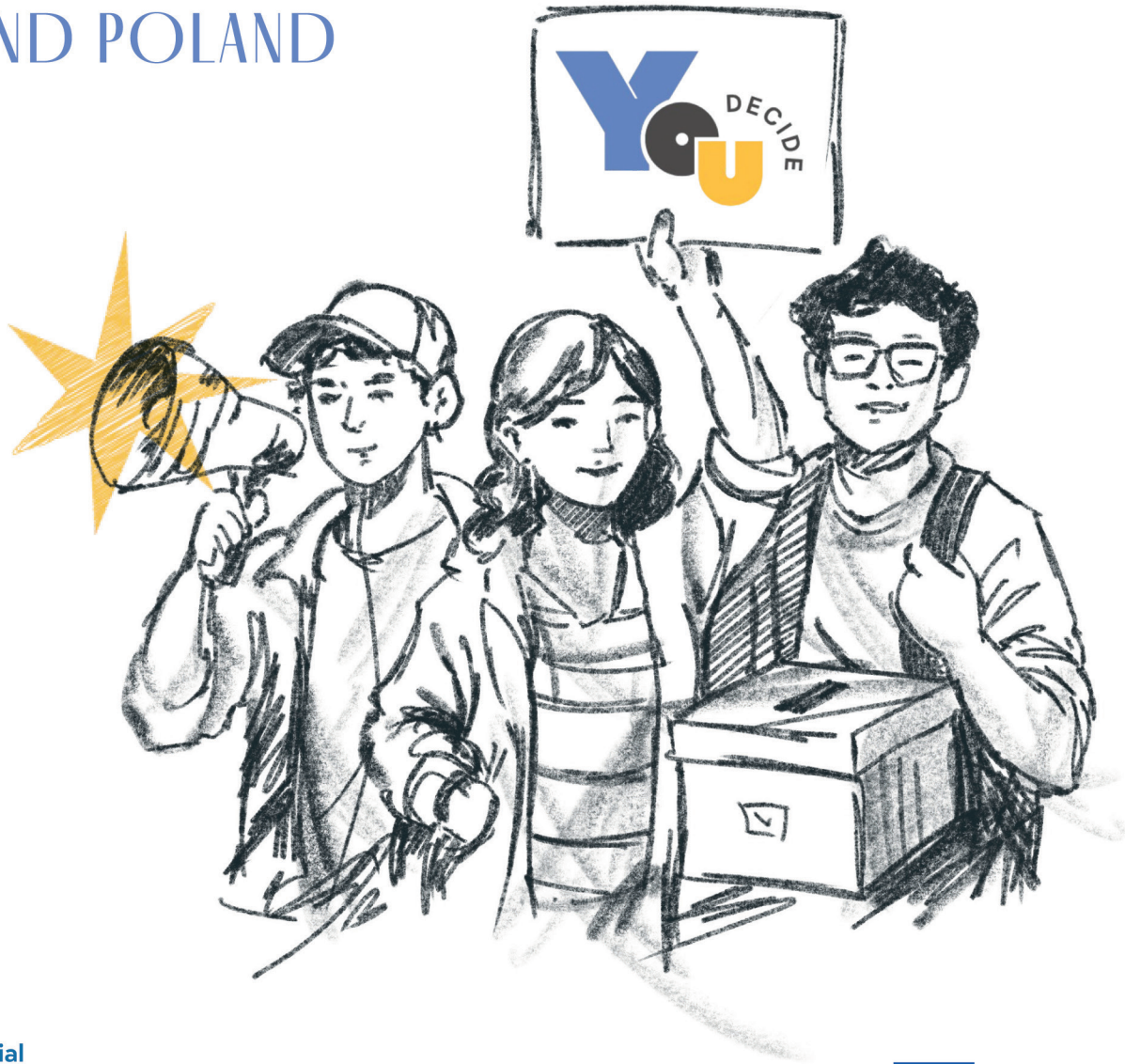
RECLAIMING OUR VOICE:

UKRAINIAN YOUTH NAVIGATING FORCED DISPLACEMENT IN CZECHIA, HUNGARY AND POLAND



Social Innovation Initiative

Co-funded by the European Union

Missing Children Europe

Fundacja ITAKA Centrum Poszukiwań Ludzi Zaginionych

organizace pro pomoc uprchlíkům

Terre des hommes
A gyerekek szolgálatában

Heartwarmingly

This report was commissioned and published by Missing Children Europe, within the framework of the **YoU Decide** (Project No. ESF-SI-2024-UA-01-0038), an EU-funded initiative led by Missing Children Europe (MCE) in partnership with Terre des Hommes Hungary, OPU – Organisation for Aid to Refugees, Fundacja ITAKA, and the Heartwarmingly consultancy. The project is funded by the European Union under the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) Social Innovation Initiative. This report was co-authored by the Heartwarmingly research team and MCE - YoU Decide Coordinator. Manuscript was completed 2026 February.

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Dr. Jennifer Allsopp, Birmingham Fellow at the University of Birmingham, a renowned scholar and expert on unaccompanied minors' transitions into adulthood and ethics, whose academic rigour guided this study.

Viktoriia Palahniuk, Researcher at Heartwarmingly, whose dedicated work included leading the Youth Advisory Board (YAB), ensuring the linguistic and cultural accuracy of the Ukrainian displacement experiences and survey analysis.

Alyona Samar, YoU Decide project coordinator and Senior Programmes Officer at Missing Children Europe (MCE) who provided comments and inputs on the overall study and co-wrote the administrative status section.

Lina Vosyliute, Founder of Heartwarmingly and Senior Associate Researcher at the Brussels School of Governance, who led the team with a focus on participative approaches, overall coordination with MCE, and the engagement of local partners.

Helena Wacko, Researcher at Heartwarmingly and the London School of Economics who contributed a meticulous 'State of the Art' literature overview and maintained a critical intersectional lens throughout the analysis.

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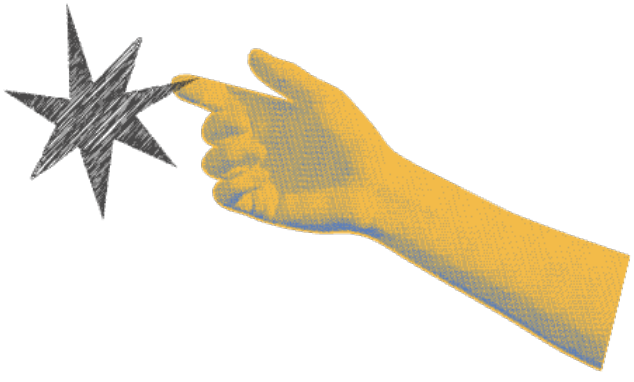
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors of this report would like to express our deepest gratitude to all those who contributed their time, expertise, and lived experiences to the EU-funded **YoU Decide project**. The project aims to protect and empower young people displaced from Ukraine by reducing the risks of going missing, trafficking, and exploitation, while ensuring that they are supported and meaningfully involved in decisions that affect their lives. It focuses in particular on the specific challenges faced by youth as they transition into adulthood while navigating education, employment, protection systems, and social integration in host countries.

This truly co-designed research was made possible through a unique collaboration between researchers, civil society organisations, and, most importantly, displaced Ukrainian young people themselves. We thank the hundreds of young Ukrainians who participated in our surveys and focus groups. Their voices are the foundation of these findings and recommendations.

First of all, we would like to celebrate the **YoU Decide Youth Advisory Board (YAB).** The heart of this report lies in their contributions. We are profoundly grateful to **Herman Barushkov, Ruslan Binazarov, Danyl Boyko, Diana Hubaidulina, Anastasiya Krapivkina, Viktoriia Romanova, Polina Sukach and Timur Zhdan-Marichev.** Their insights, bravery, and willingness to share their own testimonies, as well as their ability to hold space for others and co-design the research and co-lead analysis, have ensured that this report truly reflects the realities of displaced Ukrainian youth. We would like to particularly celebrate the youth cofacilitators of focus group discussions, **Ruslan Binazarov, Herman Barushkov and Diana Hubaidulina.** We also would like to wholeheartedly thank **Anastasiya Krapivkina** for sharing her art so that our collective findings are bolstered by her beautiful drawings. Finally, we would like to acknowledge **Ruslan Binzarov** for his consistent contributions throughout all the phases of the research.

The fieldwork and data collection were made possible by our dedicated **local YoU Decide partners** across **Czechia, Hungary and Poland**:



Czechia (OPU): We are very grateful to **Soňa Spěváková** for her leadership and coordination of the Czech team. **Iaroslava Antoshchenko** (Researcher/Facilitator), and **Ruslan Binzarov** (YAB Youth Co-facilitator). We also recognize **Martin Rozumek** (Lead Project Manager and Secretary General) and **Andrea Macháčová** (Expert and Project Officer).

Hungary (Terre des Hommes): We extend our gratitude to the TdH team, including **László Fejős** for successfully leading the Hungarian research team, with **Svitlana Dzialovska** (RIF Officer - Facilitator), **Orsolya Junkuncz Joo** (RIF Team Lead, Note Taker), and **Herman Barushkov,** (YAB Youth Co-facilitator) who convened the Focus Group Discussion. We are very grateful for **Sarolta Bányai** (Senior MEAL Officer), **Zsuzsanna Vég** (Project Manager), for their insights and inputs on research ethics and methodology. We also would like to thank to the rest of TdH team who convened the project kick-off meeting in Budapest in June 2025 and contributed behind the scenes with their advice and support: **Dorottya Ertsey** (Project Officer), **Zsuzsanna Tatusko** (Finance Assistant), **Júlia Filep** (Finance Officer), **Zoltán Hámori** (Finance Manager), **Olsi Dudumi** (Children and Youth Affected by Migration Regional Program Coordinator), **Judit Németh-Almási** (Safeguarding Focal Point and Deputy Head of Office) and **Balázs Lehel** (Head of Office).

Poland (ITAKA Foundation): We thank **Aleksandra Inatowicz-Łubiańska**, Project Manager for her resourcefulness, enthusiasm and ideas in leading the Polish team. Special thanks to **Emilia Iurchuk** (Researcher/Facilitator), **Andrzej Krapiwa** (Note taker), and **Diana Hubaidulina** (YAB Youth Co-facilitator), **Małgorzata Bohosiewicz-Suchoń** (Researcher).

We would like to thank child rights experts **Jyothi Kanics** and **Professor Elaine Chase** for providing independent ethical guidance to the research project.

Finally, we are immensely grateful to have worked with the **Missing Children Europe (MCE)** coordination team. Our sincere thanks go to the **YoU Decide project** coordinator, **Alyona Samar**, for her incredible coordination, enthusiasm, and unwavering support throughout theresearch project. We also thank the MCE communications and logistics team, including **Raffaele Cioffo** and **Patricia Morais**, for their essential work in bringing this research to a wider audience. We would also like to thank **Eugenia Miyashita** for her support on child safeguarding issues, and Secretary General, **Aagje Ieven** and **Kalim Ullah**, Senior Finance Manager, for their institutional administrative support behind the scenes.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CoE	Council of Europe
EC	European Commission
EIGE	The European Institute for Gender Equality
EU	European Union
EAA	European Economic Area
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
ETF	European Training Foundation
Eurostat	The European Statistical Office
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and other sexual and gender identities
MCE	Missing Children Europe (YoU Decide Project coordinator)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OPU	Organisation for Aid to Refugees (YoU Decide partner in Czechia)
TdH	Terre des Hommes (YoU Decide partner in Hungary)
TPD	Temporary Protection Directive
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World's Health Organisation
YAB	Youth Advisory Board
YoU Decide	Supporting Youth of Ukraine Making Informed Decisions is an EU-funded initiative

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report, co-produced with partners and YoU Decide Youth Advisory Board, examines the lived experiences and aspirations of displaced Ukrainian youth aged 15–24 living in Poland, Hungary, and Czechia. It is based on participatory, trauma-informed research with 288 young people. Three focus groups in Budapest, Prague, and Warsaw (involving 24 participants) took place between September and October 2025, and an online survey with 264 respondents was conducted between December 2025 to February 2026. While the research results do not claim to be representative, they shed important light on youth voices at a critical stage of life - the transition to adulthood shaped by war, and displacement.

The research explores how evolving 'life projects' and forced displacement shape young people's access to education, employment, housing, health and other support services. Understanding these experiences is essential, as gaps in accessible and youth-appropriate support systems can increase vulnerability to harms such as going missing, labour exploitation, or trafficking. Despite remarkable resilience and ambition, displaced Ukrainian youth face significant structural barriers.

Legal uncertainty linked to the time-limited nature of their residence rights under the EU Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), currently set to expire in March 2027, generates significant anxiety at a crucial moment for educational and career planning. Many young people rely exclusively on TPD status, yet uncertainty about future residence rights limits their ability to plan long-term. While half of respondents want to remain in their current country of residence, one in four reports not knowing where their future lies, illustrating the profound uncertainty shaping young people's life planning. Only one in ten plan to return to Ukraine when they can, thus requiring policy makers to find sustainable solutions.

Barriers to inclusion remain significant. **67% of survey respondents reported insufficient host-country language skills** as the primary barrier to **inclusion in education**, followed by high housing costs (25%) and feeling unwelcome (21%). This also impacted their social participation, employment, access to healthcare and other aspects discussed. **One-third of survey** respondents reported balancing studies with work. The research also highlighted gendered care and other family support responsibilities among displaced young people from Ukraine. Girls were more likely to support siblings or relatives, while boys experienced pressures related to potential military service obligations as well as financial support for their families. LGBTQ+ youth and those with multiple marginalised identities face additional exclusion. For instance, girls and non-binary persons were overrepresented among young people who reported not having any hobbies.

The research also highlights **precarious labour and housing conditions**. Around one third of respondents reported working alongside their studies, often in informal arrangements, unpaid internships, or contracts that did not reflect real working hours or wages. Access to stable and affordable housing remains difficult, with intersectional discrimination and lack of formal employment contracts affecting rental opportunities, with a few respondents experiencing homelessness.

Access to healthcare, particularly mental health support, remains uneven. Language barriers, lack of interpreters, and limited availability of Ukrainian-speaking professionals push many young people to rely on informal networks, online searches, Ukrainian community members, or digital tools for information and support. Importantly, one in five respondents did not know how to access the mental health services.

At the same time, the study identifies important protective factors, such as **role of the hobbies**. Creative, cultural, and sporting activities provide spaces for finding new friends, connection, identity development, and wellbeing. However, lack of time (44%), lack of money (40%) and the language barrier (36%) were reported as major obstacles to engage in hobbies. Online networks and Ukrainian communities serve as key sources of information and mutual support. Young Ukrainians also demonstrate strong civic engagement and a desire to contribute both to their host societies and to Ukraine's future.

Overall, the findings portray a generation navigating disrupted life trajectories with resilience and agency, yet within systems that often remain fragmented, temporary, or difficult to access. Strengthening youth-centred services, ensuring continuity of rights, and addressing gaps in information, education, housing, and employment support are essential to reduce vulnerability to harm and enable displaced Ukrainian youth to build stable and meaningful futures.

This report calls for evidence-based and nuanced understanding of Ukrainian displaced youth (15-24) realities. For any policy proposals to be efficient, effective and enabling capabilities, they need to take fully into account Ukrainian youth aspirations and voice as they are transitioning into adulthood.

Our five selected key recommendations (see section 6 for full list):

1. European co-legislators and Member States shall **ensure legal certainty and residence rights to people displaced from Ukraine under the Temporary Protection Directive, by granting access to the Long Term Residence Directive, after five years of de-facto residence**, as a solution consistent with children's rights and young people's 'life projects'.

2. National and local authorities shall **support Ukrainian displaced youth navigating complex enrolment procedures into education with expedited qualification recognition**, and expanded access to flexible education, with a particular focus on **free and accessible language learning**.

3. **National and local authorities shall monitor employment conditions** and create possibilities to assert **displaced Ukrainian youth their labour rights through** dedicated contact points for youth to safely report unpaid wages or abusive conditions **online**.

4. **National and local authorities shall expand** accessible and culturally appropriate physical and mental health services. Mental and sexual and reproductive health should particularly entail a proactive online outreach to Ukrainian youth.

5. **European, national and local policy makers shall create meaningful consultation and co-creation** mechanisms for Ukrainian displaced youth to have a voice and to participate in policy design, especially on questions affecting them directly. This way policy makers can make better decisions, while enabling powerful peer-to peer or youth-led initiatives tapping into young people's experiences, aspirations and capabilities, such as how to navigate '**life projects**'.

1. INTRODUCTION

What is this research about?

This report investigates the experiences and aspirations of young displaced people, aged between 15 and 24 years old, as they navigate disrupted education, precarious work, and shifting bureaucratic and social identities in three important receiving countries in Central and Eastern Europe: Poland, Hungary and Czechia. It draws on participatory and trauma-informed mixed methods research that included **in total 288 children and young people forcibly displaced from Ukraine**. Three focus group discussions were held in Budapest, Prague and Warsaw, where **24 young people** joined in person. **264 young people meaningfully participated in an online survey** in the mid-December 2025 -mid-February 2026.

The specific experiences and needs of displaced Ukrainian youth at this defining period in their lives require focused and sustained attention in research and policy. This is because, as they transition towards adulthood, important life decisions are made - what to study, where to live, whether to work for survival, shifting relationship priorities, whether to pursue the prospect of a future career, perhaps abroad?

To understand the shifting 'life projects' (Drammeh 2010) and migration plans (Chase and Allsopp 2021) of young Ukrainians, including their potential susceptibility to harms such as going missing, exploitative working or trafficking, we need to explore their experiences of seeking out and accessing relevant support services.

This report begins by setting out the background context. This is followed by a short discussion of the framework for analysis, methodology and ethics. The findings are then presented under six thematic headings that emerged from our research: 1) Hobbies and Social Life; 2) Work and Education; 3) Housing; 4) Administrative and Immigration-Status Related Support; 5) Personal Physical and Mental Wellbeing; and 6) Voice, Inclusion and Belonging.

The report concludes with a series of recommendations for promoting the wellbeing and inclusion of displaced Ukrainian youth in each of these three countries. These recommendations have, along with all other stages of this research project, been co-developed with Ukrainian youth through the involvement of a Youth Advisory Board (YAB). Our recommendations are aimed at: peer-to-peer support networks; practitioners, such as youth workers, social workers and NGOs; and policy makers at the local, national, regional and international levels.

2. BACKGROUND

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Children and young people account for a significant share of people on the move globally due to armed conflict, climate change, economic instability, and other drivers of displacement (World Migration Report 2024). This pattern is reflected among displaced Ukrainians following the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022 which drove many children, young people and families from their homes (Kostiuchenko et al. 2024). The Russian war against Ukraine has also resulted in significant internal forced displacement. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, as of July 2025, an estimated 3.7 million Ukrainians remain internally displaced, whereas a total of 5.7 million Ukrainians have sought refuge beyond Ukraine's borders (UNHCR 2026).

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In the European Union (EU), as of 31 December 2025, 4.35 million Ukrainians were under the temporary protection regime (Eurostat 2025). Temporary protection is a specific legal status in the EU granted to Ukrainian refugees. It is covered under the broader meaning of 'refugee protection' as outlined in the 1951 UN Geneva Convention on Refugees and its 1967 Protocol.

According to the EU Temporary Protection Directive (2001/55/EC), this status confers anyone who left the affected region and arrived in the EU because of war, or natural disaster as opposed to proving 'individual persecution'. Thus, temporary protection provides all people fleeing Ukraine with facilitated entry into the EU. Other rights include access to education to minors under the same conditions as citizens (Art. 14), access to housing and healthcare (Art. 13) and access to the labour market and further vocational training and education subject to restrictions (Art.12). These rights have nevertheless in some cases been subject to national discretion.

This status has been regarded as a European expression of inter-state solidarity and has been for the first time applied to Ukrainians through a unanimous Council Decision (2022). However, since the 'temporary' nature of mass displacement is different from the individual asylum process, uncertainties are linked with the subsequent political (un)willingness to prolong the status beyond the foreseen initial three + two year periods after 2027 March (Carrera et al. 2022). Therefore, some people fleeing Ukraine have filed individual asylum applications, having to prove individual persecution, in which case the Temporary Protection is revoked. The EUAA (2025a) statistical analysis in the first quarter of 2025 showed that 16,000 people from Ukraine applied for individual asylum.

Limited statistics on young people fleeing Ukraine

As of 21 December 2025, around one third of Ukrainian temporary protection beneficiaries across the EU were young adults aged 18 to 34, while another one third were children under 18 years old (see Figure 1.) A freedom of information request filed for this research revealed that Eurostat statistics currently do not provide a more detailed age breakdown, for instance for categories under 24 years. In addition, serious statistical gaps occur as 10 EU Member States (including all three in the current research) do not report to Eurostat on the number of unaccompanied minors.

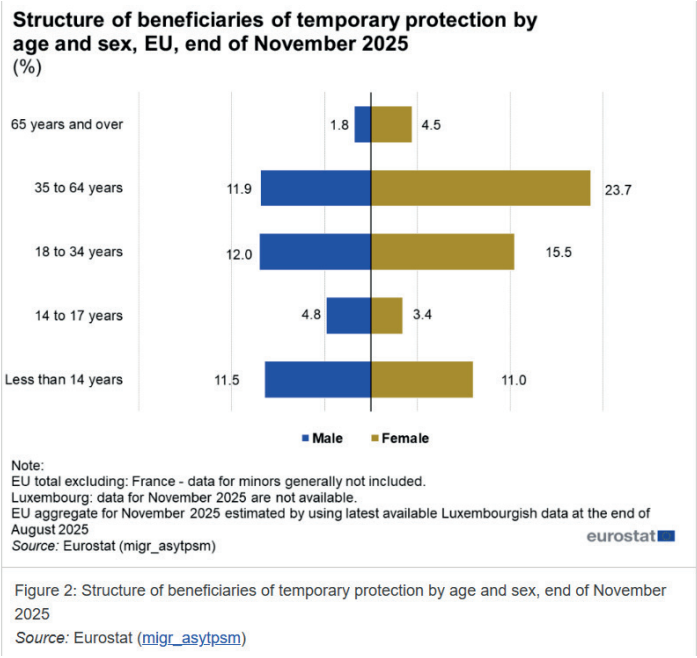


Figure 1. Temporary protection beneficiaries by gender and age

EU law does not offer bespoke safeguards regarding the transition into adulthood, however, the European Commission has issued key documents that recognise the specific challenges faced by young people on the move as they become adults: the Commission's communication on the protection of children in migration (2017), and the 2021–2027 action plan on integration and inclusion (2020).

These documents call for durable solutions and acknowledge that children who have recently arrived, as unaccompanied children, may require further assistance to integrate, especially regarding education and work. The Commission encourages Member States to fund and support each other in the delivery of integration projects with a focus on the inclusion of unaccompanied children. The Commission has also advocated for educational support, vocational training, the youth guarantee (2025) and mentoring to facilitate transitions from education into employment.

While these recommendations primarily relate to the situation of (unaccompanied) asylum seeking and refugee young people, this report shows that they can - and indeed should - also be applied to temporary protection beneficiaries, in this case, displaced Ukrainian young people. The situation of displaced children and youth in families, in particular, has long been ignored in research compared to increased attention to the situation of separated children and youth (Chase and Allsopp 2021). Indeed, in many EU Member States (including, Czechia, Hungary and Poland), statistics do not differentiate between the number of separated or unaccompanied Ukrainian minors relative to those travelling as part of family units (Eurostat 2025). This report seeks to bridge this gap by exploring the realities of Ukrainian children and youth who have migrated alone or as part of family migration. We adopt the view that a child is a child. A young person is a young person.

Gendered divisions among people fleeing Ukraine

Gender is a key axis through which young people's experiences of displacement are shaped, influencing access to safety, services, opportunities, and recognition. Among those who have left Ukraine, it was initially estimated that 90 per cent are women and children (UN Women 2022). In recent years, the proportion of young boys before the age of conscription has increased temporarily. This is largely due to martial law in Ukraine, which restricted most men aged 18 to 60 from leaving the country. Since August 2025, Ukrainian men aged 18 to 22 are now allowed to cross the border freely in either direction under martial law, while conscription of men into the armed forces of Ukraine starts at the age of 25 (Government of Ukraine 2025). As of November 2025, the monthly number of new decisions granting temporary protection in the EU (53,735) decreased by 33% compared with September, and reached a level similar to that before the Ukrainian government decree (European Commission 2026).

These demographic patterns shape distinct, gender-specific challenges for boys and young men. Many face legal and normative pressures to remain in Ukraine as potential defenders of the country and those who do leave may experience fear, guilt, and social stigma from authorities, peers, and their communities, alongside ongoing concerns for family members left behind (Mickelsson 2023).

For young displaced women and girls, gendered expectations and structural inequalities shape the challenges of transition and integration. Research shows that displaced young women are often at greater risk of gender-based violence, exploitation, and discrimination, and may face significant barriers in accessing education, healthcare (particularly sexual and reproductive health services), and dignified employment (Brück et al. 2024). At the same time, social norms and caregiving expectations may limit their mobility and autonomy, particularly if they are also caring for siblings or other dependants.

Finally, it is important in applying this intersectional lens to recognise the diverse experiences of LGBTQ+ youth. Before February 24, 2022, LGBTQ+ individuals in Ukraine were already highly marginalised, facing discrimination in education, healthcare, employment, and other basic rights (ILGA 2024). A brief from Gender Stream for the Global Public Policy Institute highlighted that, beyond the common hardships of displacement, LGBTQ+ individuals face increased risks of queerphobic violence and discrimination (Shevtsova 2024). It also revealed the absence of coordinated support specifically targeting LGBTQ+ Ukrainians entering the EU, with no dedicated national programmes in host countries to assist them with border crossing, arrival, housing, or integration (Shevtsova 2024).

Interrupted future planning during displacement

Literature on young adulthood has demonstrated how crises, such as war, can significantly affect young people's perceived and actual futures. Displacement, in particular, has been characterised as disrupting the transition to adulthood, as refugees often experience ongoing uncertainty, facing a 'constant temporariness', interrupted aspirations, and reduced access to essential social and institutional support systems (Van Blerk et al. 2021).

The importance of understanding the specific experiences of displaced young people is recognised in the Council of Europe (CoE) recommendations on supporting young refugees in transition to adulthood (Council of Europe 2019). It outlines comprehensive measures to support young refugees in their transition, particularly as they turn 18 and 'age out' of childspecific protections. Recognising that this moment often leads to a sudden withdrawal of support, the recommendation, endorsed by the EU, calls on CoE Member States to ensure continued access to essential services such as education, healthcare (including mental health), housing, legal assistance, employment, and family reunification. It also emphasises the need to prevent violence, exploitation, and discrimination, with specific attention to the needs of unaccompanied children, young women, and other particularly vulnerable groups.

As this report shows, displaced Ukrainian children and youth share some characteristics of other displaced youth populations in Europe. Chase and Allsopp (2021) identified four primary 'life projects' pursued by displaced unaccompanied minors in Europe: safety, education, family life and work. They also noted that these priorities often overlap and shift over time. Allsopp (2024) has also explored how these play out differently according to the welfare and immigration systems of the host state and in relation to gender. This research shows that while these 'life projects' are important for Ukrainian young people, including those with families, these categories also need expanding to relate to the target group to include areas such as hobbies and civic and social life.

Distinct needs and experiences of displaced Ukrainian youth

Ukrainian children and youth also have their own wants and needs which are shaped by their specific displacement trajectories. These are influenced by factors such as Ukraine's geographical proximity to the EU, visa-free entry for 90 days, varied socio-economic backgrounds, and experiences of racialisation, as well as by the particular conditions attached to their legal status. In particular, holding temporary protection status, rather than asylum or labour or student permits, creates a unique set of opportunities, constraints and uncertainties that must be considered in analysis and policy responses.

Young displaced Ukrainians face distinct challenges compared to children, older adults, or middle-aged populations. Navigating a key phase of personal development, they must also adjust to life in new environments, often following traumatic events and typically without or with limited parental support.

Research by Zolkina and Fras (2024) has shown that, in the case of young Ukrainians, their needs and challenges are shaped by war, 'bringing about profound upheaval and uncertainty… fundamentally altering their lives and aspirations'.

As young people have been internally displaced or forced to leave Ukraine before finishing school or university, it complicates their access to studies, employment, social networks and mobility opportunities. Although young displaced Ukrainians are navigating these critical challenges in their education, careers, housing and social ties, their specific experiences often remain limited in academic and grey research alike, and largely overlooked in policy discussions. Attention has mostly centred on school integration for children and employment for adults, with limited focus on youth as a category of interest.

Complex trajectories of displaced youth from Ukraine - agency, resilience and hope

Whilst research and interventions on the experiences of displaced children and youth have documented that youth 'are not a homogeneous group', and cannot be treated as a single, uniform category, other interventions have equally demonstrated the importance of seeing this 'as a group with agency', as opposed through solely applying a lens of risk or dependency (von Löwis et al. 2024).

A 2022–2023 report by UNFPA, UNDP, and Ukraine's Ministry of Youth and Sports provided a snapshot of young people's priorities during the early stages of the full-scale invasion (Petsyk 2023). It noted growing anxiety over health, safety, and basic needs, alongside diminished opportunities for employment and personal fulfilment. Notably, mental health concerns doubled compared to the previous year. Crucially, the report also highlighted a significantincrease in civic engagement, demonstrating agency and resilience already in the early days of the invasion (Petsyk 2023).

Civic participation among youth doubled in 2022 compared to 2021, with many volunteering for the first time (Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation 2023). While the longer-term sustainability and motivations behind this civic engagement remain underexplored, particularly for displaced youth, these findings identify the importance of political voice as a coping mechanism and expression of agency.

A poll in December 2023 by the Democratic Initiatives Foundation and the Razumkov Centre revealed that young people from Ukraine were somewhat more resilient than the general population, reporting slightly less deterioration in quality of life: 32% of young people felt this extreme deterioration, while on average 40% of the population faced this trend (Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation and Razumkov Centre 2023). The EUAA (2025b:73) survey with 8,200 responses from displaced Ukrainians of all ages reveals that the numbers of people expecting to return have decreased from 52% in 2023 to 31% in 2024.

Many young Ukrainians hope for outcomes such as return, NATO and EU membership for Ukraine, and justice for war crimes perpetrated by Russia. However, this optimism sits uneasily alongside protracted war, questionable peace talks and persistent uncertainty, raising questions about the durability of hope. In real time, this translates into fear about documents and residency and a destabilised sense of 'ontological security' (Chase and Allsopp 2021), that is, being able to see oneself progressing forward in a certain environment over time.

A 2024 study by the British Council and the London School of Economics explored the concerns, needs, and hopes of internally displaced young Ukrainians amid the ongoing war (Zolkina and Fras 2024). Most participants described the conflict's impact as profoundly negative, citing emotional strain, disrupted education, and fractured social ties. The study stressed the importance of youth participation in policy design and called for integrated responses that prioritised safety, psychosocial support, and long-term inclusion (Zolkina and Fras 2024).

A 2023 Centre for East European and International Studies report explored the diverse experiences of displaced Ukrainian youth (aged 18–34), offering two in-depth case studies that reflect different trajectories of life in exile. The study emphasised that youth displacement is underexplored in public discourse, particularly beyond schooling. Many young Ukrainians have fled Ukraine without family and have had to rely on personal networks, often Ukrainian or preexisting local contacts, rather than host-country welfare systems or assistance offered by NGOs. Importantly, the report highlighted that while some young people hoped to return to Ukraine, others were building lives abroad with the intention of contributing to Ukraine's recovery from afar. Rather than assuming large-scale return, the study argued that policy responses should recognise and support both forms of engagement, underscoring the agency and resilience of displaced youth, as well as the need for flexible, youth-centred policies that reflect their diverse circumstances and transnational aspirations (von Löwis et al. 2024).

Together, these studies reveal that young Ukrainians abroad are navigating complex, overlapping vulnerabilities while also demonstrating a strong sense of civic agency and future orientation. In this report, we highlight further how displaced Ukrainian youth are re-claiming their voices and actively pursuing futures. We underscore the high response rates among displaced Ukrainian young people, their eagerness to share their experiences and have their voices heard. This offers essential insights for policy makers and practitioners about more efficient ways of responding to their needs.

The above literature review indicates that current public opinion data only partially captures the depth of youth experiences, especially the material, emotional, aspirational, and relational dimensions that shape decision-making about migration, return and belonging. Therefore, in this report we attempt to provide more in-depth, qualitative research to understand how these young people are experiencing wellbeing and imagining and preparing for their futures amidst protracted uncertainty. Most importantly, this research has been co-developed with Ukrainian youth, so as to bring forward their voices, hopes and concerns.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

How we went about learning with and from young people

These pictures were taken by ITAKA in Poland, OPU in Czechia and TdH Hungary during the focus group discussions, final exercise intention-setting origami.

This section provides an overview of the research design including the theoretical stance, our participatory approach with young forcibly displaced Ukrainians and our research ethics. We further detail the data collection methods used and broadly elaborate on demographics of our research participants.

Theoretical approach: trauma Informed, child-rights and intersectionality

This research adopted a grounded theory, interpretivist epistemological approach which led to the coding of focus group discussions (FGD) and survey data under key themes that substantiate our findings. It was nevertheless guided by a capabilities approach to wellbeing among refugee youth which recognises the importance of refugee youth's competences as well as their vulnerabilities, and what is valuable to them personally in terms of what rights they can exercise - 'what they can be or do' (Chase and Allsopp 2021).

YAB contributions resonated with the capabilities approach by emphasising not only structural barriers (e.g. housing, recognition of qualifications) but also aspirations such as hobbies, cultural expression, and personal growth. As one YAB member expressed by presenting a paper crane symbolising friendship: displaced youth articulate wellbeing in relational as well as material terms.

Alongside this subjective understanding of rights and wellbeing, the research also draws on the Council of Europe's theorisation of Life Projects (Drammeh 2005). While our sensitivity to the capabilities approach recognises the strengths of displaced youth, our methodology also recognises their potential vulnerabilities. Our ethical approach prioritised safety, trustworthiness, peer-support, collaboration, empowerment, and cultural sensitivity.

This approach aimed to minimize the risk of retraumatisation and foster a safe and supportive environment for participation. Some key facets of our trauma-informed approach included seeing childhood and youth as social, legal, and policy constructs (Qvortrup et al. 2009). It also prioritised understanding the various and intersecting traumas participants may have experienced, such as forced displacement, violence, separation from family, and the challenges associated with migration (Fazel et al. 2012, Allsopp et al. 2025). Throughout, we adopted a child rights approach, seeking to further the realisation of the rights of all children as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1990 (Avramović 2014).

We also sought to promote voice and empowerment (Chase and Allsopp 2021, Shankley et al. 2023) to youth at every opportunity. Informed consent and anonymity were upheld during all stages of the research and, in keeping with best practice research with youth, we paid attention in the FGDs to ***how*** as well as ***what*** was said (Allsopp 2024).

This research also adopted an intersectional lens, recognising that displaced young people's experiences are often shaped by characteristics which include, but are not limited to, age, class, gender, race, sexual orientation, health and immigration status which further shape their experiences of not only displacement but also of the transition to adulthood (Crenshaw 1991). This approach has been central in challenging the notion of a universal 'migrant subject', calling attention to how displacement is differently experienced depending on one's social positioning. An intersectional approach towards understanding the experiences of displaced youth requires attentiveness to how these various axes of identity and inequality intersect to create both vulnerabilities and forms of resilience. Thus, intersectionality is understood in this research as an overarching methodological and analytical tool.

Research co-design and participation

The findings presented in this report are the result of i) a desk-review of academic and policy literature compiled by the Heartwarmingly research consultancy coupled with the triangulation of data from extensive collaborative fieldwork which involved: ii) three in-person focus-group discussions (FGDs) with **24 Ukrainian displaced youth aged 14-24 years** in Warsaw (9), Budapest (6) and Prague (9) in September - October 2025; and iii) an online survey with **more than 264 respondents.** The contributions of different stakeholders to each stage of the research process is outlined in Figure 2 below.

Research was designed and refined with the YAB and partner organisations in each country: Poland (*Fundacija ITAKA*), Hungary (*Terre des Hommes)* and Czechia (*OPU - Organisation for Aid to Refugees*). Missing Children Europe (MCE), as the coordinator of the YoU Decide project, oversaw the process, while the participatory research process was guided and facilitated by the Heartwarmingly research team.

The YAB was composed of 8 young Ukrainians displaced by war to Poland, Hungary and Czechia who represented various ages, gender identities and life experiences. Their lived experiences and reflections provide crucial perspectives that ground the research in lived everyday realities and ensure that the findings accurately resonate with youth priorities. One finding of our study is that Ukrainian displaced youth in Poland, Czechia and Hungary are willing to use their voices and keen to participate in community research. This counters a trend in studies with young migrants where some have spoken of 'participatory tokenism' or 'the tyranny of participation' (Rogers 2003).

Ethics

Ethical approval for all stages of the research was sought from two independent experts and approved by the YoU Decide coordinator and safeguarding officer of Missing Children Europe and each partner organisation. The Heartwarmingly research team conducted targeted research ethics training in September 2025 for partner organisations and the YAB, introduced templates for parental/guardian and youth consent, as well as provided resources for participants in the FGDs and survey. A clear mechanism for any complaints was made explicit. To mitigate the risk of harm, questions were framed in a trauma-informed and youth-friendly way with input from the YAB and reviewed by external experts (see Figure 2).

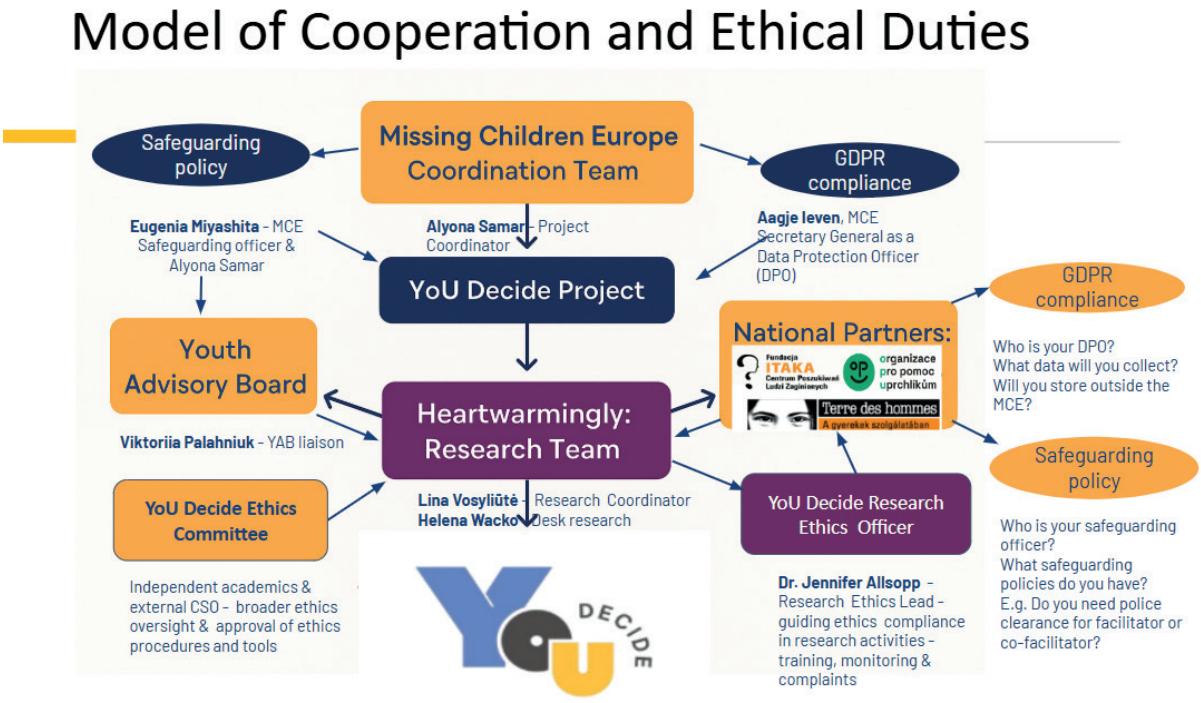


Figure 2. YoU Decide model of cooperation and ethical duties

i) Literature review

At the first stage of the research, a comprehensive State of the Art literature review was conducted to map existing knowledge, identify key gaps, and refine the study's research questions. The review focused specifically on the experiences of displaced Ukrainian youth. The literature review applied an intersectional lens to pay attention to how age, gender, disability, socio-economic background, ethnicity, and migration status has been attended to in literature mapping the lived realities and access to support for Ukrainian youth. The scope included peer-reviewed academic research, grey literature, policy reports, and publications from international organisations and civil society.

ii) Focus group discussions

The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) methodology, was co-created and co-facilitated by members of the YAB. YAB recommendations shaped methodological tools in tangible ways. For instance, YAB stressed the role of icebreaker activities in building trust, suggested creative elements such as origami to express aspirations, and highlighted the need for supportive environments for shy participants. They also recommended post-session debriefing and support for co-facilitators, recognizing the emotional weight of these conversations and risk of vicarious trauma.

The focus groups followed a standardised methodology across all three locations at the end of September-beginning of October 2025. The focus group guidelines (Annex 2. Focus Group Discussion Guidelines) split the discussion into themes that were identified as salient in the literature and policy review and in discussions with partners and members of the YAB: hobbies, education and work, housing, physical and mental wellbeing and civic and social life. Participants were also given the chance to speak to other themes they felt were relevant to the study of their support strengths, needs and support-seeking behaviours.

Strategies for recruitment for the FGDs were mostly through YoU Decide project partner organisations and their networks. Local partner organisations assigned facilitators, provided logistical support and refreshments. Facilitators and note-takers were Ukrainian speakers. The YAB insisted on the use of the Ukrainian language, due to the context of war. In light oftrauma- informed and participative research methodology this research was tailored to include Ukrainian youth, thus providing us with a clear guidance on a language selection. Russian language speakers in Ukraine as well as Ukrainian Roma, Tatars or other ethnic or linguistic minorities, or refugees and migrants in Ukraine were not specifically targeted as it was not among the explicit aims of this research.

Discussions ranged from **2.5 hours** (Hungary and Poland) to **4 hours** (Czechia). Across all three sites, it was reported that participants were eager to share their experiences. One YAB member reflected that the FGD space had felt like, *'an important cathartic and supportive space for participants.'* An overview of participants in each focus group by gender and age is provided in Annex 1. Focus Group Discussion Participants by age, gender and education/ work situation

Following the FGDs, the notetakers shared details with the Heartwarmingly research team who translated the findings into English and coded them by theme using an inductive approach. This allowed for our analysis to be informed by the key themes identified in the literature review whilst also being open to new themes. The resulting analysis shaped the formulation of the online surveys.

iii) Survey

The online survey was informed by the data gathered from the literature review and FGDs and was co-designed with partners and members of the YAB who provided input on the types of question as well as the sensitivity of their wording. The survey adapted the thematic structure from the FGDs to include six thematic sections. The platform chosen for distribution was Survey Monkey (see Annex 3. YoU Decide Survey Questions (English version)).

The survey was aimed at youth aged 16-24. In keeping with European standards and best practices for research consent, 15-year-olds were not included. In Hungary, due to the safeguarding policies of the partner organisation, a separate dissemination channel was created for children aged 16-18 years, which required parental or guardian consent. This was largely distributed in schools.

Other dissemination strategies involved targeting social media channels such as Telegram and Instagram (including paid advertisements targeting Instagram in Poland), the networks of partner organisations and the networks of members of the YAB. We used a combination of closed and open questions, (41 closed and 5 open) with members of the YAB especially keen to give peers the chance to have a voice using open questions. We concentrated on these questions at the end of the survey and were surprised by the high rate of completion.

The survey ran **between mid-December 2025 and mid-February 2026** and reached in total 305 displaced Ukrainian young people aged 16–24 youth across three countries. **264 or 87%** of them substantially contributed to the survey, while the rest (41 respondents) skipped to the end. This significantly high rate of completion shows young Ukrainians' willingness to use their time voice. Participants were residing in **Czechia (78 respondents), Poland (109 respondents) and Hungary (77 respondents)**.

Gender distribution is broadly balanced. 50% of respondents self-identified as female, 44.7% - as male, and 2.3% self-identified as non-binary or inter-sex, while the rest preferred not to say. See breakdown by country in Figure 3 below:

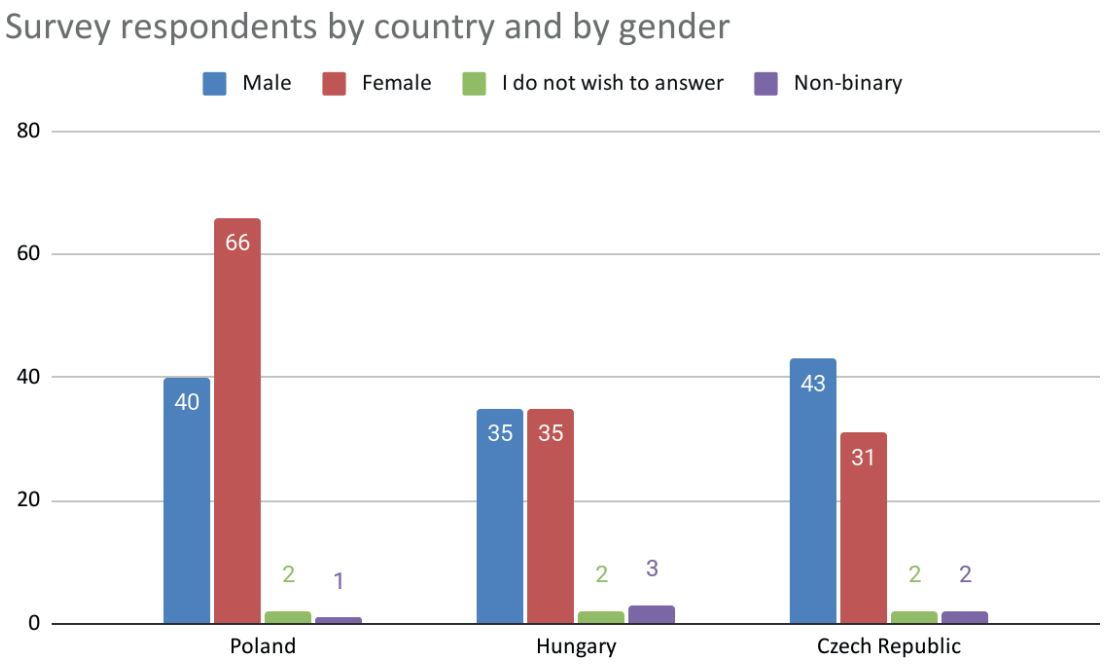


Figure 3. Survey respondents by gender and country

The age structure is skewed towards younger respondents, with **16-year-olds constituting the largest single cohort (40%)**, followed by 17–18- 20 -year-olds, resulting **in an average age of 18.2 years**. See Figure 4 below:

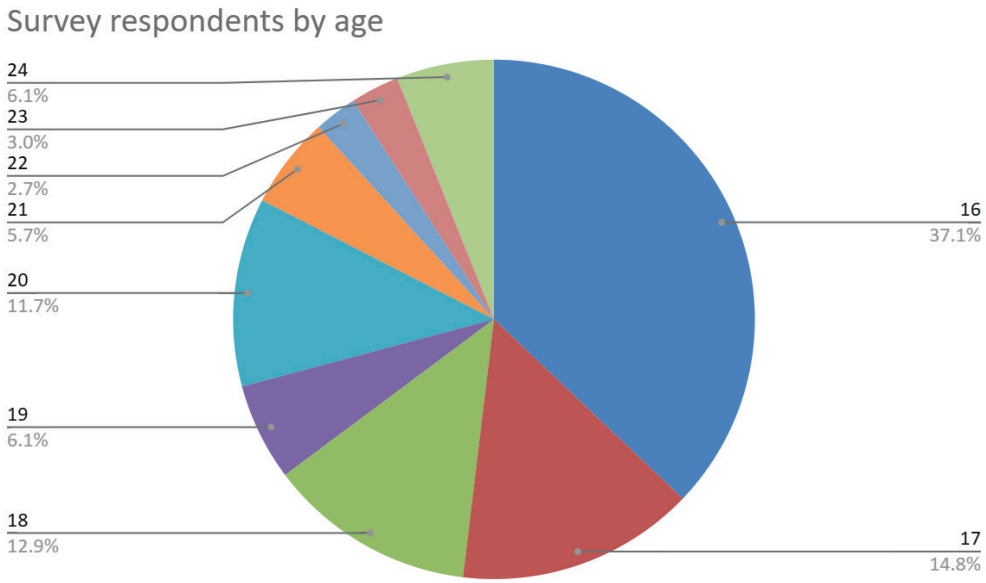


Figure 4. Survey respondents by age (total)

16 and 17-year-olds make up 75% of the Hungary group and 71% of the Czech group. **In Poland,** the age structure is much flatter. The largest single group is the 22+ category (45%), which suggests this group might include university students or young professionals rather than just secondary school students (see Figure 5).

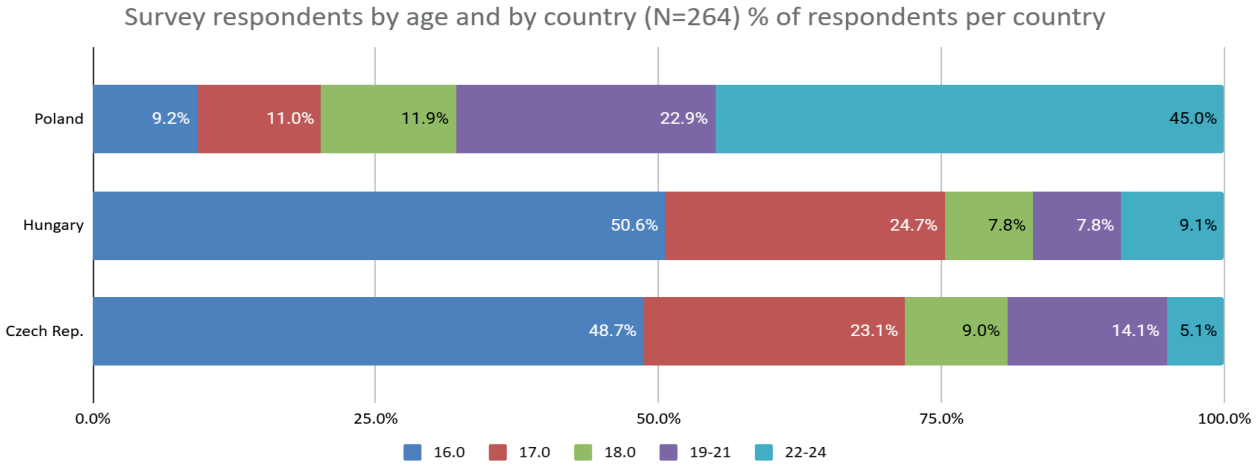


Figure 5. Survey respondents by age categories and country

Regarding the duration of stay in the host country, **26% had been residing there for less than one year**, **40.5% for between one and three and a half years**, and **34% for more than three and a half years**. The further breakdown by country (Figure 6) indicates that the highest number of newcomers was among respondents from Czechia, with 49% (38 out of 78) having lived there for less than a year. Respondents from Hungary meanwhile represent a more established community, with 48 % (37 out of 77) having lived there for more than 3.5 years. Hungarian results of having more friends might be influenced by the longer duration in the country as well as the younger average age and high level of enrollment in school. Poland featured the largest middle-term group, with 50% (54 out of 109) having lived there between 1 and 3.5 years.

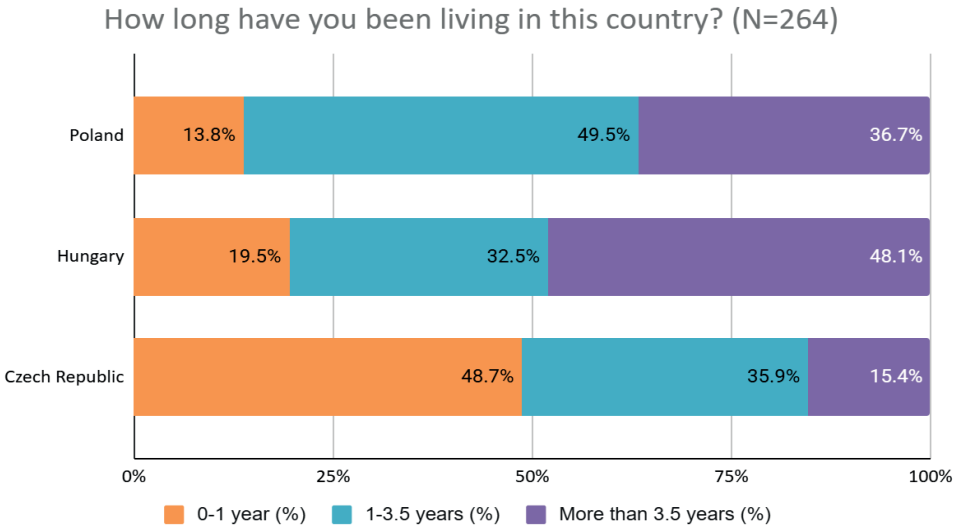
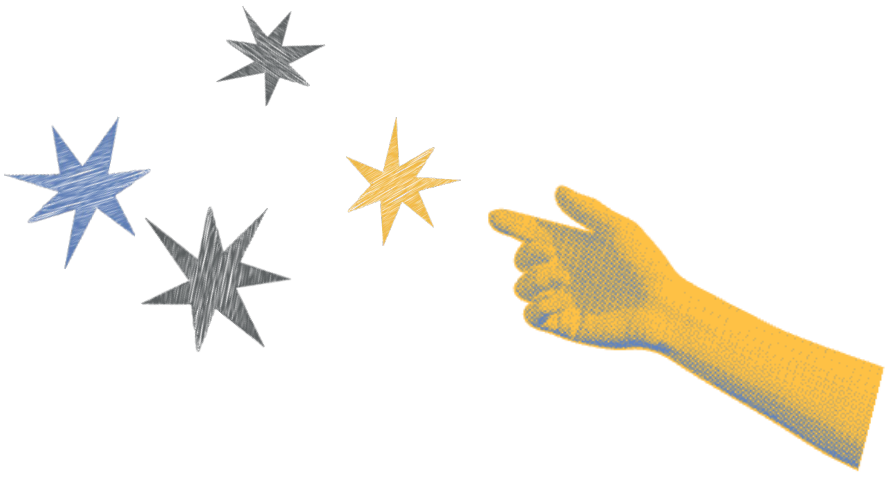


Figure 6. Survey respondents by years spent in the country of displacement

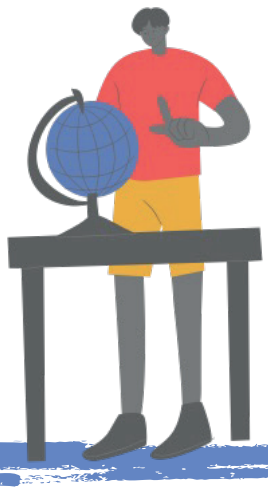


Many survey respondents in Hungary arrived at a much younger age (13-14 years). However, in Czechia respondents show that being young and 'new' creates a unique pressure: they have had very little time to learn the language and culture before they are expected to function as adults. Conversely, in Poland the sample of respondents shows that even with only two years in the country, having arrived at the beginning of war, this student age group has already pivoted toward independent living, showing a rapid (and perhaps forced) transition to adulthood.

Overall, while it does not claim to be a representative sample, the survey details a range of youth experiences. While some respondents remain in the early stages of adaptation, a considerable proportion are experiencing prolonged displacement, with growing implications for long-term integration, educational trajectories, and future planning at different stages in life (finishing school, starting university, looking for jobs or internships).

The survey provides an important window into the lived experiences of Ukrainian youth forcibly displaced in **Czechia, Hungary and Poland - that has been co-created with the displaced young people themselves.** Analysis was conducted using statistical software for closed questions (Survey Monkey and Excel). Excel was also used to thematically analyse open question responses.

The results of this thematic analysis were triangulated with themes identified in the literature and policy review and FGDs to inform the findings presented in the next stage of this report. Draft research findings and recommendations were validated in a joint analysis and collaborative recommendations session with YAB and local partners held in February 2026.



4. FINDINGS

What we learned from young people navigating forced displacement in Czechia, Hungary and Poland

The findings section of this report is structured into seven thematic areas which correspond to the structure of the online survey with the exception of the separation of education and work as categories. The findings combine triangulated analysis from each stage of the research: i) literature and policy review; ii) FGDs and iii) the survey.

Though we have presented findings under thematic headings for accessibility, it is important to note that they intersect and overlap as well as change in salience for individuals over time. Also, these themes or headings on Hobbies, Social Life and Voice, Education, Work, Housing, Administrative and Migration-status related support, Personal Wellbeing and Health, were identified as especially important to the young people who participated in the FGDs.

The survey findings broadly support this separation into the most relevant topics. For instance, our analysis finds that responses to the survey question on 'the most difficult thing since moving' were dominated by keywords such as *language, adaptation, work, housing, and social connections.* These recurring terms point to persistent barriers that shape everyday life. However, it is important to note that these are not exhaustive, and often overlapping. Following the presentation of these findings, we offer a conclusion including identifying areas for further research and a series of recommendations.

4.1. Hobbies, Social Life and Voice

Hobbies and social life

Across the three countries, participants described hobbies as important sources of identity, wellbeing, and social connection, while also noting significant disruption in hobbies as an obstacle for making new either local or Ukrainian friends.

The survey findings on these were mixed, as well as focus group testimonies showing individual patterns. While **48% of survey respondents reported that it was not difficult to find new local friends**, a substantial **41% experienced difficulties**, indicating uneven access to peer networks. The breakdown by country shows similar results. Around half of respondents found it difficult to find new friends living or studying in the country (see Figure 7).

Only the Hungarian respondents (49%) found it slightly less difficult to make new friends living or studying in the country. This could be explained by on average their longer time within a country providing for such opportunities. However, some of them, as FGDs revealed, are intentionally socialising primarily within Ukrainian or international circles, pointing to persistent language and local network gaps. For some, connecting to friends back in Ukraine was a lifeline. A young 16-year-old boy living in Czechia explained, *'childhood friend from Ukraine, we communicate online, he is currently in Ukraine.',* when asked who he talks to when experiencing difficulties.

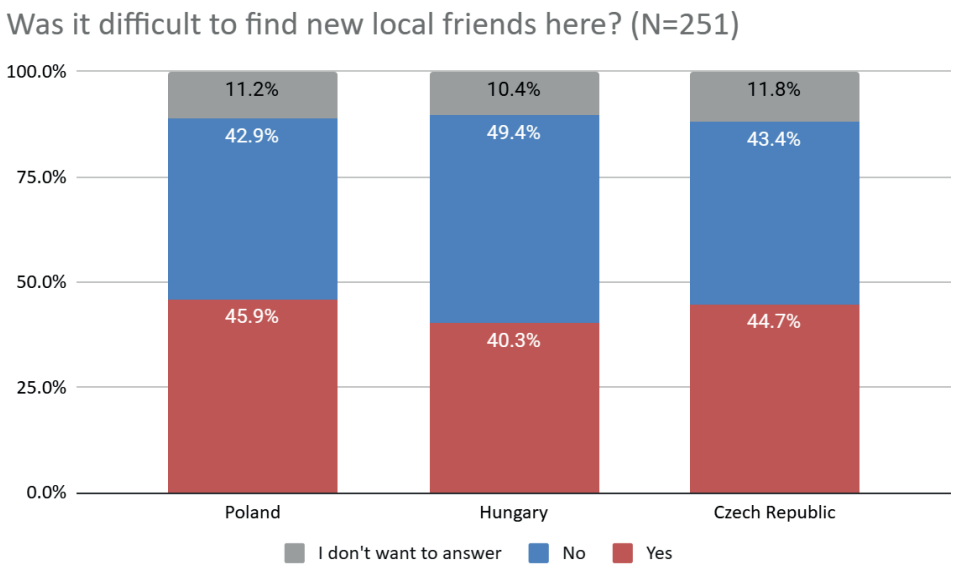


Figure 7. Difficulty finding new friends

Answers related to support and coping mechanisms revealed a narrow set of emotional anchors. The most frequently mentioned sources of support were friends, family, and partners, while institutional or professional support appeared far less often. Even when such relationships existed, respondents frequently qualified them, indicating partial or conditional emotional openness rather than full trust.

Importantly, the presence of social contacts did not necessarily translate into accessible emotional support. When asked whether they had someone to talk to when facing difficulties, many survey respondents described self-silencing, shame, or fear of burdening others, even when personal relationships existed. A 23-year-old young woman living in Czechia explained that she relied on her boyfriend for social support, *'but mostly I don't talk about anything.'* An 18-year-old boy living in Czechia reported that while he has an aunt in Prague who sometimes helps him, *'I rarely talk to her about my problems… I don't want to burden her.'* Meanwhile, a 21-year-old girl living in Poland said, *'I have a very good friend, but I can't talk to him about everything.'*

Several survey respondents reported substituting interpersonal support with solitary coping strategies, such as journaling, underscoring hidden loneliness. One young girl reported, *'I write in a journal, it helps. But still, I feel very lonely.'* Meanwhile, others reported that, besides family and friends, they also used artificial inteligence, such as ChatGPT to find support and information. One 18-year-old boy explained how he relied on *'support from relatives in Ukraine and the ability to access the information I need online or through AI chatbots.'* These findings highlight a gap between **network availability and usable psychosocial support**. This is particularly relevant for youth navigating displacement without stable peer communities.

Engagement in hobbies remains relatively high even after displacement. This was demonstrated in the survey with a multiple-choice question (see Figure 8). Around **half of participants are engaged in sports** (59% of them boys), followed by **video games** (68% of them boys) and **music** (54% of them girls), **creative activities** (57% of them girls), and **social media** (62% of them girls). Other hobbies included reading, learning languages, coding, handicrafts, or even subjects (such as chemistry).

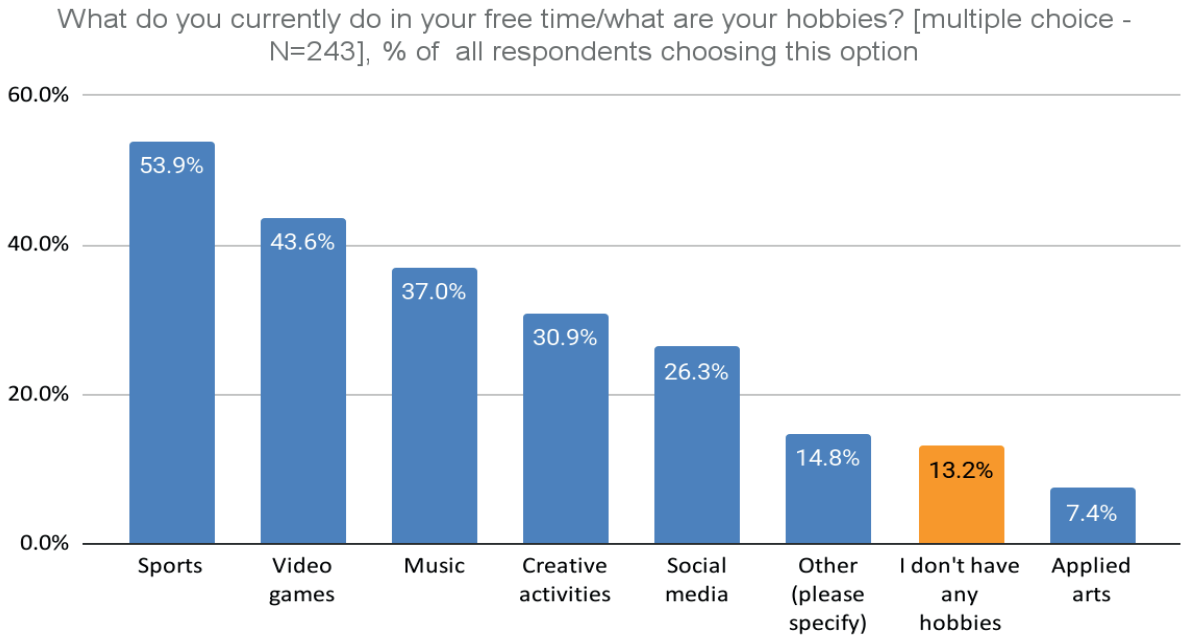


Figure 8. Hobbies among survey respondents

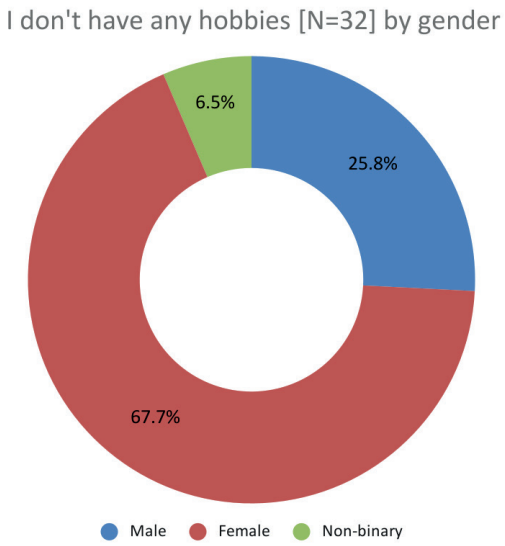


Figure 9. Respondents without hobbies by gender

However, 12% reported having no hobbies at all, often linking this to exhaustion or lack of resources. Despite the very small sample (32 respondents who chose this response), the gendered differences among those without hobbies were significant (see Figure 9). **Two in three were girls, while boys represented only one in four without any hobbies.** Two out of six self-identified non-binary persons also reported not having any hobbies.

Displacement affecting hobbies and social life

The focus group discussions in all three countries pointed to the shift from group activities back home towards more individual self-expressions in the country of displacement (see Figure 10). For instance, in Czechia, several participants spoke of a rupture between hobbies practised before and after leaving Ukraine. Creative and sporting activities were often interrupted due to language barriers, financial constraints, lack of access to information or the need to prioritise work or heavy school loads. Some of the focus group participants, such as an 18-year-old female participant living in Czechia noted that while she 'loved to draw and write poetry,' she no longer writes poetry because she feels unable to do so in Czechia, due to lack of time and other pressures.

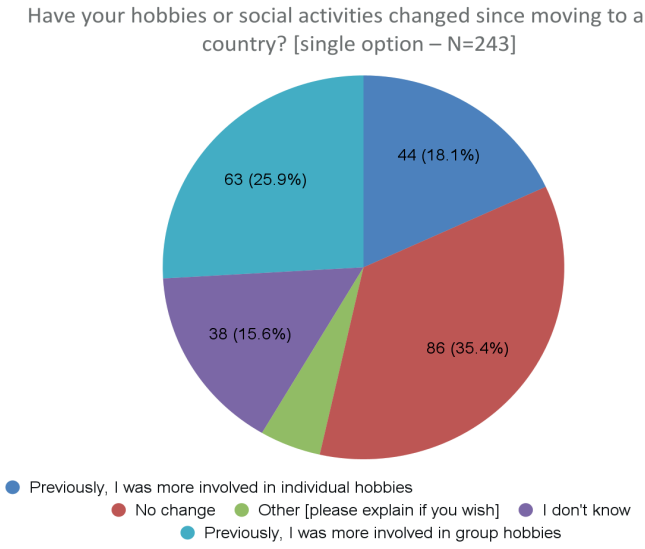
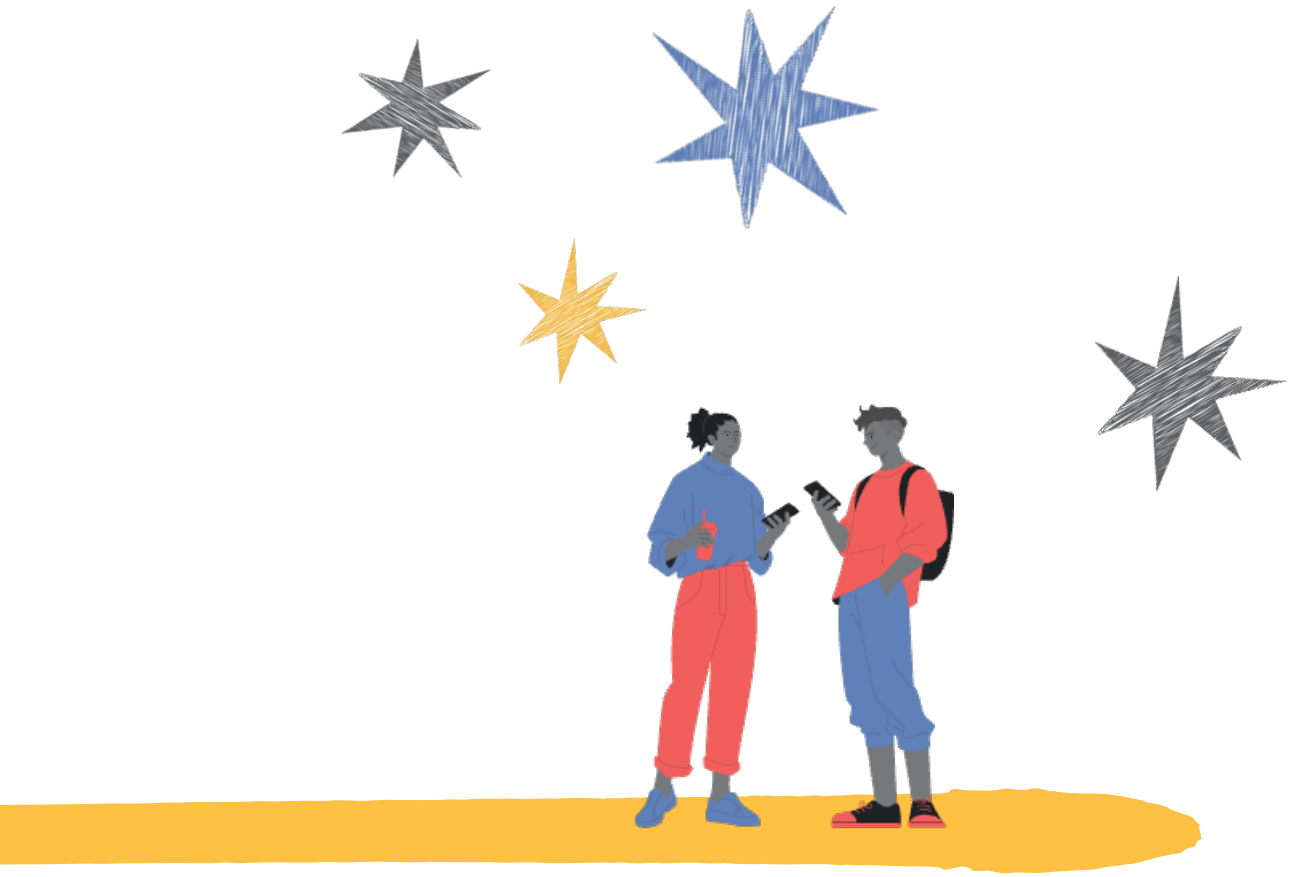


Figure 10. Changes in hobbies since displacement

A female focus group participant aged 18, living in Czechia meanwhile, described how volleyball and judo clubs closed after displacement, leading her to shift towards painting instead. The survey indicates that while for 35% of respondents there has been no change, 25% or one in four, shifted from group to individual hobbies (Figure 10). However, 18% of all survey respondents or one in five, reported the opposite trend - shifting from individual hobbies towards more group activities. The latter finding was somewhat surprising, as findings across FGDs held in all three countries - where young people narrated how after displacement they turned to more solitary hobbies, mainly due to the costs, and not feeling entirely comfortable with the new language or the new social environment. Therefore, more research needs to be done to understand the role of hobbies in displacement.

Some participants demonstrated agentic engagement with hobbies, including monetising creative skills, with the 18-year-old female participant living in Czechia continuing to draw and earning income from it. However, many described significant obstacles to pursuing desired activities, particularly time constraints linked to employment and self-sufficiency. An 18-year-old male participant living in Czechia explained, *'When you live alone and support yourself, you don't have time for hobbies; on your day off, you just want to sleep.'*



Barriers to hobbies and social life

Across all three countries, 44% of all survey respondents chose **lack of time** (109), 40% chose **lack of money** (100) and 36% chose the **language barrier** (90) as the three biggest obstacles preventing youth from pursuing their hobbies.

The respondents' choices by country further illustrate these statistics (see Figure 11). In **Poland**, 'lack of time' is the single most cited issue, picked by 54% of Ukrainian youth residing there (51 respondents). This might be also due to the older age, independent living and the pressure to earn or sustain ones living. In **Hungary**, the **language barrier** was picked by more than half participants (39), which is significantly more prevalent than in Poland (26%) or Czechia (36%). In addition, **Czechia** had 34% of respondents who feel that **'nothing is stopping them'**, suggesting a slightly higher level of hobby integration compared to the others, or perhaps a higher degree of motivation, since many of them have also arrived relatively recently.

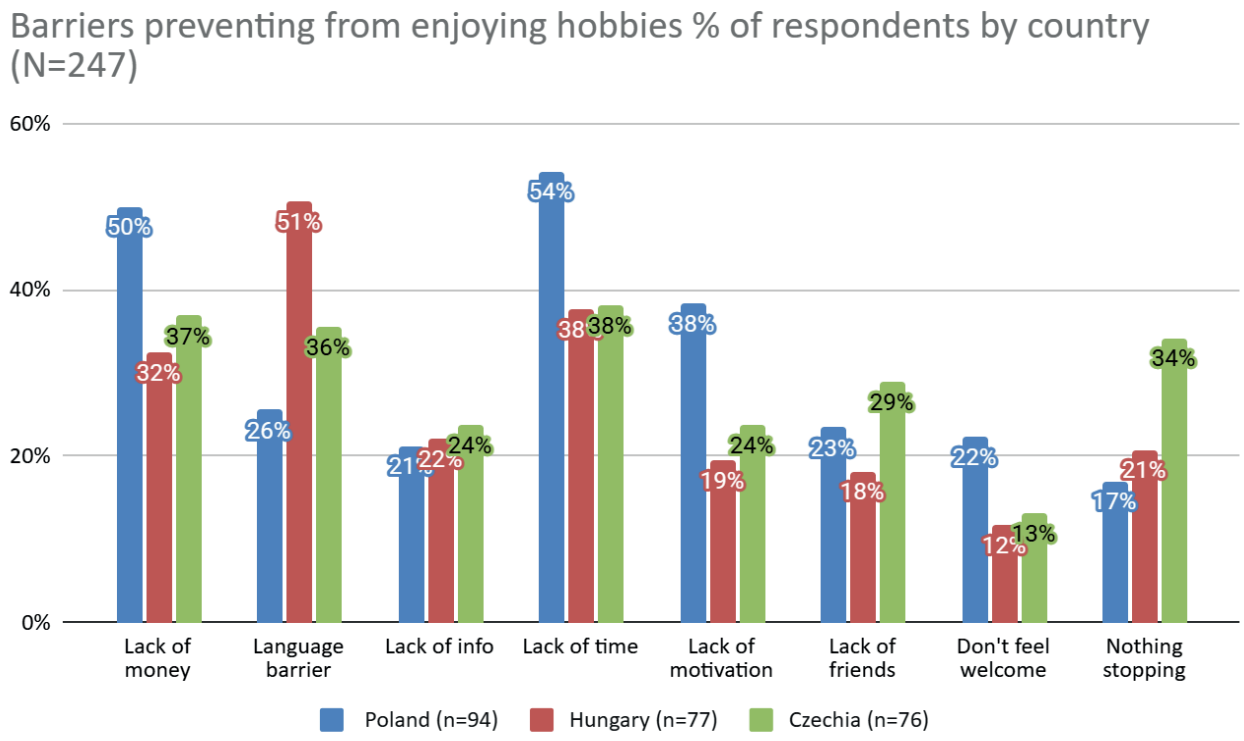


Figure 11. Barriers to enjoy hobbies by country

Financial barriers, limited time and language confidence also constrained participation, with individuals expressing aspirations to try activities such as archery, dancing, travelling, or starting a band, but lacking the necessary resources, time, or networks. Support for accessing hobbies in Czechia largely came through informal pathways, including universities, teachers, friends, social media, community organisations such as MRIYA UA, and sports associations like the Prague Football Union.

In Poland, FGD participants described a more mixed picture, with hobbies often framed as both opportunities for development and sites of constraint. Many reported engaging in a wide range of activities, including basketball, photography, drawing, gym training, swimming, skateboarding, dancing, playing musical instruments, and chess. Several participants noted that displacement had opened opportunities to explore new hobbies which they had not previously considered, and in some cases, hobbies were becoming more structured or professionalised, particularly in sport.

Social integration also shaped access to leisure, with some participants finding it difficult to communicate with Polish peers and therefore seeking hobby spaces primarily with other Ukrainian young people. Information and access were again facilitated through informal networks, including friends, Telegram and Facebook groups, and non-governmental organisations such as the Polish Migration Forum, Baza, and Ukrainski Dom.

In Hungary, FGD participants shared that their hobbies were commonly centred on creative, digital, and physical activities, including photography, video and content creation, swimming, dance, and basketball. Participants described hobbies not only as individual pursuits but also as important mechanisms for social belonging; joining activities alongside friends provided confidence to try new things. However, barriers remained, particularly in relation to language confidence, health, time constraints, and access to appropriate facilities. A 16-year-old female participant living in Hungary shared that while fencing interested her, struggling with English language classes reduced her confidence to participate.

Others reflected on the importance of structure in sustaining hobbies, emphasising that motivation alone was insufficient without routine and discipline. A 19-year-old male participant living in Hungary noted, *'It is not enough to be inspired; you also need routine and persistence.'* Across accounts, social networks and peer support emerged as key enablers of participation, helping to mitigate some of the practical and emotional barriers to sustained engagement in leisure activities.

There was a widespread concern that Ukrainian or migrant/refugee focused youth clubs were closing because of financial pressure. As a young woman, 22 years old, living in Poland, put it in her survey response: *'Many integration spaces have recently closed… it's hard to connect with people who share similar experiences.'* An 18-year-old male living in Poland said, *'Despite actively searching online, there doesn't seem to be a community that brings together all Ukrainian youth…'* These findings showcase not only the need, but also an opportunity for Ukrainian young people to come together to reclaim their voice.

Voice and civic participation

A Save the Children (2023) study reveals that displaced Ukrainian youth in Europe frequently feel disconnected from local peer networks. Many are 'aging out' of child-focused social programmes but remain too young for adult integration pathways. Events hosted by Ukrainian cultural associations help preserve community ties but are insufficient for broader integration.

This research affirmed that young Ukrainians displaced in Europe remain eager to engage civically, both regarding Ukraine and host communities. However, legal limitations on non-citizen participation restrict their ability to join political life. In turn, civic engagements are highly dependent on NGOs or specifically funded projects, which again is funding and host country dependent.

Participants across the three contexts described constrained opportunities to express their voices in wider society, alongside more positive experiences in informal or youth-specific settings. In Czechia, several participants stated that they did not feel they had a voice in society, particularly due to legal and social limitations, such as being unable to sign public petitions. Despite this, many felt able to express themselves within trusted friendship networks.

In Poland, participants identified a lack of dedicated spaces where young people could access information, support, and opportunities for meaningful participation, and explicitly requested more youth-focused meetings and forums. Some participants, who were actively engaged in social, volunteer, or educational activities reported feeling that their contributions mattered and that their voices were recognised.

In Hungary, participants reported feeling more comfortable voicing opinions in safe youth spaces than in broader society, including standing up for the rights of LGBTQ+ peers in their country of new residence. Levels of civic participation varied widely, ranging from active engagement to a lack of interest, reflecting a broad spectrum of confidence, opportunity, and perceived relevance of participation.

Displaced youth navigate complex identities, balancing Ukrainian heritage with integration into new societies. While cultural associations preserve traditions, few programmes actively engage young people in shaping hybrid and transnational identities.

4.2. Education

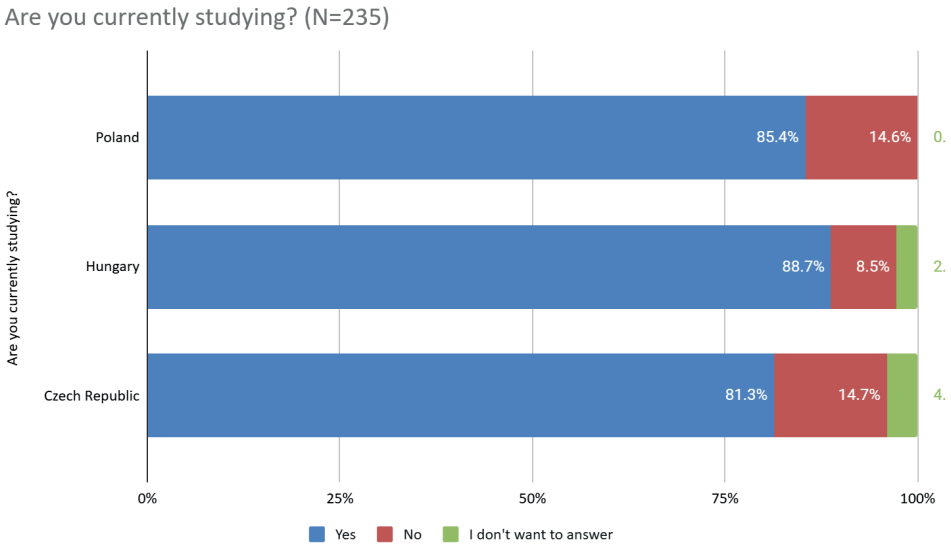


Figure 12. Respondents in education by country

Almost all FGDs' participants and a large majority of survey respondents (78%) were currently enrolled in some form of education, including host-country schools and universities, as well as Ukrainian institutions online. A breakdown by country shows that in Hungary the number of those in education was highest, due to the younger average age of survey respondents (see Figure 12). The survey has shown that in Czechia and Poland approximately one in six were not in education. While in Poland, this could be expected as the average age is higher than 18 years old, for Czechia this result is relatively surprising given the younger age of respondents.

Educational Pathways

Moreover, when it comes to the educational institutions, the results are also quite diverse:

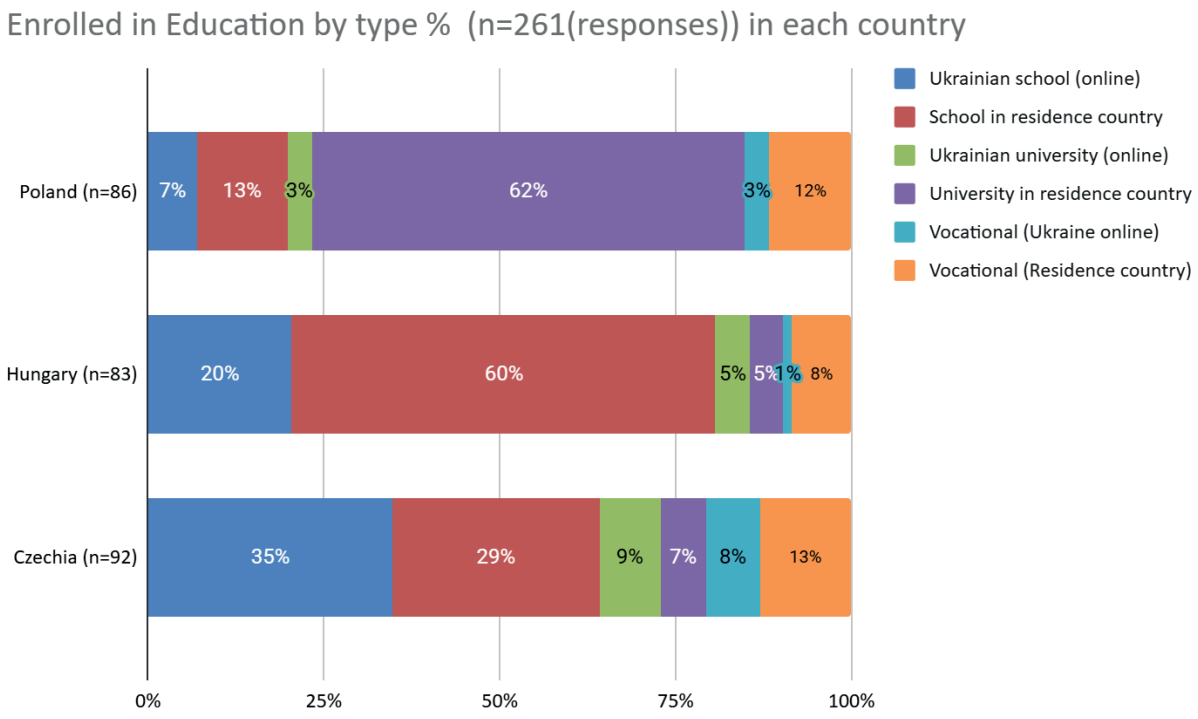


Figure 13. Type of education after displacement in a new country

As the Figure 13 demonstrates, among those enrolled in education a sizable amount of Ukrainian youth continues their Ukrainian schooling online (in red), especially in Hungary (60%) and Czechia (29%). Interestingly, in Czechia, young people were also more enrolled in Ukrainian remote universities and even vocational training online. As the subsequent graph shows, these online opportunities were often balanced with host country schooling. This is in line with the prior findings of the European Commission (2024) study showing parallel educational pathways among Ukrainians.

While four in five respondents picked only one form of education (171 out of 213), one in five is enrolled in two educational institutions (39 out of 213). In Czechia there were three respondents who indicated that they were enrolled in three or more educational institutions (Figure 14).

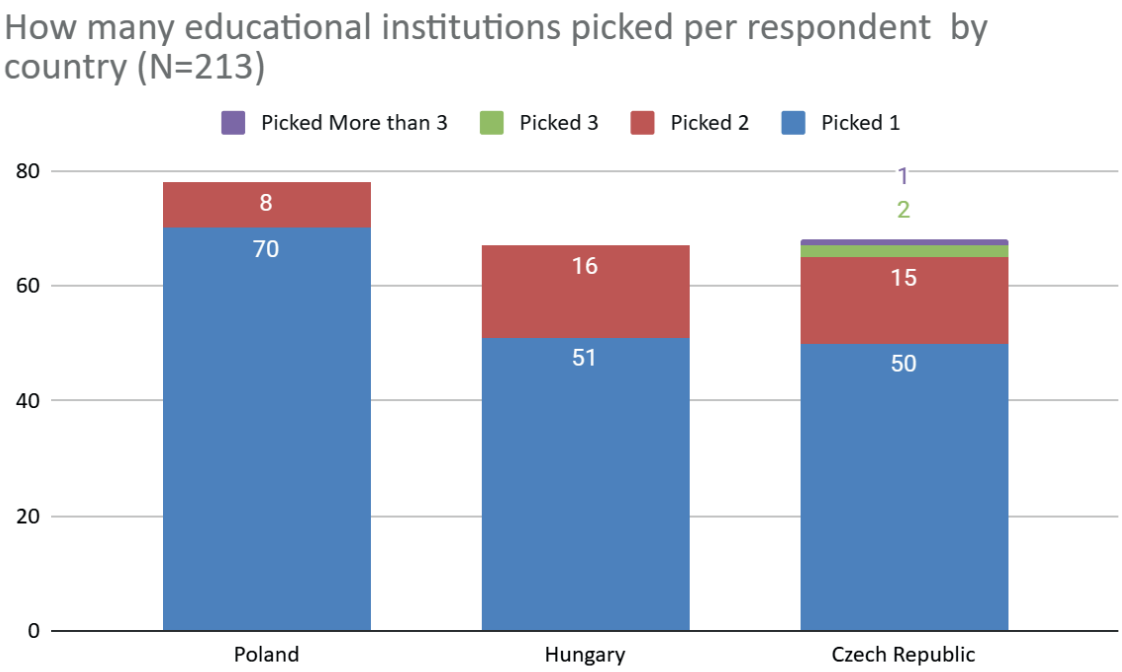


Figure 14. Number of educational institutions picked by respondents in each country

For some, the juggling of parallel educational pathways and demands masked a feeling of unworthiness. As a 20-year-old male living in Poland put it, he lives with *'the understanding that I won't be able to achieve the same things as citizens of this country.'* Some of the FGD participants in Hungary also stressed several competing demands from educational institutions and how creatively youth used AI as a relief for some competing homework.

Funding Education

Accessibility to scholarships and having to rely on family or find a side hustle while being in education was another major emerging theme. Over half of the respondents in Poland (**54%**) must pay for their education and living expenses themselves, significantly higher than in the other two countries (see Figure 15. Respondents living in the **Czech Republic** (**60%**) and **Hungary** (**70%**) have much higher rates of students reporting that their education is free compared to Poland (12%). This might be also related to the number of secondary school students filling the survey as opposed to those enrolled in vocational, bachelor's or master'sdegree studies, as prior graphs have also shown. *A* 16-year-old boy living in Hungary explained, *'I am studying at school, but for free'.*

Full scholarships that cover all expenses are rare across all three countries, with only **six respondents** in the entire sample (233 respondents answered this question) reporting receiving a full scholarship sufficient to cover the living expenses. Even partial, or symbolic scholarships seem to be quite rare, less than one in 10 in Poland, and less than one in 20 in Hungary, and only one person in the entire Czech sample. For instance, a young woman (20 years old) in Poland explained in her answer that *'I receive a scholarship that does not fully cover my expenses, so I have to work'*. Another 17-year-old girl from Poland also explained the necessity to rely on her mother: *'I study at a Polish lyceum, sometimes they give a symbolic scholarship of 250 zlotys (only when I get good grades). Although education is formally free, my mum pays for all the expenses.'* Also a 17-year-old girl from Czechia explained that instead of the merit-based scholarship she gets some social allowance, *'I receive assistance because I live alone'.*

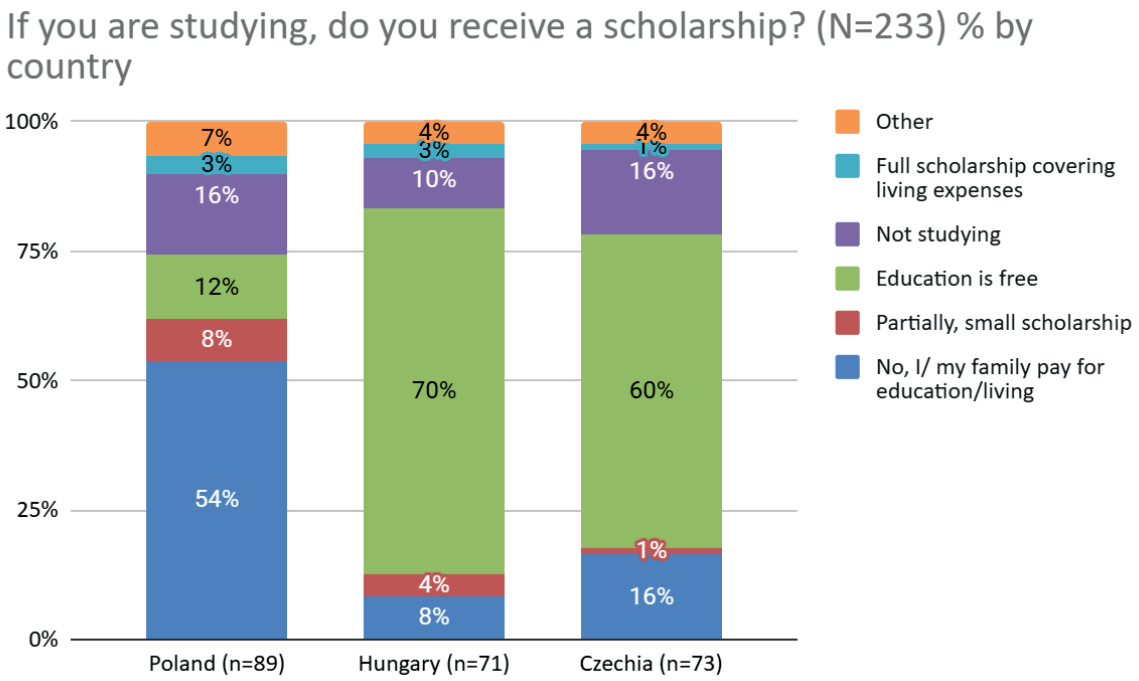


Figure 15. Respondents (not) receiving scholarships by country

Educational Aspirations

Aspirations surrounding education and career pathways were related to participants' hopes regarding the end of the war. A 19-year-old male survey respondent living in Hungary explained, *'I would like to get a higher education, gain experience and capital, and then return to Ukraine to realise my full potential there.'* Similarly, another young man aged 19, living in Hungary explained in his survey response that what was important to him was *'gaining experience in other countries and bringing useful things back to Ukraine.'* A 16-year-old boy living in Hungary added, *'With a good education, you can expect a promising career even in Ukraine.'* He explained that his short-term goal meant continuing to study in Budapest, even if the war ended, coupled with an eventual desire to return. Other survey participants, such as a 17-year-old girl living in Poland, were unsure about their futures: *'I don't know what will happen next, where I will end up…'*

In this research we found that time of departure from Ukraine as well as the educational aspirations also correlate with plans on where to live (See Figure 27).

Challenges and Barriers in Education

Our research revealed that many Ukrainian youths face challenges in accessing education, including lengthy delays in school enrolment, language requirements, lack of recognised previous qualifications, long commutes to attend classes, and a lack of understanding or sensitivity within schools regarding their experiences of war.

Among survey respondents who reported difficulties after displacement, **67% cited insufficient host-country language skills** as the primary barrier, followed by high housing costs (25%) and feeling unwelcome (21%). When analysed by country, this has shown that while the **language barrier** was ranked highest across all countries, it was especially in **Czechia**, where **79%** of respondents identified it as a major difficulty (see Figure 16). This could likely correlate also with the more recent arrivals of the respondents in Czechia.

Among the financial factors we see that **high costs of housing** was a much larger issue for students than the actual **cost of education**. In **Poland**, 44% of survey respondents cited **high rent as a primary difficulty**, this was an issue for one third of respondents in Czechia and one fifth in Hungary.

In **Poland**, **the cost of education** was also relevant among 24% or one in five respondents, while negligent in Czechia and Hungary, most likely due to older/ student age in Poland among respondents. Surprisingly, one in every five respondents across all three countries felt **not welcome** in the educational system. **Hungary** has 28% of respondents reporting **'No Difficulties'** in enrolling into education, suggesting a smoother entry into the local, especially bi-lingual secondary school education for this group. However, distance to school was also an issue to one in four respondents in Hungary. In Czechia, also one in five survey respondents felt that there was a lack of information on how to **apply to a school or university**, indicating a practical gap to be filled in.

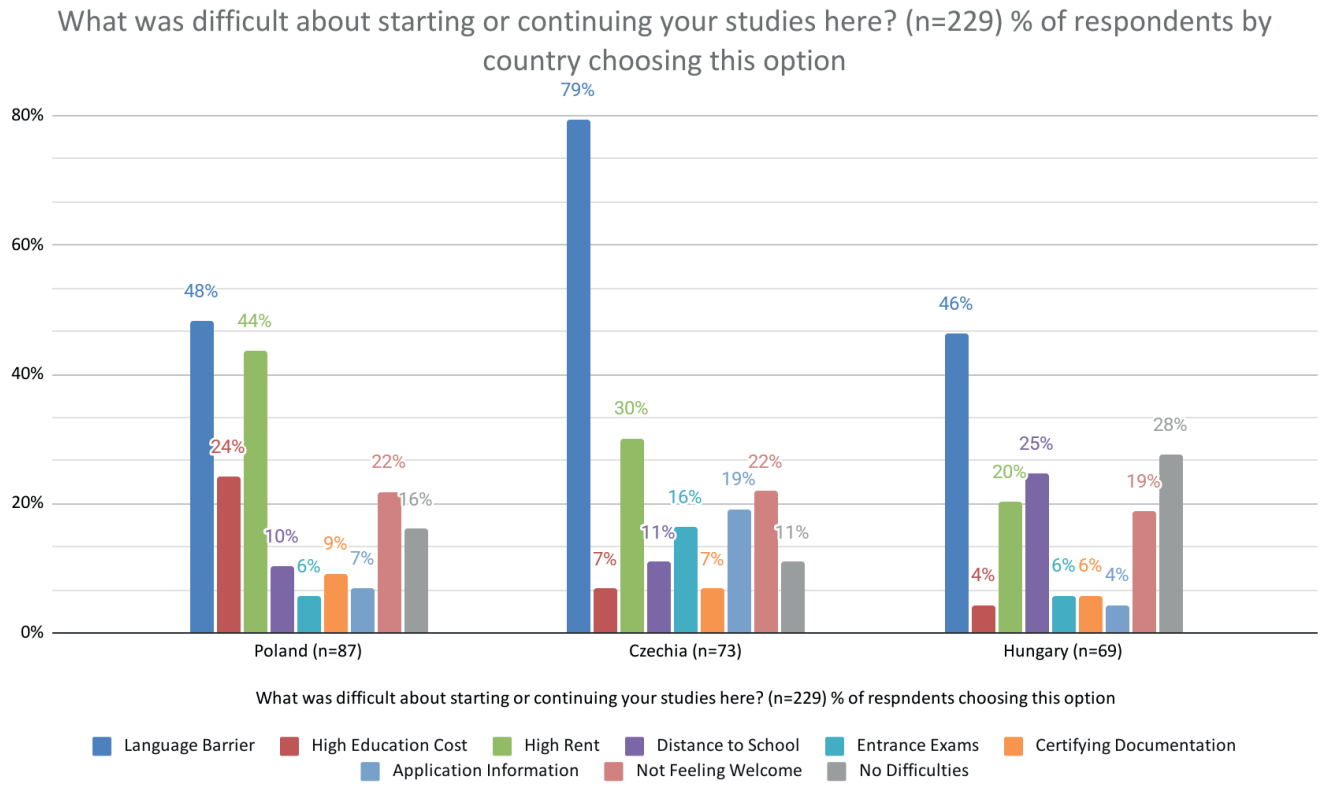


Figure 16. Difficulties experienced in continuing education, by country

Our survey results somewhat contradict the findings of von Löwis et al. (2024), who found that despite interrupted education and limited work experience, young Ukrainians generally adapted well linguistically, especially in Poland. Our data reveal that, besides basic linguistic understanding in the initial stages, a lack of proficient knowledge of the language can increasingly become a barrier for more meaningful social interactions with the local community, including lacking sufficient bespoke linguistic confidence to navigate the education and workplace.

The FGDs confirmed this, with numerous examples across all three countries demonstrating how bureaucratic and linguistic barriers limit educational progression, especially for older youth. Prejudice in admissions processes and inability to lend flexibility to the translation of documents was cited as one such example. In some cases, such as in Czechia, entry exams administered in the local language, in combination with an overwhelming lack of information, provided an additional barrier to educational progressions. These are not new findings. A CARE report found that Ukrainian students in the Polish education system encountered considerable cultural and linguistic challenges, with 24% of adolescents citing lack of comprehension of the Polish education system (Mejer 2024).

The FGDs' participants also cited examples of xenophobic treatment when revealing lack of fluency in the recipient country's mother tongue in educational contexts. Participants from Czechia noted that they encountered prejudice against Ukrainians when applying to secondary school. This xenophobic treatment in educational contexts also extends to social and peer bonds, for example, participants from Poland cited examples of bullying and alienation in local Polish schooling on the grounds of their background. One 18-year-old female participant living in Poland noted that it took her a staggering almost three years to establish relationships with her peers at the lyceum.

Despite the high participation rate in learning, educational continuity thus remains fragile, especially because of the unclear fate for those covered under the Temporary Protection Directive (see ***section 5. Administrative and Migration-Status Related Support***).

Qualitative responses to the survey illustrate how language barriers intersect with mental health, finances, and legal uncertainty. A 23-year-old female survey respondent living in Czechia reported, *'my Czech is too poor for university… I can't regularly attend any free courses because of my mental health…'* These findings suggest that access to education alone is insufficient without flexible language provision, mental-health-sensitive attendance requirements, and legal predictability.

4.3. Work

Ukrainians granted Temporary Protection in the EU countries are allowed to work legally and most EU countries have extended the measure until 2027 March. In addition, some of the European Economic Area (EEA) states, such as Norway, Switzerland, Iceland, and Liechtenstein also applied similar provisions. However, youth-specific challenges persist as many young Ukrainians arrive without sufficient language skills of their respective host countries, professional networks, or local work experience, as well as a lack of translated and confirmed diplomas and qualifications. Experiences of workplace discrimination were highlighted, with FGDs' participants and survey respondents describing being treated unfairly at work or witnessing peers being insulted because of their nationality, limiting how they perceived their agency and voice in their new place of being.

Displaced Ukrainian Youth Juggling Employment and Education

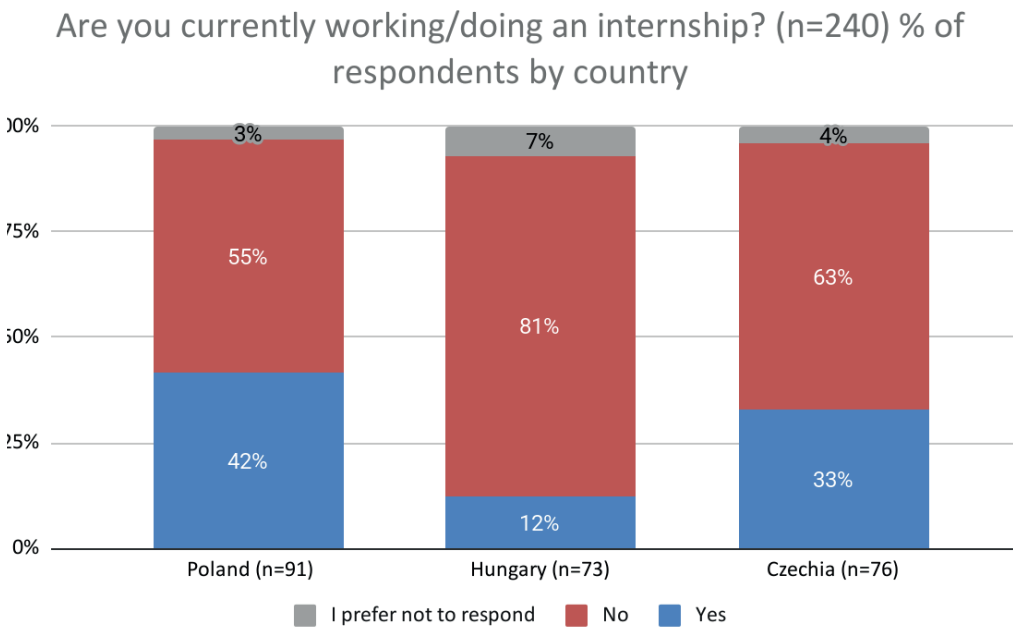


Figure 17. Respondents' employment/internship status by country

Only **30% of survey respondents** were currently working or engaged in internships, while 65% were not, often due to study commitments, caregiving roles, or language limitations. A breakdown by country revealed the more nuanced distribution among the survey respondents revealed how differently these populations are experiencing the demands to balance education and work (see Figure 17).

Poland has the highest percentage of displaced Ukrainian working youth among the three countries, with nearly **42%** of respondents currently employed or doing an internship. Among the respondents in Poland, who answered 'yes', the age range was 17-24 and the average age was **20.6.** Many of these respondents are balancing the **University in residence country** (20 respondents), and vocational training in residence country (six respondents). Thus, these are older youth who are balancing higher education with employment.

In Czechia, one in three survey respondents were also working. However, the average age among those working was **17.6** within the age range 16-22 - nearly three years younger than in Poland. This supports the observation that working displaced Ukrainian youths in Czechia are primarily **secondary school students**, often balancing local school (12 respondents), Ukrainian online school (seven respondents), as well as part-time work. More detailed analysis of respondents shows that among those working nearly **one third of them is** also managing **two or more** schools/universities. The relatively recent arrival into the country could be also one of the compounding factors, requiring young people to sustain themselves.

In Hungary, there was the lowest percentage - **12% of those working**. While overall, Hungarian respondents were relatively younger, the average age among those working was **19.7 within an age range 16-24**. It needs to be highlighted that the sample size for working youth in Hungary is very small (nine respondents), as most respondents there are focused exclusively on full-time secondary education. Thus, the deeper analysis revealed that **Hungary** has the lowest intersection of work and education, with most youth focusing on one or the other. The longer stay in the country might also have contributed as a factor.

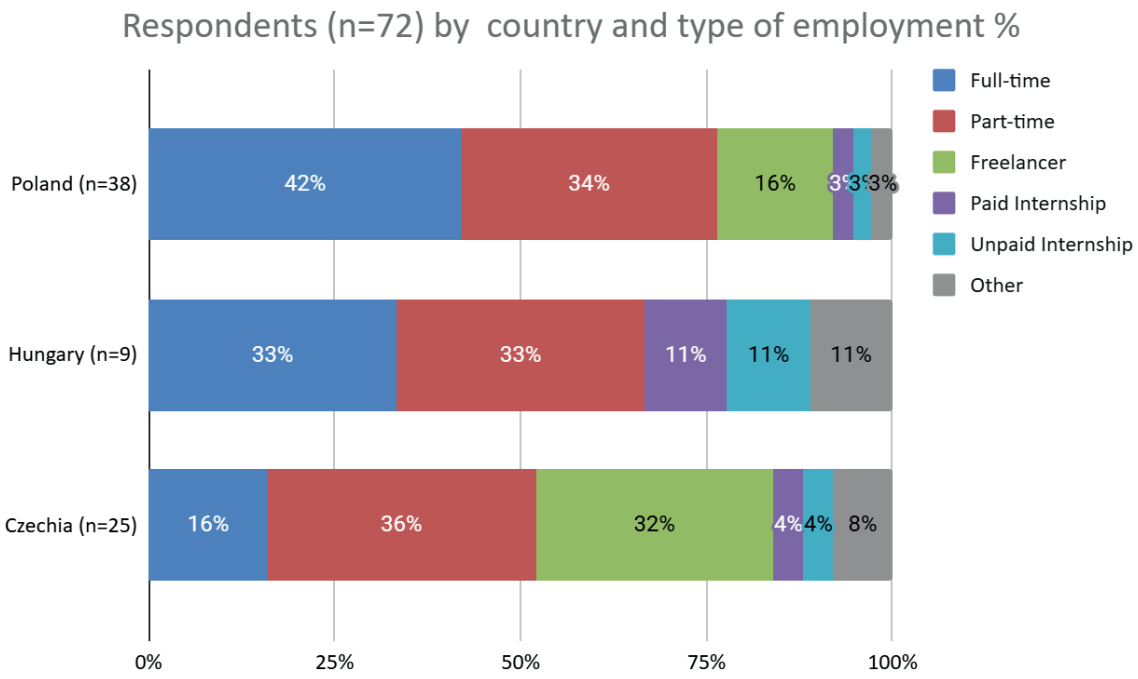


Figure 18. Reported type of employment/ internship in each country

The sub-sequent survey question focused on the type of employment and whether they were enrolled in full-time, part-time or self-employed activities (see Figure 18). Nearly **42%** of working youth in **Poland** are in full-time employment (16 out of 38). This is the highest proportion of fulltime workers among the three countries. While **Czechia** has a high number of **freelancers/self-employed** (eight) and **part-time** workers (nine), accounting for **68%** of their working group. This reflects the younger average age (17.6) and the need for flexible schedules to manage schooling. In Hungary the sample is small (nine respondents) but evenly split between full-time, part-time, and internships. Interestingly, **internships (both paid and unpaid) represent a very small percentage** of the total employment across all countries, with most youth opting **for direct part-time or full-time jobs**. For instance, a young woman (20 years old) in Poland noted in her survey response - *'I work and am doing an unpaid internship',* showing a strategy to build one's career while sustaining oneself.

In addition, 16 survey respondents - ten in Hungary, five in Czechia and one in Poland who initially said they are not 'working' are doing **unpaid internships**. This suggests that internships might **not be viewed as 'real work'** by the Ukrainian displaced youth. In addition, five respondents across three countries more viewed in this way even **paid internships.** Finally, 14 individuals consider themselves freelancers/self-employed but initially said 'No' to the working status question, possibly indicating their ad-hoc work or temporary digital work.

A higher relative proportion of working youth in Hungary and the Czech Republic are in **Factory/Manufacturing** compared to Poland, most likely as these are 'first jobs'. While Poland shows the most diverse range of employment, with respondents working in almost every listed category of jobs, including **Healthcare, Finance, and NGOs**. To illustrate this, a 23-year-old young woman living in Poland mentioned her career transition - *'First I was an administrator, now I'm an SMM [Social Media Marketing] manager.'*

One 17-year-old female survey respondent living in Poland, explained in her survey response, *'The ambitions of young people should also be nurtured by offering opportunities for internships and self-development.'* This largely corresponds to the suggestions emerging from the FGDs, that young people lack genuine ways to start and expand their professional careers through internships. However, there is a structural barrier, as most internships, especially those likely to serve as bridges to higher-paid jobs are often still unpaid or reserved for nationals and those with the 'social network', or at least - families' financial capacity to sustain them. Hence, for many Ukrainians, just like other people navigating displacement, **unpaid internships present a real-life challenge for upwards social mobility.**

Gendered analysis among the employed survey respondents

Across the three countries, slightly more males (**38**) are working than females (**31**), though this is primarily driven by the trend in Czechia. Interestingly, in Czechia, most of those balancing both work, education and care were **males** (9 out of 13). This differs from Poland and Hungary, where females make up the larger portion of this group.

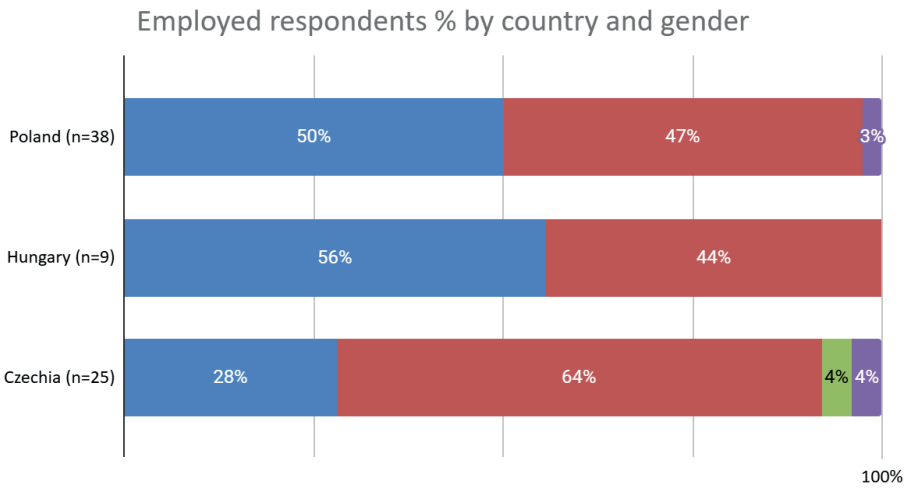


Figure 19. Employed respondents by gender and country

In Poland, the employed respondents are almost perfectly split between females - 50% or 19 respondents and males 47% or 18 respondents, suggesting that employment opportunities or the need to work are equally distributed across genders for university-aged youth. In **Poland**, 11 out of 38 working youth (**29%**) also have care duties. Most of them or seven out of 11 were young women, revealing that such care-giving responsibilities might also come on top of work and education. See more detailed analysis in the sub-sequent section ***Caring responsibilities***.

In Czechia, significantly more males 64% (16 respondents) are working compared to females - 28% (seven respondents). This is notable given that many in this group are younger (average age was 17.6), indicating that male secondary students may be entering the local workforce or internships at a higher rate. OPU, local partner organisation in Czechia, also has informed about a concerning phenomenon that young Ukrainian boys and men have been pro-actively recruited from Ukraine to work in difficult and low paid jobs in Czechia, often in exploitative conditions. In addition, 13 of these working respondents also have caring responsibilities - nine of them were males, three - females and one non-binary person. This shows how the gendered family obligations are also applied to young men and boys.

In Hungary, the small group of nine working respondents is relatively evenly split (five females, four males). Six out of nine working youth (**67%**) have care duties, suggesting that for the few who do work in Hungary, family responsibilities are a very common part of their lives. Gendered analysis shows that while four of them were female, only two were male. However, this sample is very small.

This gendered analysis reveals more complex realities across three countries, where **gendered employment patterns were detected in Czechia**. Interestingly, 'traditional' female caring responsibilities seem also to correlate more with the maturity of the respondents such as illustrated in Poland. The findings from Czechia also suggest, caregiving or helping one's family being also a particular obligation among the majority of working young men and boys. In addition, **males** were more likely to be **Freelancers or Self-employed** (nine males and three females). Nevertheless, some female respondents also reported self-employment, but under 'other' category. For example, a 17-year-old female respondent in Czechia explained *'I'm a lash maker, I do eyelashes… 'I work in the beauty industry. And I decide for myself when I can leave'* showing how more flexibility and entrepreneurship can come through highly gendered type of employment.

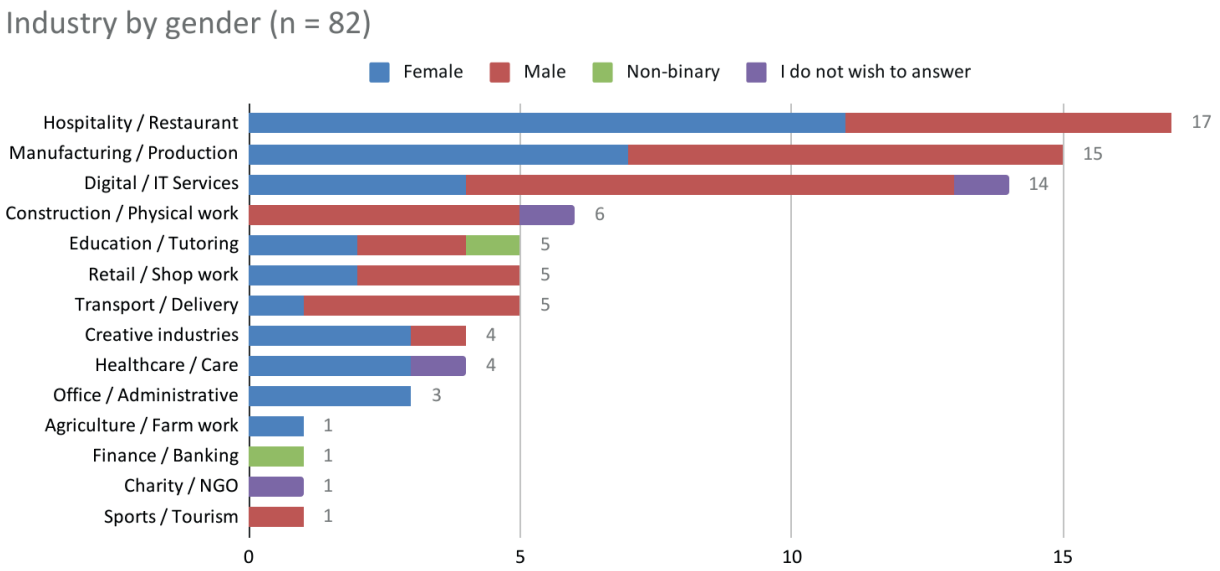


Figure 20. Respondents by sector of employment and gender (total)

The gendered lens shown that displaced youth were more likely to conform to the dominant gender stereotype within the field (see Figure 20):

Male-Dominant Sectors: Digital/IT (9 males vs 4 females), Construction (5 males vs 0 females), and Transport/ Delivery (4 males vs 1 female).

Female-Dominant Sectors: Hospitality (11 females vs 6 males), Office/Administrative (3 females vs 0 males), and Healthcare/Care (3 females vs 0 males).

Gender-balanced: However, manufacturing, education and retail are the most balanced industries for this group, with nearly an equal split between all genders.

Caring responsibilities

Amongst the displaced youth surveyed, gender was also a central intersectional factor shaping access to work and opportunity, with the clearest examples emerging in Poland and Hungary. In the FGDs, girls and young women expressed having to shoulder care responsibilities for younger siblings, limiting their time for hobbies, educational commitments, or paid work. **Nearly half of the survey respondents (46%) provided regular support to family members**, most commonly through administrative assistance, translation, childcare, and health-related support. Their experiences reveal how gender and identity intersect with displacement, deepening vulnerability and reinforcing pre-existing inequalities. This unpaid labour significantly shapes young people's capacity to engage in education, employment, and social life.

While at the same time this might also contribute to ones' agency by capacity to help others and feel needed. This is an area that requires further exploration. Ukrainian research team members have called it a **'custom' or 'behavioural culture'** in Ukraine, *'I doubt if all young people enjoy taking care of family members, but in many cases, they have to. But still some just want to help their parents out of necessity'.*

This was particularly true for those displaced **in Poland where 81%** or 25 out of 31 of those helping families were girls and young women. **In Hungary**, helping their families among respondents were more prevalent (43 out of 77 respondents), yet they were also more equally distributed along gender lines with **54% girls (23 out of 43) and 42% boys (18 out of 43).** However, among those displaced **in Czechia**, surprisingly there were slightly more boys - **53% (18 out of 34)** helping their families.

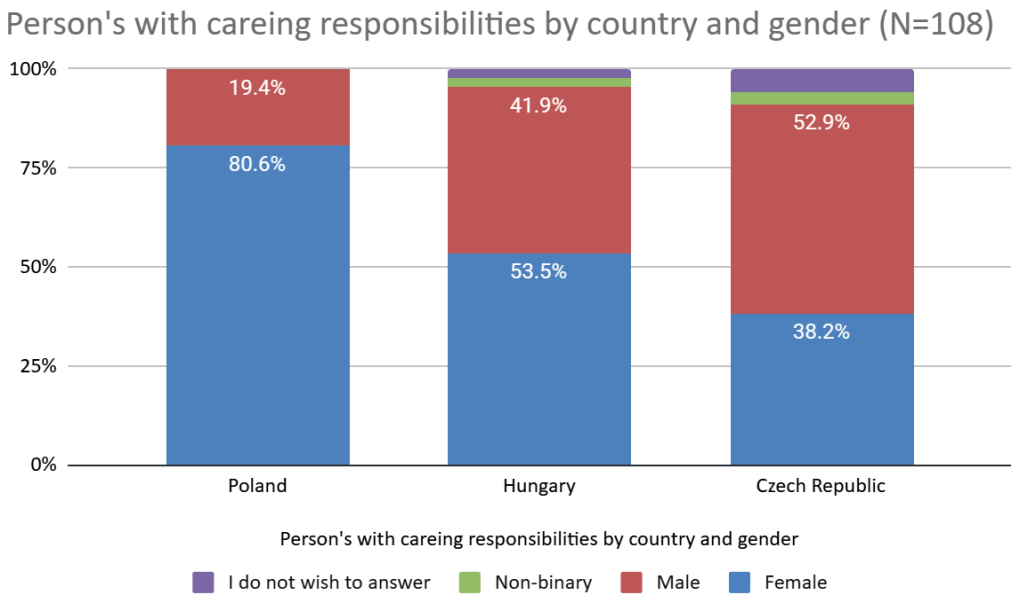


Figure 21. Respondents helping their families by gender in each country

Although the sample size is small, this pattern suggests that caregiving is more likely to be still borne by young women within displaced Ukrainian families, and as findings in Poland indicate, this gets even more pronounced after reaching 18, or starting independent living. More research is required to understand how young, displaced Ukrainians understand the concept of 'caregiving' and whether, for example, it includes contributing to the family financially when living together or through remittances (if they are left in Ukraine). Shedding light on this is important to further disaggregate gendered analysis.

This gendered distribution of responsibilities nevertheless seems to reflect broader structural inequalities, whereby girls and young women are more likely to assume care work alongside education, employment, and integration pressures, potentially limiting their educational and professional opportunities in the host country. Added to this was the potential for young adults to begin their own families by having children. Though the question of whether you have children wasn't specifically asked in the FGDs or survey - something perhaps to be explored in further research - it emerged as significant. One 22-year-old woman living in Czechia stated that her life felt like, *'starting all over again with nothing, with a small child.'*

Challenges to access formal contracts, labour exploitation and experiences of discrimination

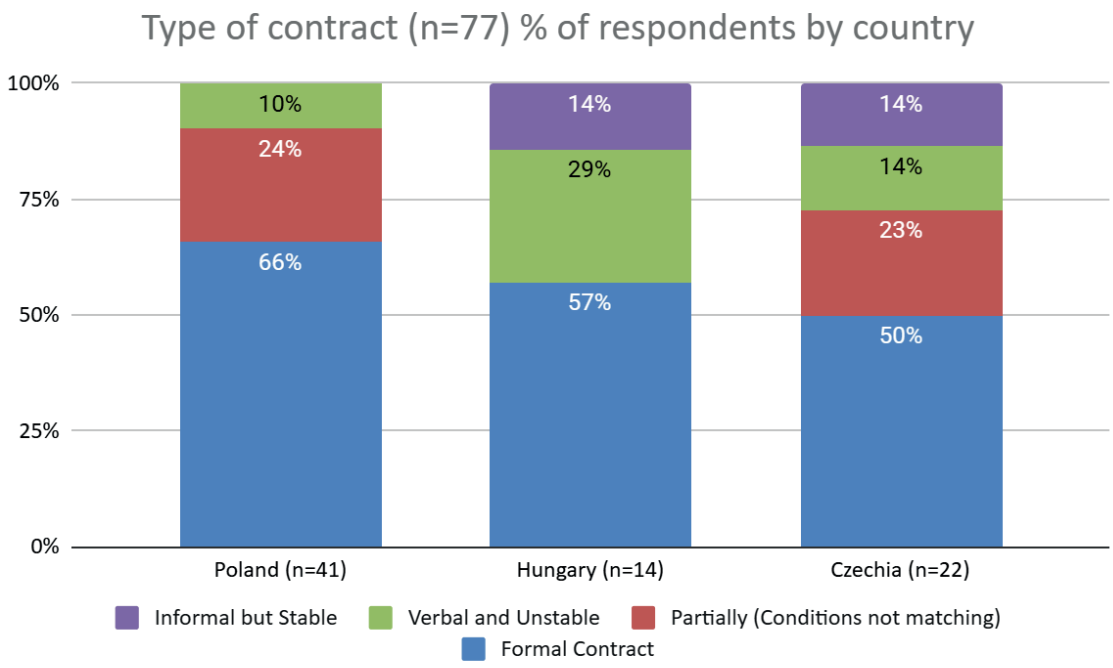


Figure 22. Reported formality of employment contracts in each country

The FGDs revealed and our survey confirmed a concerning lack of formality among the employment contracts offered to displaced young Ukrainians across three countries (see Figure 22). As our survey results indicate, **Poland** has the highest rate of **formal contracts** that match actual working hours among young displaced Ukrainians (**66%**). However, it also shows the largest number of people with 'gray' contracts - **24%** (or 10 respondents), where the document formally exists, but does not match the actual salary or hours.

In Hungary, the small sample of respondents (n=14) , the contract formality is high (**57%**), but a significant portion of the group operates on informal and verbal-only agreements **(43%**).

In **Czechia**, the Ukrainian displaced youth surveyed had a high reliance on **verbal, often informal (28%), and 'grey' arrangements (23%). Only half of them had formal contracts** matching the working hours and salary. The sector-specific contractual arrangements, or their known deviations, such as the hospitality sector is the primary employer in Czechia and in Poland, as well as construction and manufacturing - in Czechia and Hungary.

Xenophobia and lack of adequate work health and safety protections, for example, through trade union membership was also cited as a reason for precarious working conditions. A 19-year-old male survey respondent living in Czechia explained how he experienced precarious employment, *'Understanding that at work you will always be treated as a tool: if you break, they will throw you away. No one cares about your rights, let alone your safety.'*

A 24-year-old woman living in Poland confirmed that such discrimination was experienced across gender and national divides: *'The vast majority of Ukrainians work in dangerous conditions, under psychological pressure. They can fire you for anything, and I speak from experience. Talk about your rights? You're fired. Don't follow orders because they violate safety regulations? You're fired. Got sick and took sick leave? Look for a new job.'*

Once again, mental health, language barriers and displacement-related mental health challenges were shown to intersect to shape education and employment opportunities. The young woman explained her central dilemma was as follows: *'To come to terms with the loss of my past life and force myself to resume my studies or go to work. My Czech is too poor for university, and I can't regularly attend any free courses because of my mental state… The language barrier and lack of experience in any kind of work also prevent me from finding a job, so that someone would want to hire me for a decent job, not for illegal work in some warehouse with 12-hour shifts… I simply don't have the strength.'*

Importantly, her observation reveals how the irregular working hours and other labour exploitation is reaping off the vulnerabilities created through displacement and trauma. FGDs and also members of the YAB and partner organisations highlighted how unscrupulous employers such as in warehouses, as well as in restaurants and agriculture, are profiting from the compounded vulnerability of young displaced persons, often in need to sustain themselves and their families while studying or even while continuing school. FGDs revealed how the practice of using student contracts was also misused across all three countries by employers, and served not as a preparation for the careers, but as a way to lower taxes at the expense of young persons' social and economic protections.

Across the board, Ukrainian young people encounter several significant challenges **in accessing decent employment**, such as limited proficiency in English, caregiving responsibilities for young children, the non-recognition of qualifications and work experience obtained in Ukraine, insufficient personalised support from Job Centres, and visa-related restrictions that result in the refusal of apprenticeship opportunities and formal job contracts. Both surveys and FGDs point to the widespread phenomenon of informal working arrangements, often through other Ukrainians.

Experiences of being targeted by **false job advertisements,** and labour exploitation were repeatedly mentioned, contributing to feelings of insecurity and inter-communal tension. A 22-year-old male respondent living in Czechia explained, *'many agencies advertise on Instagram and TikTok, promoting jobs that do not correspond to reality.'*

A 24-year-old female living in Poland wrote in our survey, *'the vast majority of Ukrainians work in dangerous conditions… You speak up about your rights? You're fired.'*

Participants in FGDs cited a **lack of information and xenophobia** as challenges towards employment. Some stated that they were rejected during their job search and employment processes because they were Ukrainians. Similarly, once in employment, the FGD participants noted harassment on the grounds of their background. An 18-year-old female FGD participant living in Czechia noted that she was *'harassed more than anyone else'*, whereas another 19-year-old male participant in the same FGD similarly expressed frustration at why his Czech employers *'attack foreigners.'*

Language was once again reiterated as a barrier to finding a quality work or internship. A 20-year-old male survey respondent living in Poland reported, *'Without knowledge of the language, it is very difficult to find work and local friends, and there is a severe lack of funds.'*

Another practical barrier for Ukrainian youth is obtaining **an EU driving licence**, which requires a number of documents. As a young man, 22 years old, living in Czechia, explained, *'First of all, I need to learn Czech, then get my driving licence, and then try my hand at different things.'*

Displaced youth employment as independence strategy and lack of youth-friendly guidance

For FGD participants, work, as well as education, were interlinked with the desire for independence and survival; part-time jobs were essential for many, but were also said to compromise study time and wellbeing. This clash of competing goals between education for a better job in the long-term, and short-term employment to provide for oneself and in some cases for one's family, has been identified among other refugee youth in Europe (Allsopp and Chase 2023). Participants described this combination as difficult, stressful and requiring a lot of dedication, organisation and self-discipline.

While many EU countries have youth employment agencies, few specifically target displaced youth. A recent joint United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and European Training Foundation (ETF) report highlights the absence of integrated career guidance services that connect educational, vocational, and psychological support for young Ukrainians, citing the need for a career guidance system that has a special focus on young Ukrainians, particularly given their specific difficult circumstances (UNICEF and ETF 2024).

However, these guidance services also need to consider where young people seek information on their labour rights. Our survey reveals that the absolute majority rely on their own **internet search (60% of all respondents)** and quite some rely on **social media (28%)**. Thus, displaced youth are far more likely to trust an anonymous search engine or a community post than a formal institution. In addition, respondents prioritise 'horisontal' information from peers over 'vertical' information experts/authorities.

To illustrate this, local friends (34%) and/or work colleagues (32%) were selected much more often, lawyers were selected only 40 times (17%), and **trade unions—the formal bodies designed for this exact purpose—were selected only 13 times (just 5% of respondents).** Only respondents **in Poland were more than twice as likely to mention a lawye**r (20 mentions) compared to Czechia (eight mentions). This aligns with previous findings that the Polish sample is slightly older and more formally employed, leading to a more formal approach to rights. Finally, while displaced Ukrainian youth in our survey is also in an age bracket often connected to education, **only 14% see their teachers as a resource for work rights**, indicating that schools are not currently seen as providing 'real-world' legal or labour advice.

Given the wide-spread informality of working contracts **(34% in Poland, 43% in Hungary (but only nine respondents), and 50% in Czechia),** and reported experiences of labour exploitation among displaced Ukrainian youth, as well as general lack of knowledge about the labour rights (**50-55% average self-assessment out of 100%**), these survey findings on trusted information sources suggest the under-explored potential of powerful youth-oriented online labour campaigns co-designed with young people for social media, along with increased opportunities for quality online advice, i.e. via chatbots.

4.4. Housing

In terms of living arrangements, **60% of 264 survey respondents reported living with family members**, while **30% lived independently** and **10% indicated other arrangements** or preferred not to answer. The breakdown of living arrangements by country revealed that **in Poland,** because here the average age of respondents was above 18, **more than half were living by themselves**. Among 'other answers', there were several respondents living with their boyfriends/girlfriends or friends. The Hungarian and Czech respondents, due to their younger median age of around 16 and 17 years respectively, were mostly living with parents or other relatives.

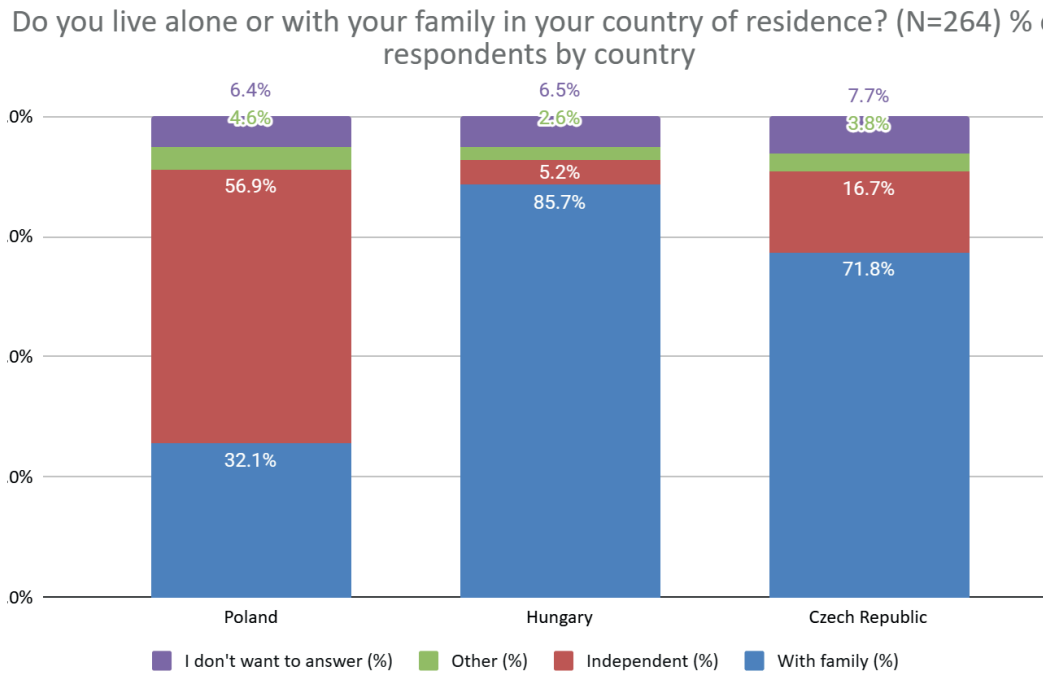


Figure 23. Respondents living alone or with family in each country

Subsequent survey questions on housing arrangements further nuanced that sharing a room or a house is a significant reality for youth in **Poland (50%** and the **Czechia (20%** but is almost non-existent for the Hungarian sample (**7%**) as majority still live with their parents or caregivers. Across all three countries, a small but consistent number of youth (**3-5%**) report having **no permanent place to live** or are **couchsurfing**. While the percentages are low, this represents a very vulnerable group of **respondents** of survey who lack housing stability.

Access to suitable housing

Access to suitable and longer-term housing emerged as a central and urgent concern. This is particularly evident once the initial mobilisation around emergency and temporary accommodation begins to wane, leaving a gap in access to longer-term housing. Beyond being a fundamental material need, housing plays a crucial role in wellbeing and a sense of belonging. Yet it 'represents a major challenge during arrival and reception' (Haase et al. 2024). These challenges include shortages, unsuitable living conditions, 'financial burdens, overcrowding, and instances of racial intolerance' (Popyk et al. 2024). The latter reflects a broader pattern of hardship already documented, which highlights the additional barriers which Ukrainian young adults must navigate.

For example, a 2024 study of displaced Ukrainian youth in Poland found experiences of discrimination in the rental market and 'a widespread hesitancy among landlords to rent to Ukrainians, often based on misconceptions about legal risks and financial liabilities' (Popyk et al. 2024). This left Ukrainian youth faced with 'temporary housing solutions that offer little security and stability' (*Ibid*).

Our research strongly confirms these findings, with housing emerging as a central stressor. **59% of respondents reported having difficulties in finding adequate housing** (see Figure 24).

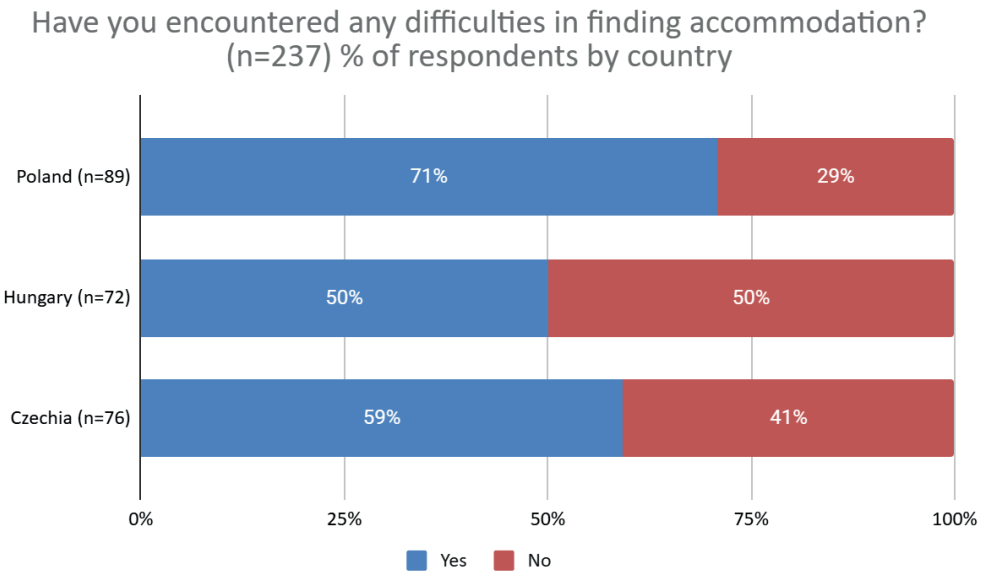


Figure 24. Respondents (not) encountering difficulties in finding accommodation by country

Poland shows the highest rate of housing difficulties, with over **71%** (63 out of 89) of respondents reporting problems. This correlates with the higher number of Polish respondents living in shared accommodation or on their own, likely facing the competitive and expensive rental markets in major cities. In Hungary we see the experiences were split. Given that **86%** of Hungarians live with family (as seen in Figure 23), many may not have had to search for new accommodation recently, while those who did likely encountered significant hurdles.

In all three countries, high prices of housing was the most frequently cited difficulty, particularly in Poland (47%) and Czechia (41%), but only 24% in Hungary. In addition, discrimination based on being Ukrainian is significantly high across the board, affecting 42% of respondents in Poland, 33% of respondents in Hungary and 28% of respondents in Czechia.

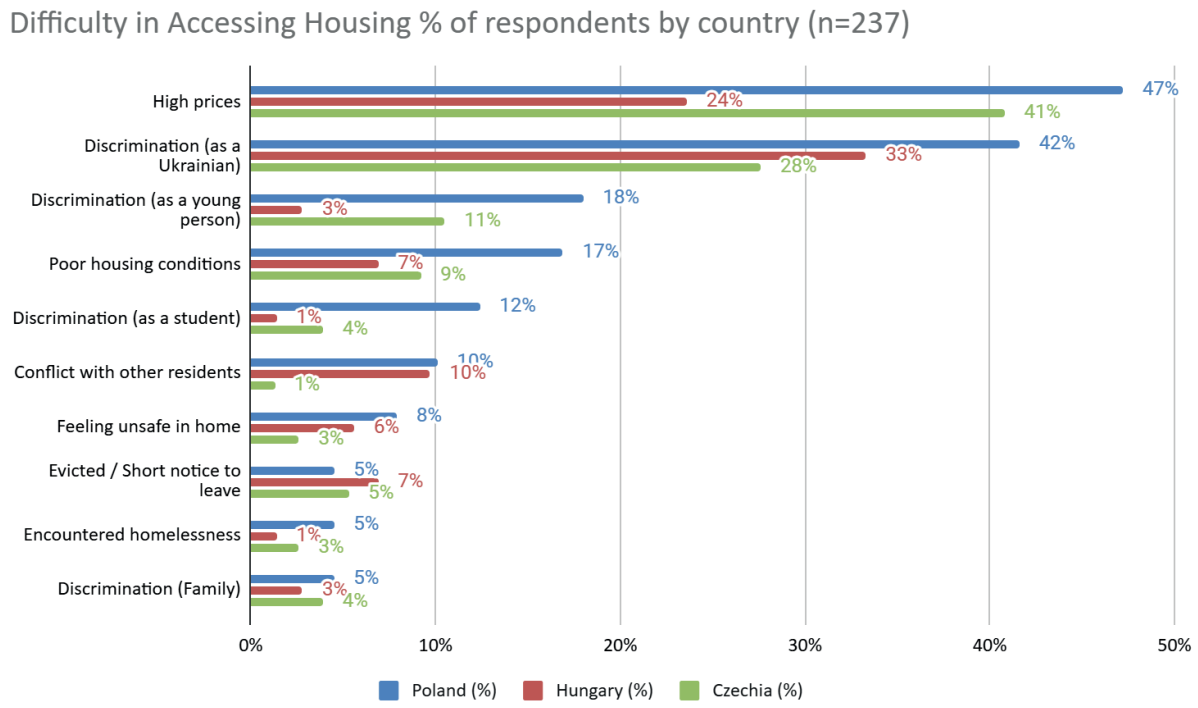


Figure 25. Reported barriers in accessing accommodation by country

In Poland, Ukrainian youth reported higher counts across almost every category of hardship, including **poor housing conditions (17%, feeling unsafe (8%,** and **even homelessness (5%** suggesting a higher level of housing precariousness for youth in that market. In Poland, there were also more respondents sharing that they were being discriminated against as young people (18%) and as students (12%). While the numbers are relatively low on homelessness, the fact that **seven persons** across these three countries explicitly reported still encountering homelessness is a critical finding for protection and support services.

Housing satisfaction among survey respondents

While average housing satisfaction given by survey respondents stood at above the average **- 3.67 on a 5-point scale** (5 being the highest level of satisfaction), the country-by-country breakdown has shown how these levels have differed across three countries.

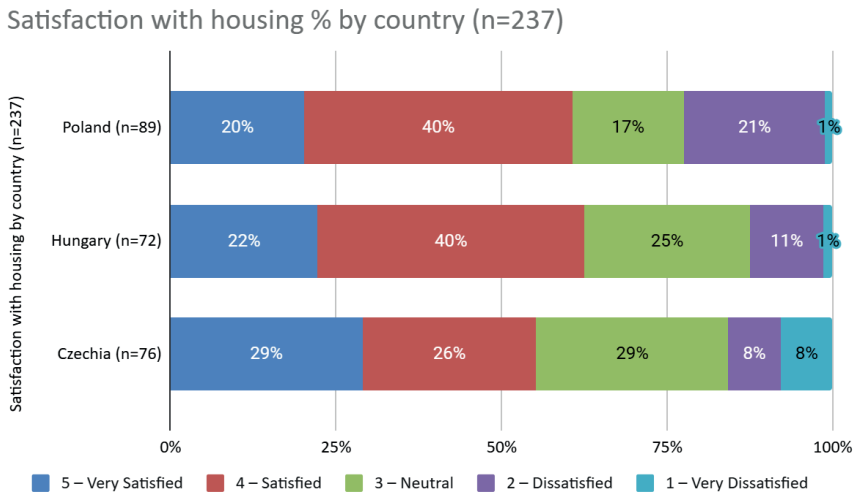


Figure 26. Satisfaction with current accommodation by country

Poland has a strong majority of satisfied Ukrainian displaced youth (**60%** in categories very satisfied and satisfied), but it also has the largest group of 'dissatisfied' and 'very dissatisfied respondents' —**22%** of the Polish sample. This reflects the housing reality in Poland where many youth live in **shared apartments or single rooms**. While the quality of life is generally good, the lack of privacy or high costs in shared accommodation likely drives this negative sentiment for one in five people.

Over **62%** of **Hungarian** respondents are either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied'. This likely correlates with the fact that **76% of Hungarian respondents live with family**, providing a more stable and higher-quality environment compared to shared student/worker housing.

Respondents in **Czechia** showed the very diverse group - highest percentage of '**very satisfied' - 29% and highest percentage of those 'very dissatisfied' - 8%.** Unlike the others, Czechia has a very large neutral group - **29%**, suggesting a significant portion of the population lives in housing that meets basic needs but is not particularly comfortable.

High rents, insecurity of rental contracts, and frequent moves compound other vulnerabilities, particularly for those living independently. Indeed, the youth in the **FGDs across Czechia, Poland, and Hungary,** described housing pathways as marked by precarity, high costs, and limited access to independent accommodation.

In Czechia, among the FGD participants, housing arrangements included student dormitories, living with parents, employer-provided accommodation, and social housing for foreign minors. Several participants experienced acute housing insecurity, including temporary homelessness following job loss, as employer-linked accommodation was withdrawn. Despite this instability, some participants expressed a strong desire for independence, emphasising self-reliance and the importance of carefully navigating information, even when a family safety net remained available.

In Poland, the most of FGD participants lived with family members, primarily mothers and siblings, while a small number opted for student dormitories due to overcrowded homes, caregiving responsibilities for younger siblings, and a lack of personal space. All accommodation was privately paid, with no access to social or supported housing. In Poland, FGD participants reported significant barriers to securing housing, including widespread xenophobia and discrimination against both Ukrainians and students, with some landlords explicitly excluding them in rental advertisements: 'No Ukrainians' and 'No students': a double burden of exclusion from the housing market. Many also recalled unsuitable living conditions during their initial months in Poland, including overcrowded spaces, temporary refugee centres, and in some cases sleeping on the floor.

While several participants expressed a desire to move out upon turning 18, they recognised that high rents, demanding landlords, and limited employment opportunities made this aspiration difficult to realise.

In Hungary, most FGD participants similarly lived with parents, largely due to their age and the high cost of housing in Budapest. Participants, again, highlighted discrimination by landlords, particularly against Ukrainian families with children, often resulting in refusals without explanation and forcing reliance on personal networks to secure housing.

High rental costs were consistently cited as a major constraint, with many FGD participants agreeing that remaining with family was currently the only viable option. Polina, a YAB member who relocated to Belgium from Hungary over the course of the research project, reflected on how challenges around housing and university integration shaped her migration journey. Her account echoed survey findings on disrupted education, but also the nuanced differences between moves within Europe (Hungary vs. Belgium), pointing to the need for comparative analysis of intra-European displacement experiences.

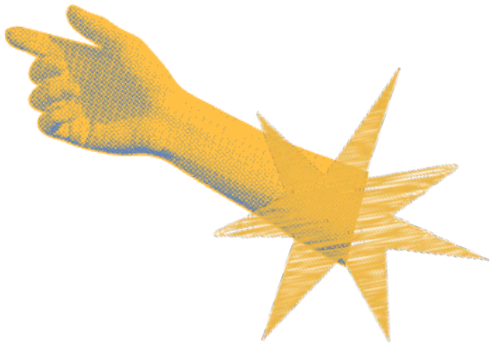
4.5. Administrative and Migration-Status Related Support

Moving to another country requires navigating **complex administrative and legal systems**. For young people experiencing forced displacement, these challenges are further intensified. This research showed that administrative barriers continue to hinder access to education, employment as well as to other services, with youth reporting difficulties related to document translation, professional qualification recognition, and navigating complex legal procedures. As a 23-year-old male living in Czechia explained, *'It took me a month to get all the necessary documents and pay all the taxes.'* Priority gaps identified in the research included simplified qualification recognition and accessible translation services tied to education and employment.

Another significant gap concerns **access to youth-focused legal aid**, which is essential for enabling young people to understand their rights, obligations, opportunities, and future options within the framework of their legal status in the country of residence.

Half of all survey respondents (50%) reported that they plan to remain in their current country of residence in the longer term. However, there are notable variations by country (See Figure 27). While **in Czechia, two in three young people plan to stay longer, in Hungary** we see the least of them - **one in four.** The indecisiveness among those in Hungary may be explained by their younger age, while among those in Poland it is less clear.

In both Poland and Hungary, around one in four respondents plan to move and live elsewhere in the EU or even outside of the EU. However, this apparent stability coexists with profound uncertainty, especially regarding their temporary legal status (see Figure 27 below): **22%** explicitly stated that they do not know what their future are, while **18% anticipated onward movement** or **eventual return to Ukraine**.



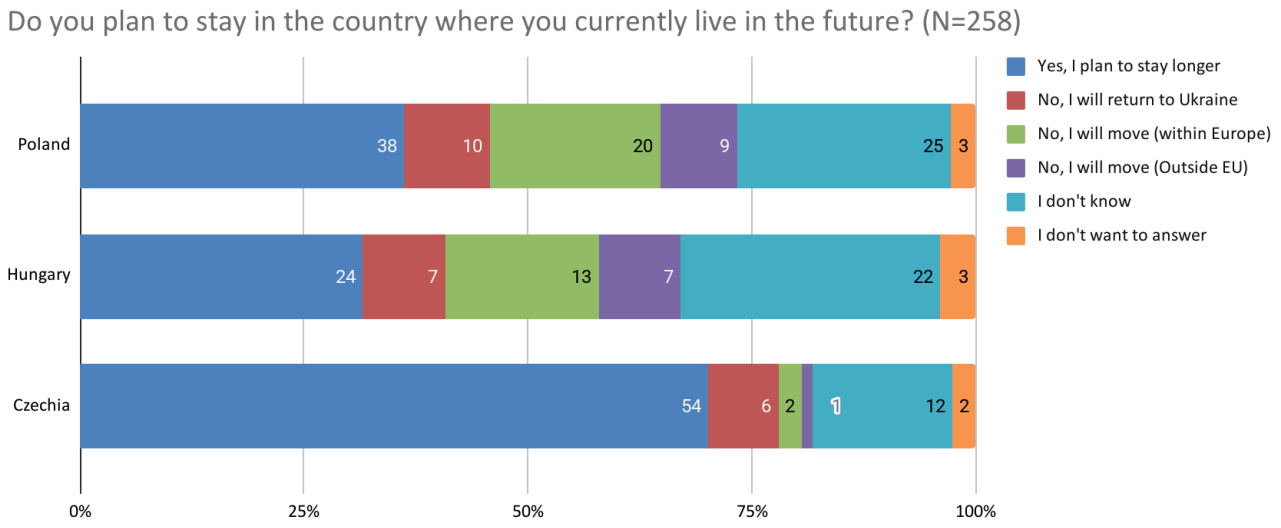


Figure 27. Aspirations to stay, return or move to another country

A key concern for some was that their immigration status might change and that this might impact their future study plans. A 23-year-old female survey respondent living in Poland articulated her hope *'[t]hat the legislation will not change and I will be able to finish university under temporary protection status.'*

Quantitative and qualitative findings together highlight diverse trajectories, with some young people planning to return after completing their education and others intending to remain or move onwards in search of career opportunities. As a 19-year-old female survey respondent living in Poland shared: *'I will finish university, earn some money to get started (ideally working in my field), decide which country I want to live in, and then move there.'*

Given geographic proximity, established mobility patterns and other factors, countries of the EU are likely to remain primary destinations for secondary movements of young Ukrainians. As a young female, aged 17, living in Poland, put it, *'I just hope to pass all my exams and move to another country after graduating from university.'*

This underscores the need to streamline procedures for changing residency and to clarify rights during such transitions. Currently, EU Member States are not obliged to grant temporary protection to individuals who already hold this status in another Member State, and some have indicated that such applications would be rejected, contributing to continued legal uncertainty for young people considering onward movement (see for example, Belgian migration law information portal (Vreemdelingenrecht.be n.d.))

Future status prospects and uncertainties

Looking ahead, uncertainty is further compounded by the lack of clarity regarding what will happen after March 2027, when the EU-wide temporary protection ends (see also our background analysis above -Temporary protection status for people fleeing Ukraine).

Most respondents (**67%**) across all three countries are residing under permits issued following triggering of **Temporary Protection Directive (TPD)** (see Figure 28). This is highest in **Czechia**, where **88%** of the sample relies on this specific TPD status. This highlights the high degree of dependency on emergency legislative frameworks rather than standard migration paths. While '**Temporary Protection'** is still the lead in **Poland and Hungary**, it is followed by a '**refugee status**', which might have been used interchangeably with temporary protection.

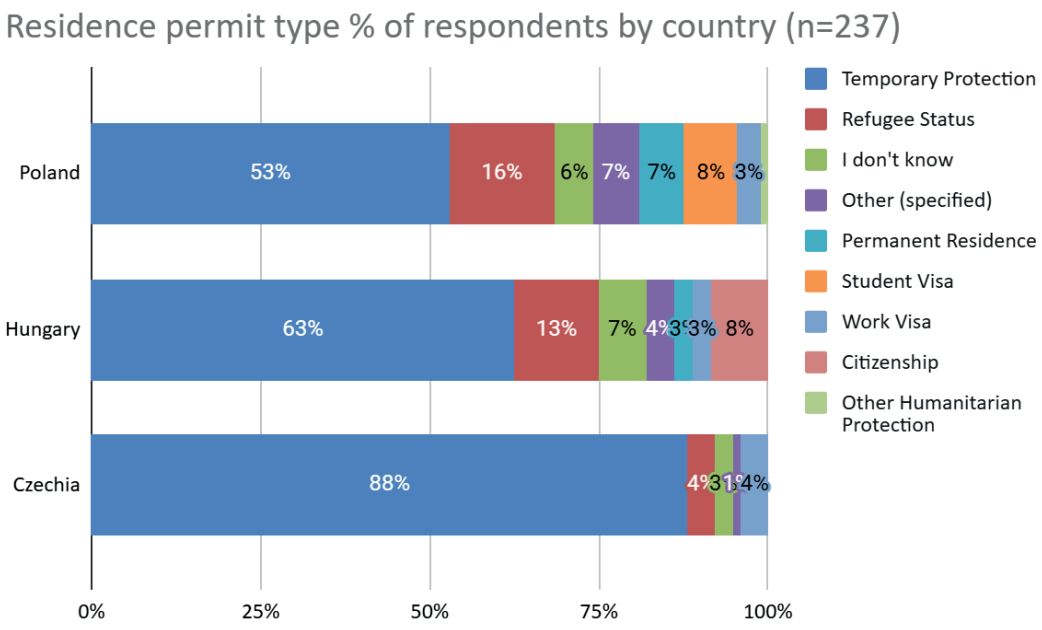


Figure 28. Reported residence permit types by country

Responses from **Poland** show the most diverse legal status profile among Ukrainian Youth, as they reported having **Student Visas** (8%), **Permanent Residents** (7%), Work Visas (3%) and other statuses (7%). **Hungary** has a unique cluster of **Citizenship** holders (8%), likely representing ethnic Hungarians from Ukraine who held or obtained Hungarian citizenship. In addition, it is important to note that about **5% of the total sample** (12 individuals) did not know what type of residence permit they hold.

A sense of limbo exists at multiple levels for young people displaced from Ukraine across EU countries. The recently issued EU Council Recommendation of 16 September 2025 on a coordinated approach to the transition out of temporary protection for displaced persons from Ukraine, encouraging Member States to plan transitions out of Temporary Protection Directive, signals that individuals may need to identify alternative residence pathways, with implications that might limit young people's access to services, education, and the labour market. These are important concerns that were echoed by participants in this research.

Return remains an uncertain prospect, as it will depend largely on the cessation of Russian military aggression against Ukraine, as well as the country's reconstruction progress and the readiness of systems to support return and reintegration, particularly for children and young people who require targeted support mechanisms. As our survey shown **only 9% (or 23 out of 258 respondents) across all three countries plans to return to Ukraine** as soon as it is feasible.

Qualitative responses suggest that **uncertainty is not a temporary phase, but an enduring condition** shaped by legal precarity, disrupted life trajectories, and ambivalent belonging. A 17-year-old female survey respondent living in Poland described this liminal state as follows: '*I don't know what will happen next or where I will end up. I don't fit into this new country and feel like there is no place for me here. But I also won't return to Ukraine, because no one is waiting for me there.'*

Others articulated this as a forced **recalibration of identity and aspirations**. As an 18-year-old female survey respondent living in Poland put it, it's about *'realising that you can't fully realise yourself in Ukrainian society anymore and instead have to adapt to the demands of a new one.'*

These narratives reveal how displaced youth experience **belonging not as a binary between integration and return**, but as a prolonged negotiation between loss, adaptation and constrained choice which are ultimately out of their hands, determined by bureaucratic and legal processes. These finding echoes other research on displaced youth which identifies the need to develop multiple coping strategies based on pursuing multiple possible pathways of belonging (Chase and Allsopp 2021).

4.6. Personal Wellbeing

The health-seeking behaviours of participants revealed a high rate of reliance on informal networks mixed with reaching out to services in the country of residence and online back in Ukraine. Several focus group participants explained that their reasons for consulting doctors or therapists back in Ukraine was due to a combination of accessibility, trust and language barriers. For instance, a 21-year-old woman living in Poland reported that healthcare was her major challenge, although, importantly, it intersected with other themes: *'Figuring out how banks, public service offices etc. work. And the hardest part of all is healthcare.'*

Mental health

Most young Ukrainians carry high trauma burdens from displacement, war exposure, and uncertainty about the future. They also face continued exposure to trauma in the form of ongoing kinship separation, social isolation and risk of othering and hostilities from other migrants and host communities (Kuznetsova et al. 2024). Also a WHO Europe (2023) situational analysis found that mental health services in host countries are often inaccessible due to language barriers, long wait times, or lack of Ukrainian-speaking professionals. UNICEF has further noted that adolescents and young adults often fall through service gaps because mental health provision is designed either for children or for older adults. This phenomenon also maps onto the experiences of young displaced Ukrainians. As argued by Kuznetsova et al. (2024), 'Young Ukrainians struggle to receive culturally sensitive free support in mental health'.

Crucially, the lack of psychological support has consequential ripples. As reported by a Eurofund working paper (Riso 2024): 'mental health problems in displaced children and adolescents can significantly impact education, social integration, and overall development, influencing successful integration into new communities'. Displacement disrupts friendships, romantic relationships, and family bonds, and young Ukrainians often experience guilt over having left their homeland, as well as family members and friends who remain behind (Kuznetsova et al. 2024). An additional layer of guilt, reported among other refugee youth (Chase and Allsopp 2021). This appears especially acute among Ukrainians, and in particular boys, is that of feeling 'unpatriotic' and being stigmatised for not returning to Ukraine to join the army (Mickelsson 2023).

The survey responses reveal very different individual realities. As a 21-year-old male living in Poland put it, *'No plans, just trying to survive.'* This indicates how high levels of stress and uncertainty have a toll on mental health. One young female living in Poland, aged 17, explained, *'young people in Poland are very vibrant and resilient'*… although she later added that *'clear information about accessible psychological support would be extremely helpful'*.

While digital communities on platforms like Telegram or Facebook help maintain ties, they cannot fully replace in-person social networks that serve as central pillars towards wellbeing. While family remained a key support system, it was also described as a site of tension, particularly around generational differences, caregiving responsibilities for younger siblings, and limited independence (see sub-section above - Caring responsibilities).

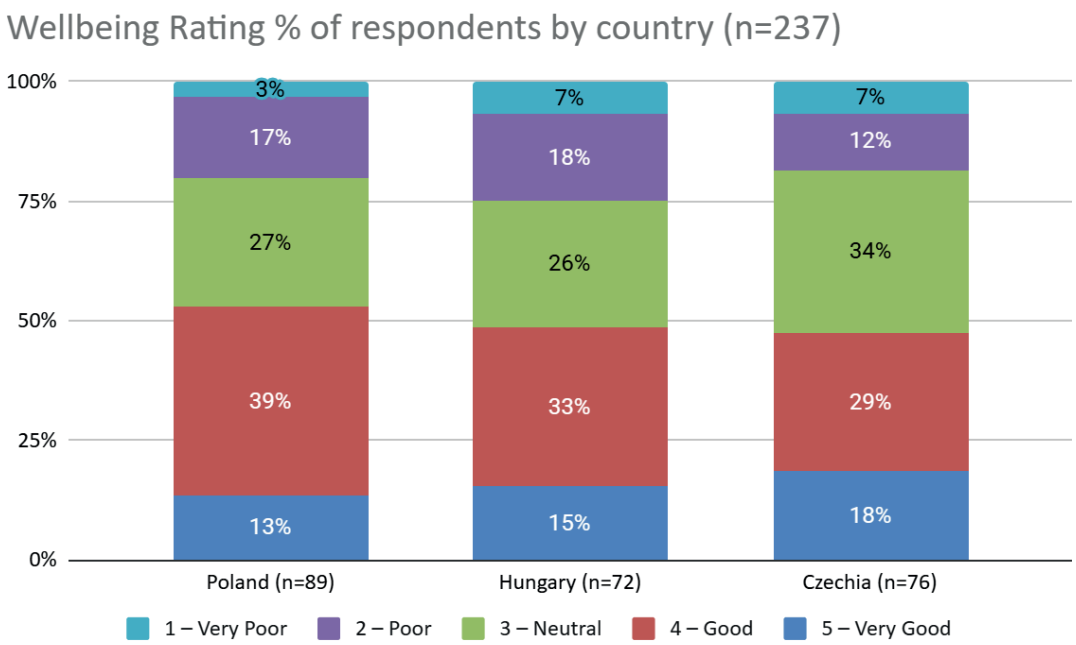


Figure 29. Wellbeing rating among respondents in each country

While overall life satisfaction and feeling of wellbeing reported in the survey averaged **3.39 out of 5**, showing a significant level of individual resilience among these youth, despite the housing, employment and education challenges discussed above. The Figure 29 masks significant internal variation among the countries.

Poland has the highest average satisfaction (**3.43 out of 5**) and the largest percentage of respondents in the 'Good' category (**39%**). This suggests a slightly more optimistic outlook among the displaced Ukrainian youth surveyed in Poland compared to their peers in Czechia and Hungary. Both Hungary and Czechia have the same proportion of 'Very Poor' ratings (**7%** of respondents).

However, **Hungary** reports the lowest average satisfaction (**3.32 out of 5**), which is surprising because of their general longer time in the country, and might be related with the aspirations to leave Hungary. In **Czechia**, the most common response was 'Neutral' (**34%**). This indicates a state of 'getting by'—not actively unhappy but not thriving either. However, the aspiration to stay within the country makes the Czech sample very distinct from the Hungarian one.

Open-ended responses revealed persistent anxiety, exhaustion, and feelings of abandonment by institutions. A 17-year-old female survey respondent living in Poland stressed, *'something needs to be done about bullying and discrimination'*. Similarly, a 19-year-old male participant living in Czechia explained that *'young people are often ignored by existing organisations and by the Ukrainian Embassy.'*

Conversely, respondents emphasised the protective role of youth-specific spaces. A 16-year-old male respondent living in Hungary explained the value of space such as those provided by various of the partner organisations in this study, *'when you know there are people you can talk to and who truly understand you.'*

The closure of such spaces was frequently described as a major loss, indicating the importance of sustained, youth-centred infrastructure rather than short-term project cycles.

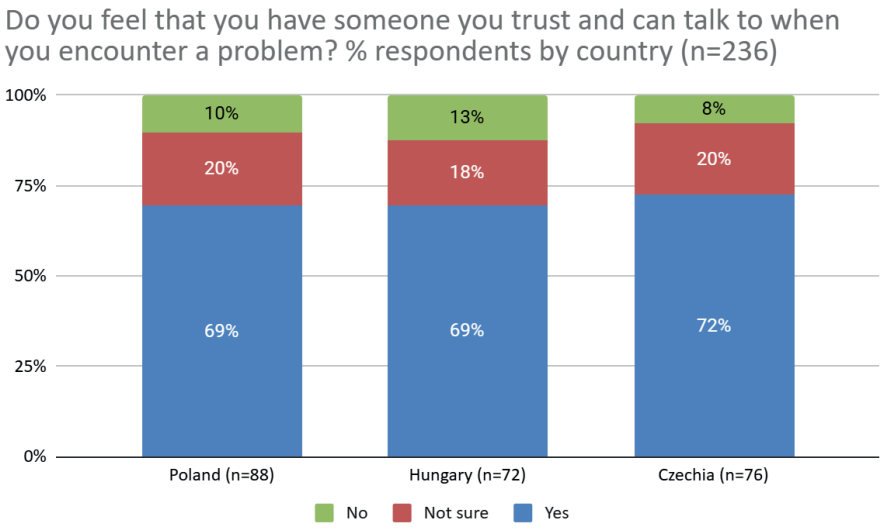


Figure 30. (Not) having emotional support figure(s) by country

Across all three countries, family emerged as a central pillar of wellbeing, though its role was experienced in both supportive and constraining ways. **In Czechia**, participants frequently identified **family as their primary source of emotional support**, complemented by individual coping strategies such as hobbies and, in some cases, psychological or therapeutic support. Wellbeing was closely linked to identity-affirming support networks.

Compared to physical health services, significantly more people **do not know** where to find mental health support. This gap is most acute in **Hungary (23%)** and **Poland (18%)**. Internet **search** remains the top source across all countries, but its usage is lower for mental health than for physical health, suggesting that youth may find it harder to find 'trusted' or 'specific' emotional support online. Ukrainian displaced youth in the **Czech Republic** are much more likely to find this information about mental health services through **local schools or universities (21%)** compared to Poland **(6%)**. This may reflect more integrated psychosocial support within the Czech education system for displaced youth. In Hungary, Hungary again shows a stronger reliance on **Ukrainian schools (13%)** and **family (23%)**, reinforcing the importance of community hubs in disseminating mental health resources.

Discussions revealed that wellbeing practices were largely self-driven and low-cost, including listening to music, walking, journalling, and consuming humour content.

Barriers in accessing mental health

A widespread lack of information about where to access psychological or medical help was reported, with schools and workplaces seen as failing to provide clear guidance. In **Poland** and **Hungary**, approximately **one in five young persons** (18% and 23% respectively) explicitly stated they **do not know how to access** mental health information. This is significantly higher than the uncertainty around physical doctors. While the Internet is the top source overall, **Family** remains the most important human source of mental health information in **Czechia** and **Hungary**, suggesting that peer-to-peer or family-based advocacy is critical for reaching these youth.

In Hungary, participants expressed mixed views on psychological services, with some reporting distrust or discomfort with therapy, describing it as difficult to open up in unfamiliar or unsafe environments. A 14-year-old female FGD participant living in Hungary stressed, *'I didn't want to share, it's hard to express feelings for an hour straight.'*

When asked about the most difficult aspects of living in the host country, respondents most frequently mentioned **language barriers**, **loneliness**, **loss of social networks**, **precarious employment**, **bureaucratic complexity**, and **restricted access to healthcare**. For many, these challenges were compounded by uncertainty about the future and the ongoing emotional impact of war and family separation.

Sexual and reproductive health

Among young Ukrainians displaced in Central and Eastern Europe, sexual and reproductive health topics are still highly stigmatised. An 18-year-old participant identifying as transgender in one of the countries of research emphasised the importance of mutual understanding within transgender communities, alongside support from a schoolteacher and trusted acquaintances who were affirming of LGBTQ+ identities. Sexual and reproductive health and rights remain a neglected area of concern for young displaced Ukrainians, often treated as an afterthought compared to general health needs.

Yet they are vital throughout a person's life and are particularly crucial to understand and access during adolescence. Our research revealed that displaced youth frequently lack access to sexual health information in Ukrainian, leaving significant gaps in knowledge and care. Access is also highly dependent on intersectional factors, including but not limited to gender and sexual identity. For example, in 2024, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) released a report highlighting the challenges Ukrainian women face in accessing sexual and reproductive healthcare across the EU under the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD). Drawing on data from 26 Member States, the study identified key barriers such as limited free services, delays in critical care, insufficient rape crisis centres, and restrictive laws that compelled some women to seek treatment abroad or return to conflict areas for necessary care (Bardho 2024). For LGBTQ+ youth, challenges are similarly shaped by intersecting barriers, including fear of discrimination within healthcare settings (ILGA-Europe 2023).

According to FGD findings, access to services, particularly healthcare and psychological support, was uneven and often perceived as inadequate. In Poland, all FGD participants reported difficulties accessing sexual and reproductive health and broader medical services, citing long waiting times for specialists, poor-quality diagnostics, and emphasised a lack of Ukrainian-speaking professionals. While private healthcare was seen as an alternative, it was widely described as prohibitively expensive. As a result, participants expressed greater trust in Ukrainian specialists and often sought support remotely.

LGBTQ+ youth typically navigate displacement with limited institutional support, face social exclusion, and maintain fragile ties to their home country while seeking safety and community and to pursue life projects abroad. The experience of a displaced Ukrainian LGBTQ+ youth affirms findings in wider literature on queer experiences of displacement, and is further affirmed by FGD participants, for example one of whom has had their transition disrupted as a result of displacement. The young transgendered person, aged 17, shared the lack of both psychological and family support following the decision to transition and highlighted the absence of organisations able to support people with similar experiences. *'My situation is quite specific. I'm a transgender teenager, and it's very difficult for me to plan my transition because I have to navigate between [country of residence omitted], Ukraine, and my studies…'*

5. CONCLUSION

While this report has been structured into sections identifying key themes, a comment from a 23-year-old woman living in Poland, shows that a range of stressors interact and compound one another, presenting an onslaught of challenges: *'the language barrier, factory work, the loss of all social connections, being unable to visit family (my family is in occupied [city]), difficulty making plans for the future because nothing feels certain. The spread of anti-Ukrainian movements in the political and social environment. Searching for work and housing.'*

The findings confirm that youth transitions in displacement are shaped by the interaction of legal status, economic precarity, gender roles, and social belonging. Young people across the three countries articulated strong aspirations, developing professionally, pursuing creative careers, excelling in sport, and gaining independence. Yet these aspirations repeatedly collided with the realities of displacement and limited resources. This recurring tension between what young people hope for and what they can realistically access highlights how displacement restructures youth transitions, redirecting energy away from self-development and towards coping with immediate pressures.

Uncertainty about the residence rights and future aspirations

A significant cross-cutting concern relates to the long-term security of legal status under Temporary Protection Directive (TPD). Among our survey respondents, 88% of those in Czechia, 63% in Hungary and 53% in Poland reported relying exclusively on the TPD status. Uncertainty about future after March 2027 and their residence rights was repeatedly linked to anxiety, constrained planning, and intentions of secondary migration. While only one in three survey respondents in Poland and Hungary, wished to stay there longer, in Czechia, two in three survey respondents expressed this wish, likely motivated by their later departure from Ukraine and educational aspirations.

In addition, one in three respondents in Hungary (29%) and one in four – in Poland (24%), could not answer about their future plans, showing high levels of uncertainty. Significantly, only one in 10 planned to return to Ukraine when the situation allows for it, requiring the EU and national policy makers to find the ways to secure their residency rights and accommodate their transitions into adulthood.

Quantitative patterns in the research align closely with qualitative narratives, reinforcing the conclusion that wellbeing and inclusion depend not only on access to services, but on their flexibility, continuity and emotional safety through secure legal status during the transition to adulthood. At the same time, a notable minority expressed profound uncertainty or a survival-oriented outlook, reflecting emotional exhaustion and constrained agency over their future.

Gender and intersectionality

Gender, age and other identity-markers shape access to wellbeing, safety, and opportunity. Several participants explained that there were high expectations from family members who had either been forcibly displaced with them or remained back home. Girls and young women expressed having to shoulder care responsibilities for younger siblings or older relatives, limiting their time for hobbies, educational commitments, or paid work, while boys and young men experienced the risks or pressure related to military service obligations. Girls were twice more likely than boys to report having no hobbies. In Poland, care responsibilities were heavily gendered - 81% of those who look after family members are female. In contrast, respondents in Czechia show a different dynamic where 53% of them were male. There may be additional pressure on both young men and women related to financially contributing to their families. These experiences reveal how gender and identity intersect with displacement, deepening vulnerability and reinforcing pre-existing inequalities.

LGBTQ+ young people meanwhile described mixed experiences, some encountering supportive teachers or peers, others lacking psychological or family support and feeling invisible in service provision, showing a clear gap on how to address the needs of queer and trans Ukrainian youth. The testimony of interrupted gender transition showcasing the specific challenges.

Hobbies and social life as key contribution to 'life projects'

This report identified hobbies, housing and civic participation as central pillars of identity evolution for displaced Ukrainian youth, building on prior research on refugee youth in Europe 'life projects' and their transition into adulthood (Chase and Allsopp 2021). It thus provides a critical and timely intervention into the Ukrainian experience and contributes to expanding wider discussions of youth navigating forced displacement. Collective hobby spaces, such as sporting and creative activities, serve as key protective factors, compensating for fragmented formal systems. Meanwhile, individual hobbies (applied arts, reading or language learning) provide important, often therapeutic, opportunities for self-development. The research identified that displacement has altered these dynamics for at least half of respondents: 26% respondents reported shifting from group hobbies towards the solitary ones, while 18% that opposite was true for them. Importantly, some of the hobbies and socialisation has moved online, with video games mentioned by 44%, and social media by one in four (26%).

Main obstacles preventing any engagement in hobbies were lack of time (44%), lack of money (40%) and the language barrier (36%). In addition, lack of information about hobbies has been an issue to roughly one third of all the respondents, as majority counted on their local friends and Ukrainian community.

Navigating adulthood – education, employment and housing

Education was riddled with bureaucratic and linguistic barriers that limited progression and future quality employment opportunities. Importantly, **67% of survey respondents reported insufficient host-country language skills** as the primary barrier to **inclusion in education** followed by high housing costs (25%) and feeling unwelcome (21%). Focus group discussions also revealed that limited access to clear information on

university enrolment and complex document verification procedures often resulted in gap years before young people could re-apply.

Another bottle-neck issue was lack of scholarships and paid internships. While important for career advancement, some youth reported having to combine studies with side jobs in order to sustain themselves, illustrating how insufficient financial support can reproduce inequalities in access to career opportunities.

We have seen that many Ukrainian young people are expected to act like adults (working, navigating housing, caring for siblings or parents, etc.) while still legally or socially minors (often still in education). Around one third of survey respondents reported combining studies with formal or informal employment, often alongside caregiving responsibilities, reflecting significant time pressures despite continued engagement in hobbies and social activities.

Precarious working conditions emerged as a widespread issue. Half of respondents in Czechia (50%) indicated that their employment contracts did not reflect actual working hours or salaries, compared with 43% in Hungary and 34% in Poland. At the same time, some young people showcased their entrepreneurial initiatives, sometimes even turning their hobbies (such as photography, coding or filmmaking) into side-hustles to support their education.

Housing access also emerged as a major challenge. Young people reported discrimination when seeking accommodation due to being both displaced Ukrainians and young or student tenants. Seven survey respondents reported experiencing homelessness, highlighting an acute need for targeted housing support for displaced youth.

Health and wellbeing

Structural discrimination in education, work and housing, combined with legal uncertainty surrounding residence rights, has been shown to undermine feelings of wellbeing and long-term integration. Moreover, there is a clear unmet need for youth-specific information, mental health support, and accessible social infrastructure as well as protection from employment discrimination, abuse and precarity.

Young people reported difficulties in accessing health care, especially mental health support, with some relying on Ukrainian providers online, and even using AI for this purpose. Lack of interpreters and Ukrainian-speaking professionals was an important barrier in accessing physical health. In addition, lack of information on how to find mental health is concerning - 23% of Ukrainian displaced youth in Hungary and 18% in Poland did not know how find information about the mental health providers.

The report found notable gaps in tailored psychological and community support in the Ukrainian language. Indeed, many programmes supporting Ukrainian youth have faced funding cuts which have significantly reduced the engagement of local NGOs.

Support and access to information

In response to gaps in formal support, young people rely on informal networks, including peers, online communities, Ukrainian NGOs, and local as well as Ukrainian friends, to access jobs, housing, hobbies, and bureaucratic guidance. These networks provide both practical and emotional support, reflecting youth resilience while highlighting structural inequities: the ability to thrive depends heavily on personal and community resources.

Furthermore, there is a clear preference for informal over formal information channels across all categories (Work, Health, Education). 'Internet search' was consistently the top one source for every category, yet the survey showed this often leads to misinformation or dead ends, as evidenced by the high number of people who search the internet but still report 'I don't know how to access info' in the same section. Others, reported about the fake or misleading job advertisements, especially among those in Czechia.

Voice, Independence and Layered Belonging

Finally, this report shows that belonging among displaced Ukrainians is fragmented and uneven. Most young people report strong comfort and identity affirmation within Ukrainian peer circles, where language, humour, and shared experiences create a sense of safety. However, their belonging within local institutions, schools, workplaces, or youth spaces, is often partial, conditional, or undermined by xenophobia, stereotyping or administrative barriers.

The strongest sense of non-belonging appears in the housing market, where discrimination is reported as routine; in workplaces, where Ukrainian young people often feel undervalued and at risk of exploitation because of their intersectional identities – being young and non-nationals; and in public spaces, where they may feel marked as 'outsiders'. These layered experiences of belonging and exclusion shape young people's social inclusion and integration pathways, confidence, and self-perception.

For most displaced Ukrainian youth in our research, independence is ambivalent: it is both desired and deferred. Young people articulate independence as a goal, yet structures make it unattainable. Notably, our youth-co-facilitated focus group discussions and responses to the open 'anything else' survey questions showcased young people's willingness to share their experiences. When given space beyond structured questions, respondents were more likely to use their voice - articulate frustrations and unmet needs - a crucial learning for future research.

With this said, this report has also found a remarkable level of resilience, determination, civic participation, and hope among respondents and participants. As an 18-year-old woman living in Czechia described, navigating adulthood in displacement brings both independence and new responsibilities: *'pulling yourself together and understanding that your life now depends only on you, as you are navigating open waters by yourself from now on. All while an overwhelming number of problems and responsibilities fall on you at once.'*

This research has identified commonalities with other migrant and refugee youth, but also specific capabilities of Ukrainian young people displaced and living in Poland, Hungary and Czechia. With the right support, these capabilities can be channelled into positive futures that can benefit not just the young people displaced from Ukraine and their families, but Europe as a whole. This requires moving from 'temporary protection' logic

towards meaningful youth-centred inclusion frameworks that respect young people's agency and support them in shaping and pursuing their 'life projects'.

In the final section of this report, we set out a series of recommendations that have been co-developed with partners and the YAB, based on our findings.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings highlight the need for coordinated, youth-centred action to address structural barriers while supporting displaced Ukrainian youth in navigating disrupted life trajectories, complex identities, and transitions to adulthood. Across all governance levels, responses should prioritise flexibility, continuity, and emotional safety of services, recognising that wellbeing depends not only on access but on stability of legal status, supportive environments, and opportunities for meaningful participation.

For Member States, National and Local level actors:

- **Education, skills, and language**
    - **Ensure transparent and consistent recognition of Ukrainian qualifications**, including clear guidance, reasonable timelines, and access to free translation and document verification services, to address bureaucratic barriers limiting educational progression.
    - **Expand bridging programmes for interrupted studies** and promote flexible study arrangements to support students balancing education with work, caregiving responsibilities, and mental health challenges.
    - **Prioritise accessible language learning opportunities**, including sectorspecific and workplace language courses delivered through flexible formats, recognising language as the primary barrier to inclusion identified by young people.
    - **Support comparative learning and enhanced coordination between regions and countries** to address barriers experienced by youth moving within Europe, including challenges related to housing, university access, and recognition of prior studies
- **Employment, internships, and labour rights**
    - **Establish dedicated contact points** where displaced youth can seek information and advice on employment, safely report informal contracts, unpaid wages, and abusive working conditions.
    - **Conduct targeted monitoring and outreach on labour exploitation**, including outside capital cities, through cooperation between labour inspectorates, trade unions, and civil society organisations providing information in Ukrainian.
    - **Develop or expand publicly supported paid internship and traineeship schemes** to reduce financial pressures that redirect young people's energy away from self-development and towards coping strategies.

- **Health, wellbeing, and emotional safety**
    - **Expand youth-friendly, trauma-informed mental health services**, including proactive outreach and culturally sensitive approaches, recognising the prevalence of loneliness, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion linked to uncertainty and disrupted life plans.
    - Ensure confidential sexual and reproductive health services are available in Ukrainian and strengthen interpretation services across healthcare provision.
    - **Develop targeted outreach and inclusive services for LGBTQ+ youth**, addressing gaps in psychological support and visibility within existing programmes.
- **Social inclusion, belonging, and identity development**
    - **Provide stable, multi-year funding for youth spaces and community initiatives**, including youth clubs, hobby spaces, and community centres, recognising their role as key protective factors supporting belonging, identity development, confidence, and psychosocial wellbeing. Funding frameworks should prioritise continuity to avoid the fragmentation caused by short-term project cycles and should include dedicated support for Ukrainian community organisations and civil society actors working directly with youth.
    - **Establish youth-focused information hubs and regular youth forums** to improve access to reliable information, support services, and opportunities for meaningful participation, particularly in contexts where young people report limited access to dedicated spaces. Such platforms should enable dialogue with decision-makers and strengthen pathways to civic engagement.
    - **Support programmes that enable young people to explore hybrid and transnational identities**, moving beyond cultural preservation towards active engagement in identity-shaping activities, intercultural dialogue, creative expression, and community participation, reflecting the complex identities young people navigate in displacement.
    - **Strengthen and coordinate peer-support networks, mentoring schemes, and youth-led cultural or social initiatives, recognising peer-led approaches as a crucial complement to formal services.** Evidence shows these initiatives strengthen relational skills, reduce loneliness, and increase confidence in navigating everyday challenges. Authorities and funders should provide structured support, including training, supervision, safeguarding frameworks, and streamlined funding mechanisms, ensuring better coordination across programmes and sustained support to youth-led and Ukrainian civil society initiatives.

- **Civic participation and youth voice**
    - **Create structured mechanisms for youth consultation and co-creation**, ensuring displaced youth can meaningfully participate in policy discussions and community initiatives, responding to their expressed desire to be heard.
    - **Support arts, cultural, and sports initiatives** as pathways for civic engagement, emotional expression, and social inclusion, particularly for young people who struggle to articulate experiences in formal settings.
- **Addressing discrimination and structural barriers**
    - **Strengthen enforcement of anti-discrimination frameworks** in housing, education, and employment, including enabling equality bodies to process complaints in Ukrainian and English.
    - **Support strategic litigation and monitoring of discrimination cases**, recognising structural discrimination as a key factor undermining wellbeing and long-term integration.
- **Integrated support and transitions to adulthood**
    - **Develop integrated youth support pathways linking career counselling, skills development, and mental health services**, recognising that young people are often expected to assume adult responsibilities while still navigating education and identity formation.
    - **Ensure youth-specific information services are accessible**, addressing gaps in guidance on rights, opportunities, and available support.

For the European Union

- **Legal certainty and continuity of protection**
    - Provide clear and timely communication on the future of legal status under the Temporary Protection framework beyond March 2027, recognising the strong link between legal uncertainty, anxiety, and constrained future planning.
    - **Support pathways to more secure and stable residence status** for displaced Ukrainian youth, including the application of the Long-Term Residence Directive for those with five years of de facto residence due to forced displacement, ensuring continuity of rights and ensuring stability of residence during transitions to adulthood.
    - **Provide clear guidelines and encourage policy coordination to address challenges related to intra-EU mobility**, including legal residence, recognition of studies, and access to housing and services when young people move between Member States for purposes of pursuing education, employment, reuniting with families or other reasons.

- **Data, research, and evidence**
    - **Strengthen coordination of data collection across Member States**, by mandating Eurostat to develop more granular age-disaggregated indicators, including a distinct category for ages 18–24. This would better reflect evidence that young adults aged 18–24 face significantly different challenges in education and labour market transitions compared to those aged 25–34, thereby improving the evidence base for youth-specific policymaking.
    - **Support further research on youth experiences across the EU,** particularly regarding labour exploitation, education access, and service provision gaps through dedicated and sustained funding streams. The European Commission and Member States should recognise the continuous need for evidence to inform responsive policymaking and programme design, including longitudinal and participatory research that captures evolving needs as young people transition to adulthood.
    - **Ensure complete and comparable reporting on unaccompanied and separated children,** including mechanisms to capture situations where young people who initially arrived with family members later begin living independently and fall outside formal protection systems. Strengthening harmonised data collection would help address current gaps identified in the findings and support more effective planning of guardianship, housing, and transition-to-adulthood support.
- **Policy coordination and inclusion**
    - **Promote mutual learning and exchange of good practices among Member States**, particularly on youth participation, integration approaches, and service delivery models that ensure flexibility and continuity.

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ANNEXES:

Annex 1. Focus Group Discussion Participants by age, gender and education/ work situation

OPU convened a focus group discussion in **Czechia,** which took place on 6 October 2025 in Prague. Nine participants 16 -20 years old, 4 female and 5 male, joined the event, along with the youth co-facilitator Ruslan, facilitator and note-taker Iaroslava. Five of them live alone, three of them in social housing, while one in a university dormitory and another is living with her boyfriend. Only four of them are living with their parents. In one case, even when parents were said to be also in Czechia, they had no contact with them.

No.	Country	Fake name or acronym	Age	Gender	Arrived in country	Alone or with family	Educational situation	Work situation
1.	Czechia	Masha	20	Female	Arrived in 2023	Alone, lives in social housing	Vocational training / courses	yes
2.	Czechia	D.	17	Male	Arrived in 2022	With family	School	part-time job
3.	Czechia	M.	18	Male	N/A	Alone, lives in social housing	Vocational training/ courses	looking for part-time job
4.	Czechia	Stas	19	Male	Since 2022	With family	Professional secondary school	yes
5.	Czechia	A.1.	20	Female	Since 2022	Alone	Studying at university	no
6.	Czechia	A.2.	18	Female	First arrived in 2022, and returned to CZ in 2024	Alone	Studying at university	looking for job during holidays
7.	Czechia	A.3.	16	Male	Arrived in 2019 - before the war	With family	Professional secondary school	part-time job during holidays
8.	Czechia	O.	18	Female	Arrived in 2022	With family	Secondary school	part-time job
9.	Czechia	Sasha	18	Male	Arrived in 2024	Alone, lives in social housing	Studied part-time at a Ukrainian university, expelled from the university	looking for job

Terre des Hommes Hungary convened a focus group discussion in **Hungary,** which took place on 26 September 2025 in Budapest. Six participants 14 -20 years old, 3 female and 3 male, shared their experiences along with the youth-co-facilitator Herman, facilitator Svitlana, and note-taker Orzsola. All of the participants are living with their families. Four of them attend bilingual or secondary schools. One participant was studying remotely at a Ukrainian university, while another enrolled in vocational school. Only one of the participants was working while studying.

No.	Country	Fake name or acro-nym	Age	Gender	Duration in country (September, 2025)	Alone or with family	Educational situa-tion	Work situation
1.	Hungary	Yenotik	16	male	3 month	with family	Bilingual school	no
2.	Hungary	D.	19	male	3 years	with family	Vocational school	yes
3.	Hungary	L.	14	male	1.5 years	with family	Hungarian school	no
4.	Hungary	S.	16	female	3 years	with family	Bilingual school	no
5.	Hungary	K.	20	female	3.5 years	with family	Online university	no
6.	Hungary	J.	14	female	3 years	with family	Bilingual school	no

ITAKA Foundation held a focus group discussion in Warsaw, **Poland** on 27 of September 2025. Nine participants joined along with the facilitator Emilia, youth co-facilitator Diana , and note taker - Andrzej. The focus group participants were 16-20 years old, 4 male and 5 female. All participants are living with family members. However, the composition in terms of work oreducation has been diverse. Three of the participants are only working, not studying, while the other two are studying at the technical school/ university level, and the other four at high school or lyceum. While 8 of them have been living for 3 years, one of them arrived only recently and found the discussion very relevant for their further navigation of the new country.

No.	Country	Fake name or acronym	Age	Gender	Arrived in country	Alone or with family	Educationa l situation	Work situation
1.	Poland	Kirill	19	Male	3 years	with family	Technical school	Summer part-time job
2.	Poland	Alexey	20	Male	3 years	with family	Technical school	Not working
3.	Poland	Faith	18	Female	3 years	with family	X	Works
4.	Poland	Anastasia	20	Female	3 years	with family	Studying at university	Part-time job
5.	Poland	Nastya	16	Female	3 years	with family	Studying at the High School	X
6.	Poland	Sofia	16	Male	3 years	with family	Studying at the High School	Volunteering
7.	Poland	Sacha	17	Female	3 months	with family	X	Works
8.	Poland	Sasha	16	Male	3 years	with family	Studying at the High School	X
9.	Poland	Veronica	20	Female	3 years	with family	X	Works

Annex 2. Focus Group Discussion Guidelines

1. Welcome and Introductions (20 minutes)

Ideally the young people will be sent these introductory questions beforehand along with the consent form, list of support organisation and focus group logistics so that they can feel prepared. The consent form contains demographic information such as DOB and displacement situation.

(2 mins per person):

Name, age and pronouns

Fun fact about you. e.g. you can eat 5 pizzas, you've gone skydiving, you are a passionate opera singer in the shower.

Where living and time spent there

Whether unaccompanied or with family

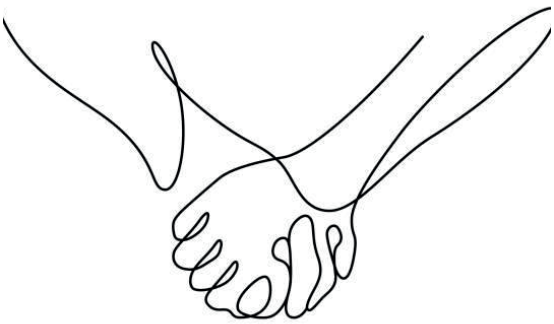
Educational situation

Work situation

2. Walk the Line Ice Breaker Exercise (10 minutes)

Use masking tape or chairs (like goal posts) to create a line across the room. Ask people the following prompt questions: (you can ask follow up questions to individuals who cross the line and also invite participants to ask their own questions).

1. Cross the line if you've travelled to more than 4 countries.
2. Cross the line if you know more than two languages.
3. Cross the line if you've ever watched a whole TV series in one sitting.
4. Cross the line if you use your phone for more than 2 hours a day.
5. Cross the line if you play computer games.



3. Part 1: Life Projects (30 minutes)

A) Hobbies (15 minutes)

Prompt questions:

1. What are your main hobbies? Have they developed since you moved?
2. Is there any hobby you want to do but can't? What are some obstacles to participating in hobbies?
3. Is participation in hobbies affected by the transition to adulthood at 18?
4. What and who are the most important service providers for hobbies? E.g. governmentproviders, INGOs, NGOs, peer-to-peer support, social media, social networks, social gatherings, school, sports clubs, gym? Are there any other people who have helped you in relation to these matters e.g. teachers/friends/social workers/family/friends?
5. Is there anything else you'd like us to know in relation to hobbies?

B) Education and work (15 minutes)

Prompt questions:

1. Are you in education? What type of education e.g. online/ in person/ both?
2. Do you work? What do you do?
3. Who has helped you access these opportunities in education and/or work?
4. How is education and work impacted by the transition to adulthood at 18?
5. Is there anything else you'd like us to know in relation to work and education including any obstacles or support you have experienced? Refreshments and pizza.

4. Break (15 minutes)

Refreshments and/or pizza.

5. Part 2: Life Projects (30 minutes)

C) Housing (15 minutes)

Prompt questions:

1. Do you live alone or with your parents or someone else?
2. Was it difficult to find a place to live in Budapest/ Warsaw/ Prague? What helped?
3. Have you/ Are you expected to change anything about where and how you live after you become/ will become 18?
4. What/who are the most important service providers in this space? E.g. government providers, INGOs, NGOs, peer-to-peer support, phone lines, private scholarship foundations, job centres, drop-ins, social media, social networks?
5. Is there anything else you'd like us to know in relation to housing?

D) Personal wellbeing and personal and family life (15 minutes)

Prompt questions:

1. What gives you a sense of feeling good/ OK/ well (safe/ connected/ supported as a concept/ dimensions of wellbeing)? Who and what helps you to feel this way?
2. Do you know how to access support for physical, mental health and sexual and relationship health?
3. Is there anything positive or difficult about your family or private (personal) life? Do you know where to seek support for this? If so, where?
4. Do you feel you have a voice in the city [Warsaw/ Budapest/ Prague] where you currently live - at school, at work, at home? What social and civic issues do you care about most and why?
5. Is there anything else you'd like us to know in relation to feeling good - safe/ supported/ connected as part of your wellbeing and family life?

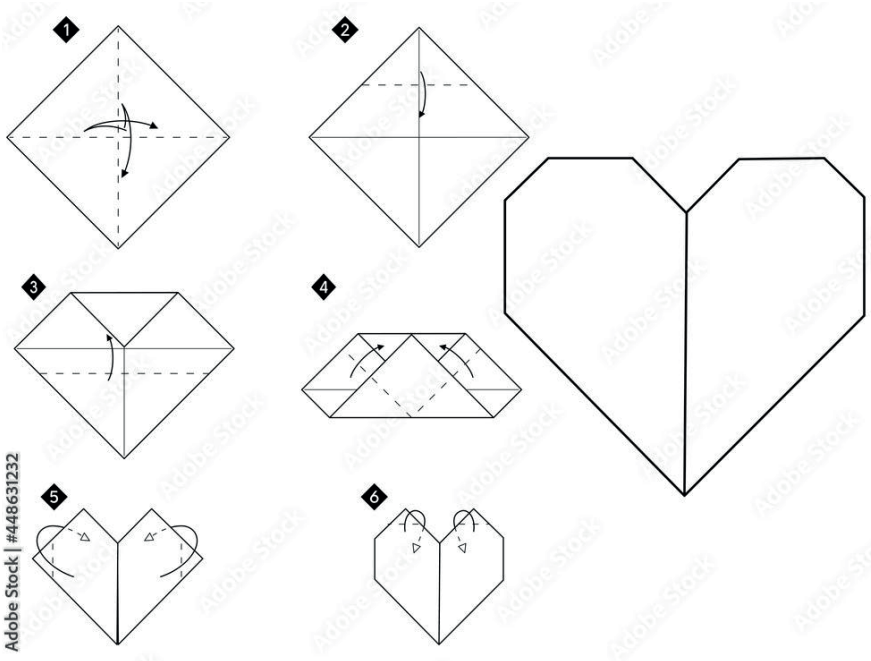
6. Part 6: Debrief (15 minutes)

The Members of the YAB will either pre-make the hearts or teach the participants how to do it in the session.

1. What is one thing you will take away from the group and one thing you will leave behind?
2. What is a wish you have? Please write on the origami heart to add to our international wish tree.

RESOURCES REQUIRED

- Name labels
- Flip chart paper
- Pens
- Post-it notes
- Origami paper (one packet)
- Pizza and soft drinks
- Travel reimbursement (to be funded by the partner organisation)
- Template for the note taker.



Annex 3. YoU Decide Survey Questions (English version)

Page 1: Welcome

The survey consists of 7 parts and will take approximately 20–25 minutes. To participate, you must be aged 16–24 and live in Hungary, Czechia, or Poland.

If you are aged 16–24 and live in Czechia or Poland, or aged 18–24 and live in Hungary, please complete the survey below.

If you are aged 16–17 and live in Hungary, please contact Terre des Hommes colleague Laszlo Fejes — laszlo.fejos@tdh.org — who will provide instructions and access to the appropriate survey.

Page 2

Part 1: Consent

Before taking the survey, please confirm that you understand all the conditions of the YoU Decide research:

- Your responses are anonymous. No one will know that I participated in this survey (unless I choose to share this myself).
- My answers will remain confidential and anonymous.
- Your participation is voluntary. I understand that my participation is voluntary and I will not receive any financial compensation or gifts for my time, except a certificate of participation.
- You may stop participating at any time. I understand that if I feel irritation or discomfort at any point, I can stop participating and seek support (see contacts below).
- Download a certificate if you wish. I understand that after completing the survey I will be able to download a certificate of participation/contribution to the YoU Decide project to use for my CV or future applications.

Data protection and use of the survey

- My responses are stored securely. I understand that all my responses, as well as some personal data I may choose to share (such as my email address), will be stored by the Missing Children Europe team in secure software.
- All survey responses will be deleted no later than March 2032 in line with project reporting requirements and GDPR.
- Only YoU Decide project partners and researchers will have access to my responses.
- I understand that the research is funded by the European Commission, but no personal information I share will be passed to them.
- Anonymous survey responses (without names) will only be accessed and analysed by YoU Decide project partners and the Heartwarmingly research team.
- My responses may be used in project research, including research reports, anonymous quotes, blogs, and presentations.
- Most importantly, my contribution will directly help shape the Minilla app.

We are here to help! Key contacts and support:

If I feel uncomfortable answering survey questions, I can view a list of local support organisations in Poland, Czechia, and Hungary via the country links.

If I feel uncomfortable or have questions about the survey, I can contact the research ethics lead, Jennifer Allsopp, at jennifer.c.allsopp@gmail.com (English speaking, but you can write in Ukrainian).

If I have questions or concerns about participation, data protection, or my right to withdraw, I can contact the YoU Decide Project Coordinator:

Alyona Samar — alyona.samar@missingchildreneurope.eu (Ukrainian language possible).

Q1: I understand the conditions of my participation and want to continue.

YoU Decide Cheerleader: The first boring and formal part is over — now we would like to get to know you better!

Page 3

Part 2: Demographic Profile

Q2: How old are you?

Q3: What is your gender?

Q4: Which region (oblast) of Ukraine did you previously live in? (Select all that apply)

Q5: Which country do you currently live in? (Select one)

Q6: How long have you lived in this country? (Select one)

Q7: Which city do you currently live in? (Select one)

Q8: Do you live independently or with family? (Select one)

Q9: Do you help care for someone in your family?

Q10: If yes, how? (Select one)

Q11: Do you plan to stay in your current country in the future? (Select one)

Page 4

Part 3: Hobbies and Social Life

Q12: What do you currently do in your free time / what are your hobbies? (Multiple choice)

Q13: How did you learn about these opportunities? (Multiple choice)

Q14: Have your hobbies or social activities changed since moving? (Select one)

Q15: Does anything prevent you from doing your favourite hobbies/activities? (Multiple choice)

Q16: Was it difficult to find new local friends?

Text: Well done! Let's continue! Our amazing YoU Decide certificate is waiting for you

Page 5

Part 4: Education and Work

Q17: Are you currently studying?

Q18: If yes, what type of education? (Multiple choice)

Q19: If studying, do you receive a scholarship? (Select one)

Q20: What was difficult when starting or continuing education here? (Multiple choice)

Q21: Are you currently working or doing an internship?

Q22: If yes, what type of employment? (Select one)

Q23: If working, which sector do you work in? (Dropdown)

Q24: If working, do you have a work contract? (Select one)

Q25: If you had a question about your work rights, where would you look first? (Multiple choice)

Q26: How well do you know your basic work rights?

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Part 5: Housing

Q27: What type of housing do you live in? (Select one)

Q28: Who provides your housing?

Q29: How satisfied are you with your current housing? (1 = very dissatisfied, 5 = very satisfied)

Q30: Have you faced difficulties finding housing?

Q31: If yes, which ones? (Multiple choice)

Text: Keep going! Only two sections left — your certificate is waiting at the end!

Page 7

Part 6: Legal and Administrative Needs

Q32: What type of residence permit do you have (visa)?

Q33: Do you understand how long you can stay outside your country of residence without losing your permit?

Text: Almost done!

Page 8

Part 7: Personal Wellbeing and Being Heard

Q34: How satisfied are you with your life now? (1 = very bad, 5 = very good)

Q35: Do you feel you have someone you trust to talk to when facing a problem?

Q36: If yes, who? (Open question)

Q37: Where do you find information about doctors/health services? (Multiple choice)

Q38: Where do you find information about mental health support? (Multiple choice)

Q39: Have you faced barriers accessing health services?

Q40: If yes, which ones? (Multiple choice)

Q41: Do you know where to get information about sexual and reproductive health?

Q42: If yes, where did you find this information? (Multiple choice)

Q43: Have you experienced discrimination or negative comments because you are from Ukraine?

Q44: If yes, who do you talk to about it? (Multiple choice)

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Text:

We have 5 open questions — we would love to hear your thoughts if you have a few more minutes. Otherwise, you can skip to the end to access support resources and download your certificate.

Q45: Do you feel you have a voice in the country where you live?

Q46: Since moving, what has been the hardest part of life in the new country?

Q47: What has helped you feel support or hope the most?

Q48: What are your long-term hopes for education and/or career?

Q49: Is there anything else you would like us to know about the situation of Ukrainian youth?

RECLAIMING OUR VOICE

Reclaiming Our Voice report examines the complex challenges faced by displaced Ukrainian youth as they transition into adulthood amid ongoing conflict and uncertainty. Through collaborative research involving scholars and the very youth affected, the report highlights critical issues surrounding education, employment, and social integration, while offering actionable recommendations for policymakers. This vital study sheds light on the nuanced experiences of these young people, advocating for sustained support and participation in their futures.

Social Innovation Initiative

Co-funded by the European Union

Missing Children Europe

Fundacja ITAKA Centrum Poszukiwań Ludzi Zaginionych

organizace pro pomoc uprchlíkům

Terre des hommes A gyerekek szolgálatában

Heartwarmingly