is a large body of research establishing the impact of displacement-related stressors (e.g. poverty, unemployment, social isolation, etc.) on the mental health of refugees and displaced persons (Source: "The Mental Health of Civilians Displaced by Armed Conflict: An Ecological Model of Refugee Distress" by Kenneth E. Miller, University of British Columbia, and Andrew Rasmussen, Fordham University). It is important to note this as the following assessment findings on mental health and psychosocial wellbeing are highly interconnected with the earlier findings on "Difficulties faced by people coming from Ukrainian."

More than 70% of those surveyed experienced fear and suffering upon their arrival. Even after arrival to safety, Ukrainians continue to be emotionally affected by the ongoing war in Ukraine and the suffering of their relatives and friends remaining in Ukraine, including temporarily

occupied areas. In addition to the emotional difficulties, many Ukrainians coming to Latvia have also experienced physical trauma and were exposed to potential psychological trauma due to military aggression and armed conflict. These experiences pre-displacement have also had a profound impact on Ukrainians' emotional well-being and overall mental health.

The unplanned change in their way of life, separation from their families and loved ones, as well as the anxiety and fear associated with the traumatic events in Ukraine, have significantly affected the emotional state and psychological well-being of the Ukrainians who sought refuge in Latvia.

Table 19: Emotions that surveyed Ukrainians felt when they came to Latvia.



Given the potentially traumatic experiences and the uncertainty faced by displaced individuals, many of the surveyed respondents expressed having felt fear and suffering. However, some respondents have also expressed feelings of joy. This joy can be explained by the relief of finally being in a safe place where they can seek shelter from the war and threats. This is indicative of the complex range of emotions Ukrainians have to manage not just upon arrival but also continuing into their displacement.

A lack of a sense of security can manifest in various ways, both emotionally and behaviorally. It is important to note that different individuals may experience and express this lack of security differently.

Table 20: Psychological and emotional effects of insecurity caused by conflict.



■ ANXIETY AND WORRY

Individuals who feel insecure may constantly worry about their safety or the safety of their loved ones here and those in Ukraine. They might have generalized anxiety or specific fears about various aspects of life. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a common result, causing individuals to experience flashbacks, nightmares, and heightened anxiety.



■ FEAR

The fear generated by war often extends to the fear of the unknown. After experiencing the chaos and uncertainty of conflict, individuals may find comfort in the familiar, even if it is limiting their personal growth. The idea of venturing into uncharted territory or pursuing new goals can be daunting, leading to reluctance to develop oneself further.



■ DEPRESSION

A sense of insecurity can contribute to feelings of hopelessness and depression. People may feel powerless to change their circumstances or protect themselves.



■ AVOIDANCE AND SOCIAL WITHDRAWAL

People may avoid situations, places, or activities that make them feel vulnerable or unsafe. This avoidance behavior is an attempt to reduce the perceived threat.



■ DIFFICULTY SLEEPING AND PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

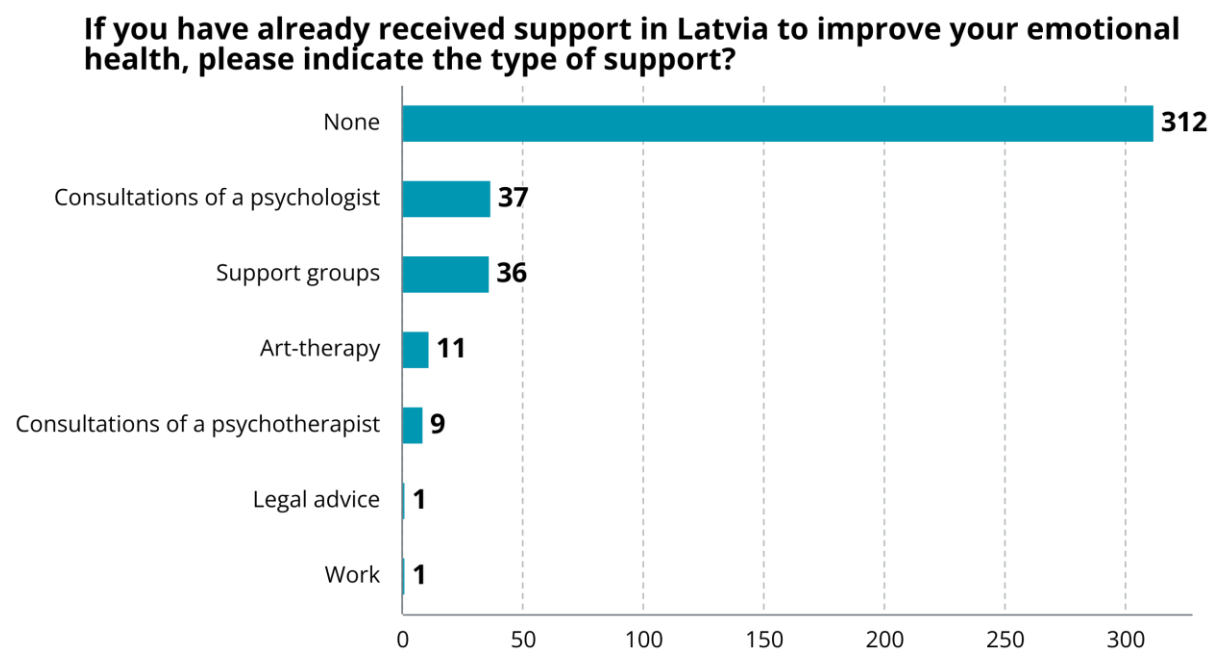
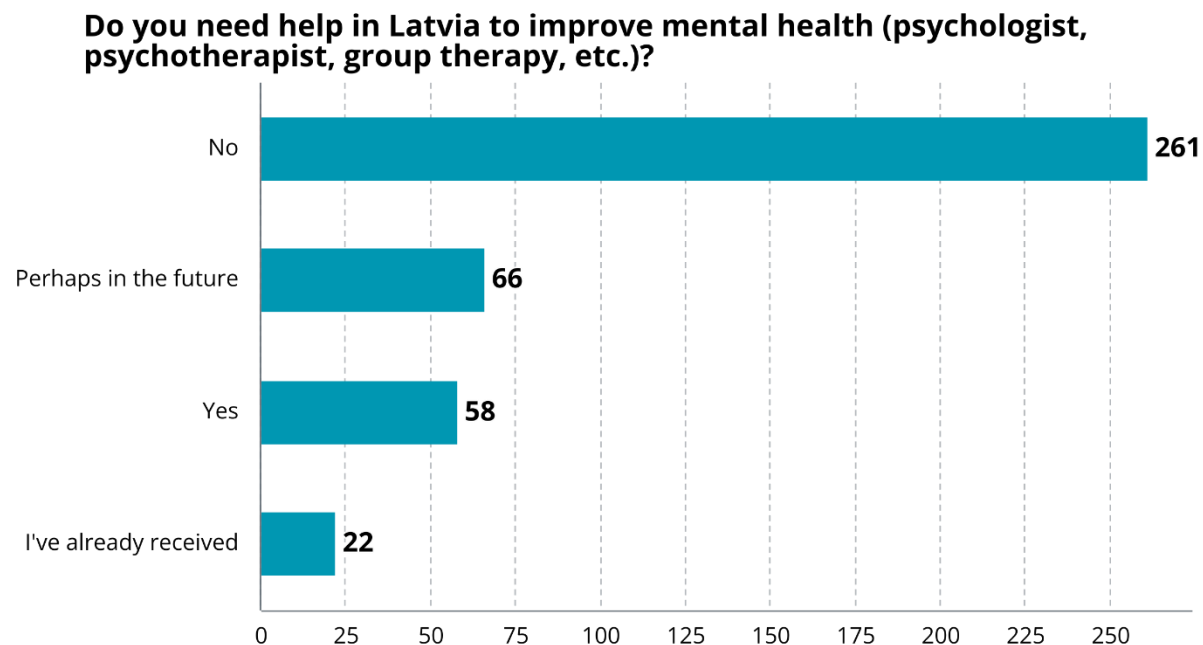
Insomnia or disrupted sleep patterns are common in individuals who lack a sense of security. Worry and anxiety can make it difficult to relax and fall asleep. Also chronic stress resulting from a lack of security can manifest physically, leading to headaches, muscle tension, digestive problems, and other health issues.



War-related fear is a complex emotional and psychological phenomenon that can have profound effects on individuals' reluctance to develop personal growth. The trauma, guilt, and economic and social disruptions resulting from war all contribute to this reluctance. Furthermore, the fear of the unknown and the adoption of coping mechanisms can keep individuals trapped in a cycle of stagnation. Returning to civilian life after war is a formidable challenge. Neglecting mental health can exacerbate this transition. Recognizing these challenges and providing support for those affected by post-war fear is essential to helping individuals overcome their reluctance and embark on a path of personal growth and healing. Ultimately, addressing the lingering effects of war is not only a societal obligation but also a crucial step toward rebuilding communities and fostering a brighter future.




Table 21, 22: Needs and the availability of mental health support for surveyed Ukrainians.



Understanding the emotional well-being and support needs of Ukrainians in Latvia is crucial for effective assistance. According to the survey, 70% of respondents experienced profound emotions such as fear, depression, and suffering upon their arrival in Latvia. While this indicates the initial impact, it is challenging to assess the long-term psychological effects of these negative emotions.

Regarding access to mental health support, 76.7% reported not having received any assistance in this regard. Interestingly, the majority of these respondents expressed that they did not feel



the need for psychological help. This finding might be influenced by cultural and social factors, including historical mistrust of psychiatry, the significant role of religion, and the cultural importance of family among Ukrainians. Conversely, only 20% of those surveyed either had already received assistance or acknowledged the need for it.

The absence of psychological rehabilitation, mental health stabilization, and psychosocial support emerges as a significant hindrance to the rebuilding process. This lack of support not only affects emotional well-being but also impedes individuals from successfully integrating into the community, finding employment, securing accommodation, and engaging with society. Additionally, the assessment underscores the importance of considering respondents' experiences prior to displacement, as these play a significant role in normalizing their economic situation.

Addressing the emotional needs and enhancing mental health support can contribute significantly to the overall well-being and successful integration of Ukrainians in Latvia. It is imperative to consider the cultural nuances and historical context when developing programs to provide effective and meaningful assistance.

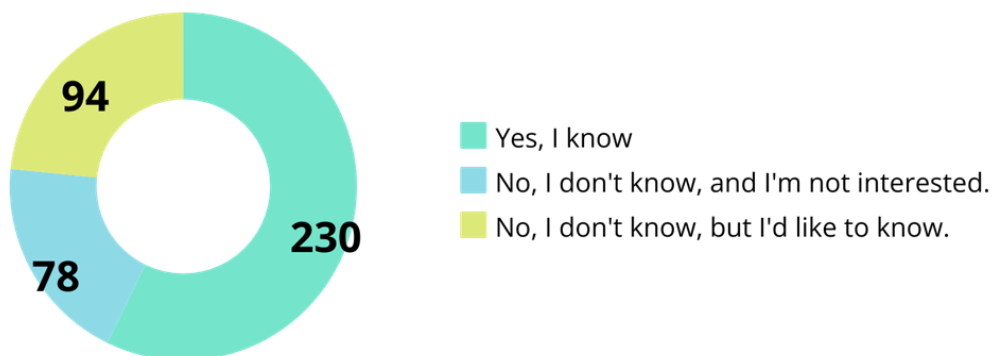
RESULTS: AVAILABILITY OF ASSISTANCE

Ukrainians in Latvia have access to free consultations with psychologists through the state social program. State authorities actively promote these psychological services. However, since July 2022, Ukrainian psychologists must validate their diplomas, obtain permission to practice, and work under the supervision of a qualified psychologist. The official procedure takes 3 to 6 months and costs approximately 250 euros. Currently, only two Ukrainian psychologists are listed in Latvia's official registry, with one closely collaborating with the Latvian Red Cross.

The survey allowed for an assessment of the possibility of accessing services related to mental health and psychological well-being. 57.2% of respondents know where to turn in case of a deterioration in their psychoemotional state, and 23.4% expressed interest in such information. This information signifies the importance of available mental health services for the Ukrainian community in Latvia, offering support for those in need and raising awareness among those interested in seeking assistance.

Table 25: Knowledge of Ukrainians about access to psychological and mental health services.

Do you know where in Latvia you can go for long-term depressed mood, feelings of helplessness, insomnia, self-destructive thoughts, or behavior?

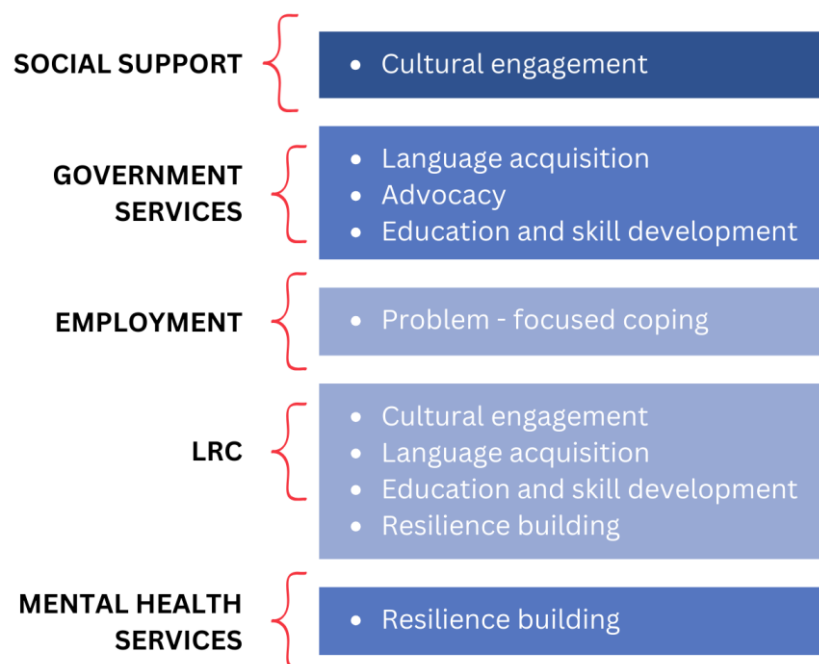


RECOMMENDATIONS

Using emotion-focused coping and social support coping strategies when assisting Ukrainian refugees can be an effective way to support Ukrainians managing potentially traumatic experiences and emotional distress. Emotion-focused coping helps them process and manage their emotions, making them more emotionally resilient. Social support coping, such as connecting with support networks and engaging with others who share similar experiences, can enhance psychological well-being. It helps refugees feel less isolated and more understood. These coping strategies can be culturally sensitive. Ukrainian refugees may find it more comfortable to express their emotions and seek support from people who share their cultural background and language.

Emotion-focused coping can assist in trauma recovery, allowing refugees to work through their traumatic experiences and develop healthier emotional responses. Social support networks are crucial for long-term adaptation. They provide resources, information, and a sense of belonging, which are vital for refugees as they build new lives. Encouraging social support fosters community building among refugees, which can empower them to support each other and collectively overcome challenges. A combination of coping strategies, including problem-focused ones, should be available to address their diverse needs comprehensively.

Table 23: Available resources and stress coping strategies of people from Ukraine.



While emotion-focused and social support coping are highly effective, it is important to recognize that refugees have diverse needs. Integrating MHPSS activities and services in combination with other social supports, including government services, ensures a comprehensive approach to address these varied needs. This holistic approach can better support Ukrainian refugees in their journey to adaptation and recovery.

CULTURAL AND CONTEXTUAL ASPECTS REGARDING MENTAL HEALTH

Ukrainians, like people from many other cultures, may have various reasons for refusing psychological help or being hesitant to seek it. It is important to remember that individuals' attitudes towards mental health and seeking help can be influenced by a combination of cultural, societal, and personal factors.

Table 24: Potential reasons why Ukrainians might be reluctant to seek psychological help.

■ **STIGMA**

Stigma surrounding mental health issues exists in many cultures, including Ukraine. People may fear being labelled as "crazy" or "weak" if they seek help for psychological problems, which can lead to a reluctance to open up about their struggles.

■ **LACK OF AWARENESS**

Some individuals may not fully understand mental health issues or may not be aware of available mental health services. A lack of information can deter people from seeking help.

■ **SELF – RELIANCE**

Ukrainians, particularly in rural areas, may have a strong sense of self-reliance and resilience. Some individuals may believe that they should be able to handle their problems on their own, without outside assistance.

■ **TRADITIONAL BELIEFS**

Traditional beliefs and cultural norms can influence perceptions of mental health. In some cases, Ukrainians may turn to traditional healers or religious figures instead of seeking help from mental health professionals.

■ **PRIVACY CONCERNS**

Ukrainians, like many individuals, may value their privacy and be hesitant to share personal and emotional issues with strangers, including mental health professionals.

■ **FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS**

Limited access to affordable mental health services can be a significant barrier. The cost of therapy or psychiatric medication may be prohibitive for some individuals and families.

■ **TRUST ISSUES**

Trust in healthcare providers can be a factor. In some cases, past negative experiences or a lack of confidence in the effectiveness of mental health treatment can deter people from seeking help.

■ **FEAR OF MEDICATION**

Concerns about being prescribed medication may deter some individuals from seeking help. They may have reservations about potential side effects or becoming dependent on medication.

■ **CULTURAL FACTORS**

Cultural factors, such as collectivism and the importance of family, can influence whether individuals seek help. Some Ukrainians may be concerned about burdening their families with their problems.

■ **WAR - RELATED TRAUMA**

For Ukrainians who have experienced the trauma of war, there may be additional challenges related to stigma and fear of being labeled as a "war veteran" with psychological issues.

To address these barriers and encourage more Ukrainians to seek psychological help, it is essential to work on mental health awareness campaigns, reduce stigma, provide affordable and accessible mental health services, and integrate mental health support into the broader healthcare system. Additionally, cultural competence training for mental health professionals can help them better understand and address the unique needs of Ukrainian clients.

THE ROLE OF LATRC IN IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH

One of the main ideas behind the existence of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is to reduce the suffering of people. By assisting Ukrainians who have been forcibly displaced to Latvia due to the armed conflict in Ukraine in rebuilding their lives, we seek to alleviate their suffering. While basic needs continue to be an important aspect of the Latvian Red Cross's support to Ukrainians, this assessment highlights the need to support the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing as well.

The basic services of the Latvian Red Cross are available to Ukrainians, such as monthly packages of food and hygiene ESF+ to low-income Ukrainian households, provided in cooperation with the European Union. Also available services are accommodation in the social and crisis centers, social shops and humanitarian aid points, a mentor program, as well as First Aid training, which are organized for Ukrainians in Russian, using training materials, videos and presentations of the Ukrainian Red Cross.

The specific initiatives tailored for Ukrainians encompass both language proficiency and integration. These measures not only assist Ukrainians in adapting to their new environment but also foster diversity and mutual understanding within Latvian society. Language courses in Latvian are organized, an integration program has been developed, including excursions to various regions of Latvia. Support groups for women, led by a psychologist from Ukraine, are provided. These groups are organized to provide emotional, social, or informational support to women, who may share common challenges or needs. Additionally, a two-week distribution of gift cards (CVA) took place in Latvia for low-income families, particularly those with school-age children attending schools in Latvia.

Table 26: Potential and present activities for Ukrainians provided by staff and volunteers of LatRC.



■ HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

ESF+ food, hygiene and school supply packages, accommodation, social/ low cost shops and HA points, voucher programs



■ PSYCHO-SOCIAL SUPPORT


Support groups for women, family therapy through social-cultural events
Integration program



■ TRAININGS

First Aid training Psychological First Aid Latvian language courses
Speaking club for youth (non-formal education)

LatRC plans to expand the range of services and availability for Ukrainians in the future. One of the services would be the mentor program for unemployed. The project aims to provide effective mentorship support to unemployed Ukrainians in Latvia with the goal of successfully



integrating them into the job market. The project contributes to the development of the target audience, enhancing their professional qualities through increased qualifications and an expanded skill set.

The next service that the LatRC plans to develop is therapeutic social- cultural events to support families. These social-cultural events incorporate social and cultural activities as part of the intervention strategy to support and strengthen family dynamics. This is in recognition of the influence of cultural and social contexts on family relationships and seeks to leverage communal experiences to promote positive change.

Another project that the Latvian Red Cross plans to develop is the 'Speaking Club for Youth' (non-formal education) for the age group of 6-10 years and 14 to 16 years. This project aims to establish a speaking club for youth aged 14 to 16, providing an opportunity for informal language improvement. The goal of the club is to create a friendly and supportive environment where young individuals can freely express themselves and enhance their language skills. The club will feature informal conversations, discussions, and other activities to help develop communication skills and boost language confidence. This will be achieved by using various topics and themes that interest the youth, fostering both language acquisition and social engagement.

Through organizing workshops, excursions, workshops, and joint celebrations of Latvian holidays, the project aims to create a stimulating environment for language learning, active participation, and interaction among children. This will help ensure better integration of Ukrainian teenagers into Latvian society, expand their communication opportunities, teach them practical skills, and acquaint them with Latvian culture and traditions.

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SUFFICIENT MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

1. Acknowledging the limited familiarity with psychological first aid:
 - 1.1. Provide psychological first aid training to the LatRC team, which includes both employees and volunteers.
 - 1.2. Conduct training sessions for employees from partner NGOs and municipal representatives.
 - 1.3. Implement a referral system to facilitate access to essential services at the local level.
 - 1.4. Create a program aimed at delivering initial psychological support to parents whose children have undergone traumatic experiences.
 - 1.5. Create informative resources containing guidance on self-help techniques for psychological well-being and direct referrals to qualified professionals.
2. Taking into account the existing stigma of adult psychological services and the community as a resource for coping with stress:
 - 2.1. Facilitate community-based group psychosocial activities encompassing self-awareness, self-help, consciousness-raising sessions, art therapy, and film therapy.
 - 2.2. Reevaluate the titles of the sessions to make them more appealing to a wider audience.
 - 2.3. Extend support and offer interventional sessions for psychologists and personnel involved in working with Ukrainian individuals.

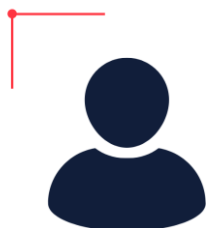
CARING FOR THE LATRC TEAM

- 1.1. Enhance the LatRC team's capabilities through training in psychological first aid, dealing with potentially traumatized individuals, managing aggressive behavior, identifying individuals in need of assistance, and establishing personal boundaries.
2. In light of the insufficient support structures for the LatRC team:
 - 2.1. Facilitate workshops on self-help, self-awareness, stress management, and burnout recognition for the team.
 - 2.2. Establish peer support systems, including peer-to-peer groups, a buddy system, and feedback mechanisms.
 - 2.3. Provide individual psychological counseling and supervision.
3. Ensure the presence of visual materials related to stress management and self-care within the LatRC premises.

STRENGTHENING COOPERATION

1. Collaborate with local mental health organizations to strengthen the LatRC's psychosocial support capabilities.
2. Create awareness campaigns to highlight the importance of psychosocial support and mental well-being.
3. Establish a dedicated communication channel for community feedback and suggestions regarding mental health services.
4. Represent the LatRC on issues of mental health and psychosocial support in various formats of cooperation.
5. Participate in academic research to better understand the impact and relevance of aid provided.

CONTACT US

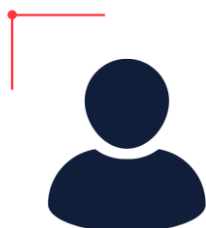


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Together we can help!