



Eastern Europe
Studies Centre
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Adaptation and Integration of Ukrainian migrants in Lithuania

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Summary

This report is based on an online survey with more than 200 respondents and semi-structured interviews with eight Ukrainians who came to Lithuania after the 24th of February 2022. The questionnaire targeted different areas of everyday life such as employment, healthcare, education system services, social adaptation and integration-related problems.

The research showed that:

- although men between 20 and 60 account for almost 30 percent of all arrivals after February 24, 2022, only 10% of the respondents were male and only one man over 60 agreed to be interviewed. This proportion reflects the “grey zone” in which many men who left Ukraine semi-legally ended up;
- almost 90% of Ukrainians that stay in Lithuania are planning to learn the state language, more than half of them are motivated by gratitude to the country they reside in;
- 65% of respondents have a stable income in Lithuania, yet still many of them are facing severe financial anxiety;
- the main struggles for Ukrainians in Lithuania are the accessibility of language courses, long queues for medical care and the feeling of alienation and social isolation;
- psychological trauma and mental health issues can hinder or slow down the integration process;
- although many Ukrainians do not have a clear future plan at the moment because of the ongoing war, 64% of respondents would consider applying for Lithuanian citizenship in the future.

Introduction

The 24th of February 2022 has shaken up not just Ukrainian society and its neighbouring countries. As a long-standing supporter of Ukraine since Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, Lithuania has opened its borders to Ukrainian refugees. Despite the complicated and time-consuming route from Ukraine through Poland, plenty of Ukrainians have chosen Lithuania as their destination.

According to the [Lithuanian Official Statistics Portal](#), in September 2023, 80,936 Ukrainian citizens had arrived in Lithuania since February 24, 2022,

although the migration rate had dropped significantly since March 2023. In total, according to the data of Lithuanian Migration Service, more than 85,000 Ukrainians now live in Lithuania, representing the biggest community of foreign citizens living in the country. Most of the arrived Ukrainians hold temporary residence permits: this year from January to July alone, 51,126 Ukrainians received temporary residence permits, of whom more than 42,000 are war refugees and use the temporary protection mechanism introduced by the European Union. However, about 10,000 Ukrainians have already left Lithuania since January 2023.

The largest group among refugees are women from 30 to 49 years old, according to the [Lithuanian Employment Service](#) survey of June 2023. Half of them hold a higher education degree. Men between the ages of 20 and 60 account for less than 30% of all arrivals after February 24, 2022. This gender gap is a result of the martial law in Ukraine and limited mobility for men of drafting age. Notably, these statistics are reflected in even more radical form in this research as well – only about 10% of respondents of the online survey, used as the main data source in this report, were men.

Data of the [Lithuanian Employment Service](#) from August 2023 shows that over 27,000 Ukrainians were employed since 2022 February. The majority of them (over 73%) are employed in jobs requiring average qualifications, e.g. customer service specialists, drivers, mechanics.

It is worth mentioning that Ukrainians received significant support from the EU. A strong affirmative statement in support of Ukraine has been issued by the [EU Commission](#) right after Russia launched their full-scale invasion in February 2022. Funds amounting to €64 billion were released for crisis response and humanitarian aid alongside military support. In addition, The [European Commission](#) has published that the European Union issued around €81 billion to help Member States attend to the needs of Ukrainian refugees fleeing from Russian aggression against Ukraine.

Moreover, an extension of the temporary protection till March 2025 is currently under consideration in the [EU Commission](#). Thus, it is safe to assume that Ukrainians residing in Lithuania will prolong their stay, considering this financial security through EU Commission funding.

Partially, the existent surveys of the [Lithuanian Employment Service](#) support this notion, claiming that since 2022 the number of people connecting their future with Lithuania has increased by 17 percent.

In light of these statistics, it is critical to address the question of how to build an efficient relationship between Ukrainians who arrived after the 24th of February 2022 and Lithuanian society. The importance of this research lies in discussing and understanding the main issues for Ukrainians in adaptation to Lithuania.

The report is based on an online survey with more than 200 respondents and semi-structured interviews with eight Ukrainians who came after the 24th of February 2022. The online survey consists of 39 questions and was devised to target the different areas of everyday life such as employment, health-care, education system services, social adaptation and integration-related problems.

Seven out of the eight interviewees were women aged 18–68 from different parts of Ukraine and different social backgrounds. Each of them has raised similar issues with a unique perspective.

This study is aimed at highlighting these issues and forming recommendations for solving them in order to efficiently incorporate Ukrainians into Lithuanian society.

This survey has revealed that over 60% of respondents are planning to stay in Lithuania and are even considering applying for Lithuanian citizenship at some point. Thus, the question of successful Ukrainian adaptation to Lithuanian society and fully fledged integration into the economic, societal and political life of the country is relevant for both Ukrainians residing in the country and Lithuanians.

The analysis of the study results focuses on Ukrainian refugees' defining demographic situation, employment status, reasoning behind choosing Lithuania, and the main challenges and issues they have faced during their stay after 24-02-2022.

The major demographic group is women who came with family members (mostly children). This factor may influence the main causes, issues, and motivations that were raised by the survey respondents, such as why they chose Lithuania as a place of residence and what social aid, medical care and education needs are the most required. Besides that, respondents were asked about challenges in learning the Lithuanian language and their social adaptation needs, sense of community and further plans for their stay in Lithuania.

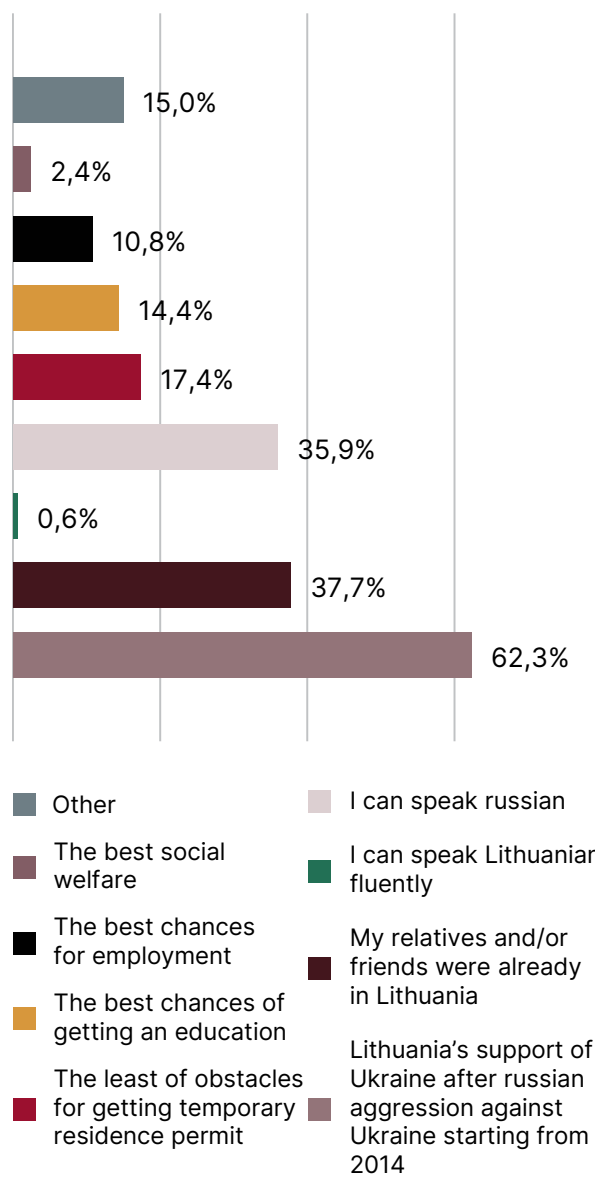
The quotes from the semi-structured interviews mostly mirror these issues, providing more in-depth perspectives and personal experience stories after coming to live in Lithuania.

Motivations for Choosing Lithuania

Getting to Lithuania is no easy task for today's Ukrainians. Whereas before, one could simply get to Vilnius by plane in 1 hour and 20 minutes, now it is about 30 hours of travelling by land, either with several transfers or through an exhausting journey in the bus seat. And at least 4–6 hours are spent waiting to cross the Polish–Ukrainian border.

Nonetheless, Lithuania proved to be among the popular destinations for Ukrainians fleeing the country because of Russian aggression.

Why did you choose Lithuania as your country of destination?



Graph 1

The answers (multiple answers were allowed) were spread out among various reasons, from political to personal. Notably, Lithuania's long-standing support of Ukraine since 2014 has played a significant part for Ukrainians in choosing this country. Over 62% of respondents chose Lithuania after seeing active support from the Lithuanian government, volunteers, and people. As an interviewee, a woman of 35, explained her motivation to come to Lithuania:

“It was difficult to choose a country of destination as I sort of have acquaintances in a lot of countries. [...] From the news I got that Lithuania is a good choice because of huge support.”

The second most common choice (almost 38%) was due to former relations – family members, friends, or acquaintances.

Notably, the third most popular choice (36%) was the accessibility of the Russian language. However, this sentiment does not arise in any of the interviews. Nor does it seem to be relevant any more considering the huge influx in the search for Lithuanian language courses and the significance of the language barrier for Ukrainians in general. Still, knowledge of the Russian language by Lithuanians is very handy for older Ukrainian newcomers who do not speak English well, and vice versa, for Ukrainians to understand elderly Lithuanians who do not speak English but still remember Russian. Especially for the first few months or years, it is much easier for Ukrainians who are learning Lithuanian to speak Russian in institutions that require knowledge of a specific vocabulary, such as tax offices, employment services or hospitals.

It is also worth mentioning that Lithuania seemed attractive to a significant number of respondents because of the relatively easy procedure for getting a temporary residence permit. For a younger audience, the opportunity of receiving education is an equally important factor. As some female students mentioned in the interviews,

“Lithuania was one of the few countries that could offer free education and additional scholarship.”

At the same time, there are almost the same number of respondents that did not have a particular reason. The field “other” seems to indicate answers like: “we didn't care where to run, we just needed to flee”, “no reason”, “it was a random choice”, “I did not choose it, the circumstances made me end up here”.

Some participants mentioned random circumstances that brought them to Lithuania. A woman of 35 reminisces:

“I came here by chance. I did not know where to go. It was quite a difficult time in the beginning. [...] My friend was moving to Lithuania and I decided to move with her as she was scared to move alone.”

Notably, this interviewee is still in Lithuania, while her friend has moved back to Ukraine to be closer to her partner.

However, the motivation to move to Lithuania does not necessarily define the subsequent experience of living in the country. For some, this random choice turned out to be the start of a fruitful cooperation with the local community and successful employment. And some faced difficulties that they were not prepared for when moving to Lithuania.

Yet, not minding the start of their Lithuanian journey, most respondents and interviewees view their experience as a positive one and express gratitude to Lithuania and its people.

Demographics

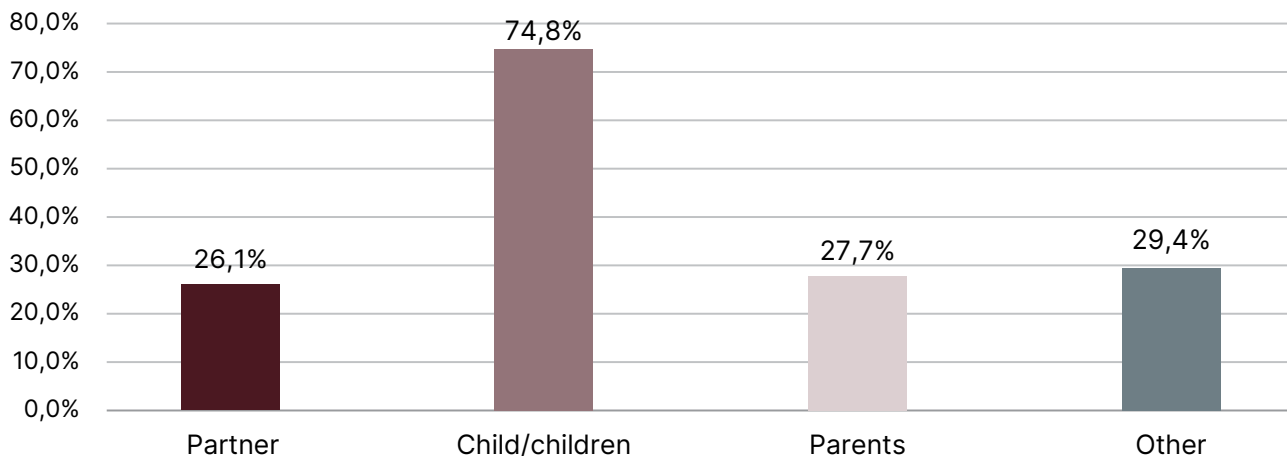
Due to the martial law and drafting of male Ukrainian citizens, the overwhelming majority of respondents of the online survey (almost 90%) were women. It can be assumed that the unwillingness of Ukrainian men to take part in the research was probably connected with fear – some men do not want to enter the spotlight, afraid that they may face problems with the Migration Department and be deported to Ukraine to serve in the Armed Forces. Also, some male refugees and men who left Ukraine before February 24, 2022, confessed in private conversations of feeling guilt and shame because of not defending their country at the frontline.

More than half of respondents are 30 to 45 years old, and 65% of all respondents have come with their family. Almost 75% of those with family members came with their children (multiple answers were allowed).

86.4% of respondents have been residing in Lithuania for over a year in summer 2023. 74.3% live in Vilnius.

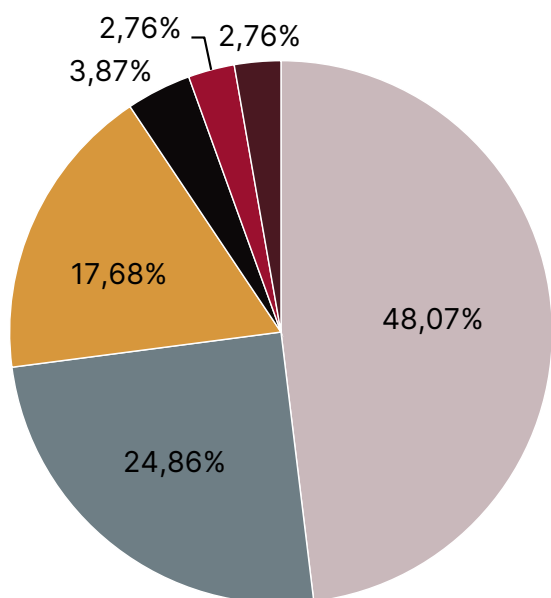
Almost half of respondents (48%) have obtained temporary residence permits during their stay. The

If you have come with your family, who is it:



Graph 2

What is your legal status in Lithuania?



- Temporary residence permit
- Humanitarian visa
- Refugee status/additional protection
- Confirmation of employment/visa with a permit of employment/student visa
- In a process of receiving asylum
- Other

Graph 3

second most common legal status in Lithuania for Ukrainians is humanitarian visa (25%), and the third one is refugee status (multiple answers were allowed). However, the data may vary from the actual situation as many Ukrainians in the local chat groups seemed not to know the exact name of their actual legal status.

Main Issues and Challenges

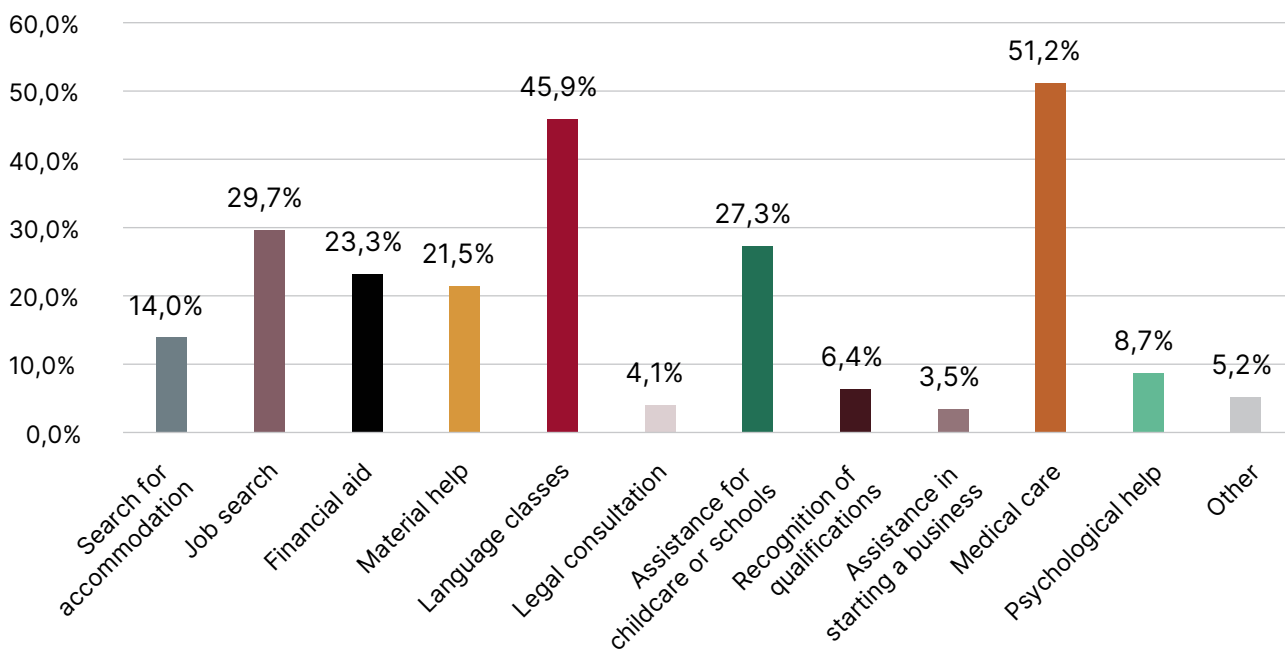
Overall, it is safe to say that most Ukrainians feel safe and are satisfied with their life in Lithuania. Before moving to Lithuania, the level of safety among the respondents was evaluated by 4,7 on average, with the median score being 1. The mark for overall experience when living in Lithuania is 7,76 (average), while the median score is 8.

Yet, there are still issues and challenges raised by respondents in their adaptation to Lithuania.

Among the most acute issues repeated in the survey and interviews are (multiple answers were allowed):

- accessibility of language courses (45.9%);
- access to medical care (51.2%);
- assistance in employment, finding accommodation and financial aid (29.7%, 14% and 23.3% respectively);
- lack of social life and connection to Lithuanian society.

What type of assistance do you need the most for your stay in Lithuania?



Graph 4

The accessibility of language courses is the most recurring issue that interviewees kept bringing up when asked to name three challenges in adaptation to Lithuania.

The general attitude to the subject of language barriers is an overall willingness to learn the language but a lack of resources to do so. The only interviewees that have no plans to pick up Lithuanian are an elderly couple who plan to return to Ukraine as soon as possible. Thus, for the absolute majority, finding affordable ways to learn Lithuanian appears to be the primary issue.

The second challenge that Ukrainians face in Lithuania is long queues for medical care. This appears to be the main problem that respondents point out when mentioning medical care. They are generally satisfied with the quality of medical consultation but express dissatisfaction with having to wait for at least three weeks to get said service.

Even though the majority of respondents are employed, there is a certain financial anxiety raised by the interviewees. For example, two of them are working for Vilnius University and receive compensation for the cost of rent in the university dormitory. However, they both fear that they would not be able to afford to rent accommodation were this compensation to be retracted.

The majority of issues regarding employment relate to finding jobs that require higher qualifications.

Some respondents state that they earn less than their Lithuanian colleagues despite possessing the same qualifications.

Notably, the language barrier plays a part in job search, but not a significant one. An employed female student, 20 years old, mentions:

“I do not feel like language barrier is a problem for me anywhere. [...] I would think of learning Lithuanian out of respect to the country.”

Interestingly enough, this is the strongest sentiment when describing the motivation to learn Lithuanian among Ukrainians, according to the survey results and expressed by almost all interviewees.

Lastly, the lack of social life after moving to Lithuania appears to be another common challenge among Ukrainian refugees. The feeling of loneliness and being out of place resurfaces in interviewees' responses and is mentioned a couple of times by survey respondents.

Partially, this difficulty relates to the in-between situation when the adaptation to a new country is a new process, especially in combination with constant anxiety: worrying about loved ones who have remained in Ukraine, facing danger from shelling at home or fighting at the frontline. Also worth mentioning is grieving the past – the pre-war way of living. A woman, 35 years old, testifies:

“[...] even if I go back to Kyiv, my social circle has become too small. Most of my friends are staying abroad in different countries. I regret losing my old life.”

At the same time, some respondents mention coldness and even hostility from Lithuanian colleagues. However, this is not a common experience and seems to be situational rather than an overarching struggle.

Learning Lithuanian

Out of every issue discussed and raised by the respondents, the absolute leading challenge is the accessibility of Lithuanian language courses.

As mentioned, almost 90% of Ukrainians that stay in Lithuania are planning to learn the state language, according to our online survey. Only 10.5% of respondents do not intend to learn Lithuanian.

This statistical result is mirrored among interviewees, most of whom are planning to learn or are already learning Lithuanian. The only people who are not interested in language courses are an elderly couple:

“We do not spend our energy on that [learning the language]. We are here temporarily and focusing on working for Ukraine” – a woman, 68.

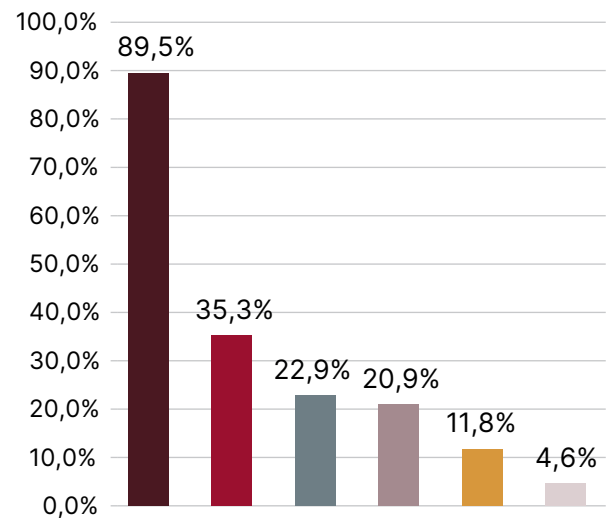
It is worth mentioning that neither of them hold any resentment against Lithuania or its language. Over the course of the interview, they repeatedly expressed gratitude to Lithuania and talked about a warm welcome in the neighbourhood.

It is also safe to assume that their reasoning is rooted in their future plans of returning to Ukraine, rather than their age.

Another interviewee, a woman of 60, has been learning Lithuanian for about a month and is planning to continue her studies. She is working in the cleaning sector and does not require advanced language skills. However, she is in Lithuania for an unknown period of time and feels like she needs to learn the language.

This general understanding of the necessity of learning Lithuanian comes from a gratitude to the country and respect. Over a half of respondents chose this option as a motivation to learn Lithuanian (multiple answers were allowed).

Why do you want to learn Lithuanian?



- A matter of respect to the country
- I cannot keep up with my social life
- It is difficult to get services from state organizations, banks, shops, etc.
- I cannot find a job because of the language barrier
- I or my children cannot receive/continue an education
- Other

Graph 5

The second most common reason for the participants to learn Lithuanian is to improve their social life and fit in better with Lithuanian society. For instance, one respondent mentioned that

“I don't want to force Lithuanians to speak Russian with me. And I don't want to talk Russian to them.”

The obstacles in social life, and the need to get proper social services or a job are other common motivations for respondents and interviewees learning Lithuanian, but these are usually mentioned as second or third options.

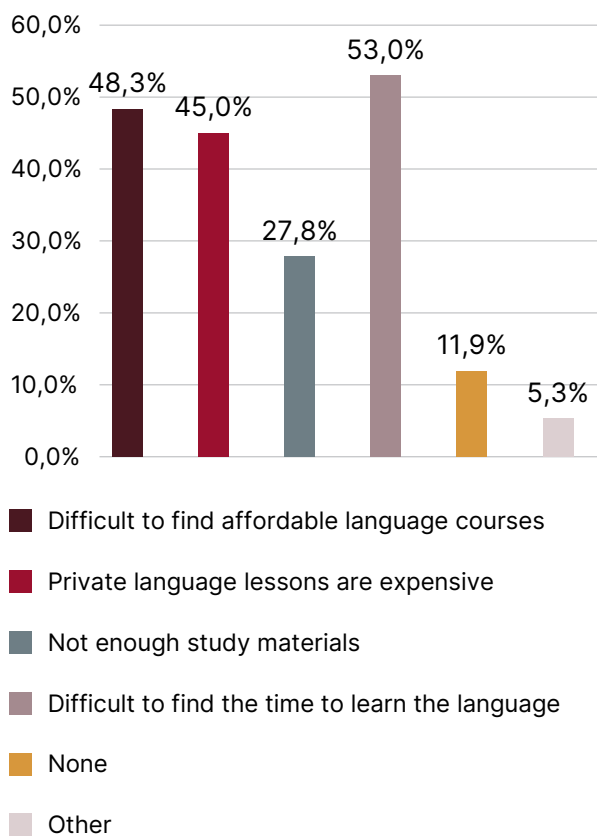
For some, learning the language to an advanced degree is crucial to continuing their job in their field of choice. A woman of 35 who works as a freelance journalist had a need to advance her Lithuanian skills to be involved in cultural projects or translation work. Notably, she had already dabbled in translating poetry to Lithuanian. Yet, she struggled to find affordable language courses past the beginner level:

“There are a lot of options for learning Lithuanian on a beginner level for free. But when it comes to a higher level, there is not much to choose from or it's too expensive.”

For most people, however, a practical reason to learn Lithuanian stems from their plans to stay in the country for a long time in the future and even to obtain citizenship. The majority of Ukrainians that arrived after February 24, 2022, are planning to stay in the country for good. Thus, being able to communicate in Lithuanian comes as an obvious reason to learn the state language.

Yet, it seems that the accessibility of affordable Lithuanian language courses is a predominant issue among the respondents.

What difficulties have you faced when learning Lithuanian?



Graph 6

The most common issue regarding learning Lithuanian is the lack of information about free or cheap Lithuanian language courses for Ukrainians. More than 48% of respondents say it is difficult to find affordable language courses (multiple answers were allowed).

Actually, there is a way to get compensation for language courses from the Employment Service. As it was explained by the Employment Service, Lithuanian language courses are conducted according to non-formal adult education programmes. Foreign citizens can participate in them regardless of employment status, as long as they are registered with the Employment Service and have a residence permit in Lithuania.

People participating in the training facility must fulfil contractual obligations. The duration of the education program is no longer than 32 consecutive calendar weeks. The amount of funds allocated by the Employment Service to pay for education services cannot exceed: 3 MMA (or €2520) when the duration of the non-formal adult education programme is 51 hours or more; or 1.2 MMA (or €1008) when the duration of the programme is up to 50 hours.

Although the number of language courses covered by the Employment Service are increasing, it is still just a small fraction of the potential demand. In 2022, €120,000 were spent on Lithuanian language courses, and in the first half of 2023 this number was €470,400.

According to the Employment Service, 824 Ukrainians started attending Lithuanian language courses from the beginning of this year to July 21. This is just a small fraction (only about 1–2 percent) of all Ukrainians who have arrived after February 24, 2022.

The relatively small share of Ukrainians who use state-sponsored language courses through the Employment Service could be related to the fact that only a fraction of them is seeking employment via the Employment Service: 3,100 Ukrainians have been registered with the Service as of July 24, 2023.

Yet, one of the interviewees mentioned that the process of getting this compensation is not always easy. To get the compensation for learning the language, an employed Ukrainian needs to have a three-party agreement signed: by the Employment Service, by an employer and by the Ukrainian themselves. According to the interviewee, her employer did sign this contract, enabling her to study. But she knows of cases in which the employer refused to sign.

Moreover, there are free Lithuanian language courses held at [Tautinių bendrijų namai](#), financed by governmental institutes and charity funds, but the information about them is not widespread among Ukrainians.

Some respondents also mention that the available courses are of a very basic level and lack quality and proper structure. A woman, 45, theorizes that this issue is due to a lack of financing:

“I am attending free courses right now. But they are not enough to learn the language to be able to actually speak. I think it’s a problem of financing. They were planning to continue this course to a higher level but they need money for it.”

Another challenge is fitting language classes into people’s busy schedules. One respondent, who works multiple jobs to support their family, shared that they don’t have time for Lithuanian lessons.

But the working schedule issue persists even for those who have one place of employment. For instance, a woman of 60 mentions that one of the greatest challenges was to combine her classes and her working schedule that does not have fixed hours. A woman of 45 also has this problem, saying that she can only visit the courses compensated by her work place one time a week due to incompatibility with her working hours.

A few interviewees also mention psychological exhaustion preventing them from picking up a language class. For example, one respondent said that

“It is difficult for me to remember the material because of stress.”

The roots of this issue can lay in the diagnosed or undiagnosed post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from which some Ukrainians may suffer. According to [previous studies](#), PTSD can negatively affect cognitive functions, such as attention and memory.

There is also the simple notion that Lithuanian is a hard language to learn. However, this is not usually perceived as an obstacle. It is worth mentioning that, because Lithuanian is not as widely-spoken as other European languages, there is an obvious shortage of free learning materials – such as mobile applications and courses – compared to English, German or Spanish.

There are no official statistics yet on the number of Ukrainians who use Lithuanian public libraries to get learning materials or leisurely reading, but according to [the interviews of Vilnius library workers](#) in local media, the numbers are not that big – probably because of a lack of information about this avenue for free access to the needed books.

At the same time, the struggle of learning a new language and a fear of being wrong is mentioned by a couple of interviewees.

“The main obstacles [in learning Lithuanian] are psychological. I am afraid whether I pronounce words correctly, and if I am not going to be mocked” – a woman, 60.

Or there are already some negative experiences that make people feel awkward:

“I have heard from other people that Lithuanians sometimes joke around about Ukrainians’ accent or pronunciation when they try to speak Lithuanian. I do not know. That’s what I heard” – a woman, 45.

However, there are also completely different testimonies regarding support from Lithuanians and the Lithuanian state in Ukrainians’ language learning endeavours:

“Lithuanians are extremely glad when you try to speak with them in their language. Their support motivates me to learn this language” – a female student, 21.

Another interviewee also had no difficulty finding a free language course and felt like she had enough options to choose from:

“There are plenty of materials to learn Lithuanian. The most effective way to speed up the process is being surrounded by Lithuanians. [...] The way I see it best is asking locals about how to say this or that and they are just advising me how to do it better” – a woman, 35.

Yet, it is worth mentioning that this interviewee is an employee at the university that compensated her costs for language courses. She has also shared that her working environment is quite supportive of her in general.

Thus, overall, the problem of getting access to Lithuanian language courses and making it work with a daily schedule remains a significant struggle for most Ukrainians.

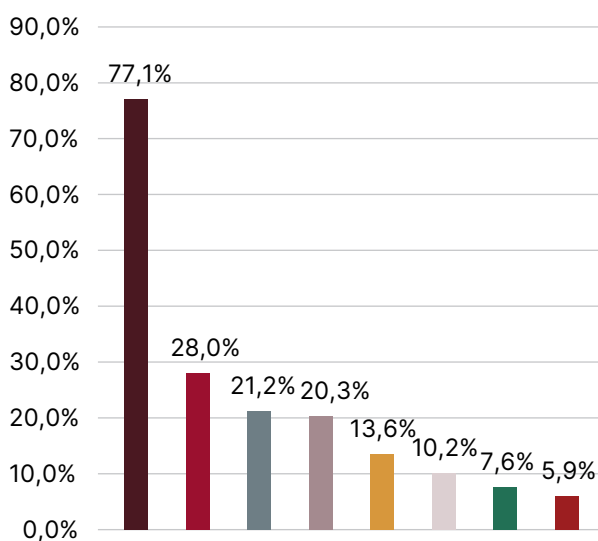
Waiting for Medical Care

The second most recurring issue in survey responses and interviews is getting a medical consultation in the short term.

This problem is new to Ukrainians who are used to getting a doctor's appointment in a matter of days. Especially when dealing with private clinics, the average consultation in Ukraine costs about 15–25 euros – quite an affordable price for a working Ukrainian faced with a health issue and in need of urgent medical help. However, this is not the case for Lithuanian medical facilities.

“In Ukraine you expect to get an appointment in a private clinic for tomorrow on a moderate sum of money. And here you have to wait forever.” – a woman, 35.

What obstacles have you faced with Lithuanian health care system?



- Long waiting times
- Lack of information about my rights and opportunities
- Language barrier
- No insurance
- No issues
- Low-quality service
- Discrimination or unequal treatment
- Other

Graph 7

About 60% of respondents have turned to health-care professionals. The weighted average for the Lithuanian health care system is 6,32 and the median score is 6. Notably, this rating is mostly due to the long waiting period for receiving medical help.

Apart from a protracted wait, respondents point out the lack of information about their rights and opportunities regarding the health care system and the issue of language barriers (multiple answers were allowed). Some also mention the lack of health insurance and a few complained about the quality of the medical service itself. Yet, the general evaluation of Lithuanian medical professionals remains positive.

According to the interviewees, the waiting time sometimes stretches to over a month and takes up to three weeks at least. And even if the service is satisfactory, it is often not needed any more after a few weeks of waiting. A woman of 35 mentioned that she had experienced stomach problems and was forced to deal with it by waiting until the issue would resolve itself. Luckily, the problem was not serious. She went to a consultation after two months of waiting, but just for a regular check-up. However, she notes on this matter as follows:

“It is long. But I realize that it is, probably, still faster than somewhere in France.”

At the same time, the feedback on the quality of medical services is primarily positive. An elderly woman of 68 who requires constant medical attention because of her diabetes praises Lithuanian medical care:

“They are not just trying to get rid of me, but actually help. In our [her and her husband's] age, the hospital is a place we visit every month.”

To the question of how she feels about the waiting times when getting an appointment, she answers:

“It is a common case all over Europe. If you need a specialist that is not your family doctor, you will have to wait for the consultation for a few weeks and more. But otherwise, it is not a problem.”

However, this is not the case for some Ukrainians. Alongside long waiting times, people seem to be lost on how to act in situations that require medical attention. For instance, a 60-year-old female interviewee who had injured her leg during a working day had no idea that she was entitled to compensation for her treatment on behalf of the employer. She has managed to get necessary treatment for free due to advice from a hospital:

“When I called the hospital, I was told that there are no places for appointments. But I was advised to come to the state hospital at 6:45 and try to get a consultation on the spot in the emergency room. That’s how I got the medical care I needed.”

Yet, there is a difficulty in getting information like this through the official channels. A lot of people feel like they do not know all the ways of getting medical help in the fastest way possible.

Another issue raised by an interviewee was a lack of psychological support in the state health care system.

“When I wasn’t employed, I couldn’t pay insurance. Thus, I was entitled only to some sort of emergency help. But when it came to the mental issue, I had no one to turn to.” – a woman, 60

There are currently no statistics on how many Ukrainian refugees are facing mental health issues, and how severe their problems are. Among probable stressors are war trauma, loss of loved ones, adaptation to a new country, financial insecurity, and worries about partners or relatives who stayed in Ukraine. Also, as mentioned in the interviews, one of the probable negative factors can be the Lithuanian climate, with less sunny days compared to the weather conditions

in most Ukrainian cities. The lack of sunlight can lead to a lack of the vitamin D which can increase the risk of developing depression and anxiety.

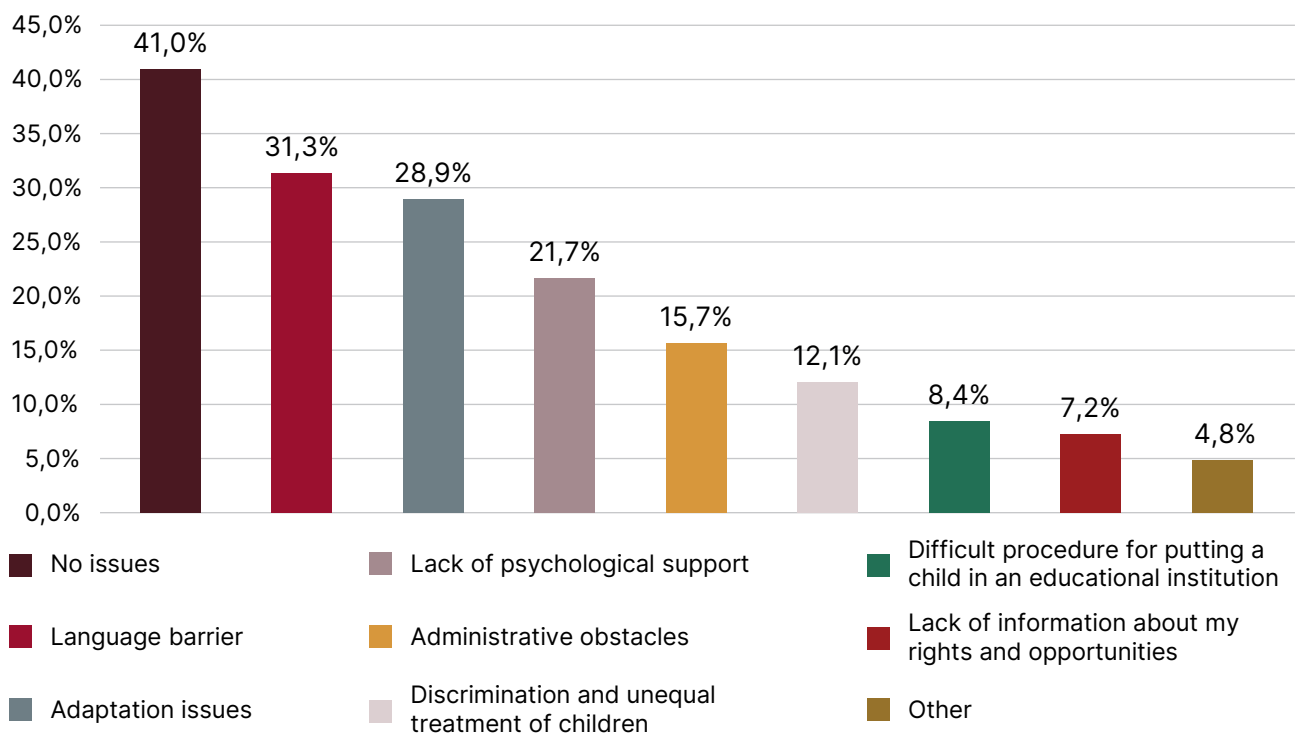
Education System

Even though the topic of education was not raised among the most pressing issues, it is worth noting since the majority of survey respondents are women with children. Besides, there was a big influx of Ukrainian students to Vilnius University last year due to the extensive financial support for Ukrainian academia. 48% of online survey respondents have used education and childcare services.

Those who have experience with education services have mostly positive experiences. Almost 35% of respondents evaluate the Lithuanian education system and childcare services with a 10 out of 10, and 18% gave it 9 out of 10. The average is 8,07, while the median score is 10.

Over 40% of respondents have not faced obstacles with the Lithuanian education system. Yet, the biggest issues seem to be a language barrier and difficulties in adaptation to the Lithuanian education system and childcare services (multiple answers were allowed).

What obstacles have you faced when using education and childcare services



Graph 8

Considering that Ukrainian students fall under the category of international students who study in English, the language barrier concerns mainly parents with children.

There is no data on the obstacles that students or their parents face in adapting to the Lithuanian education system. However, there are a few mentions of difficulties in evaluating Ukrainian grades to Lithuanian ones. For instance, one respondent writes:

“My child was not accepted to 10th grade even though he had the Ukrainian certificate of finishing 9th grade. So, we turn to Ukrainian school [remotely]”.

Notably, 22% indicated a lack of psychological support as their primary issue. This is likely to be connected with students as they are the ones who would usually seek psychological support.

Almost 16% of respondents consider administrative issues to be the most acute in the Lithuanian education system.

Last year, there were a number of students who transferred their studies to Vilnius University. Having their whole lives moved to another country with no certainty in their future takes quite a toll on young people.

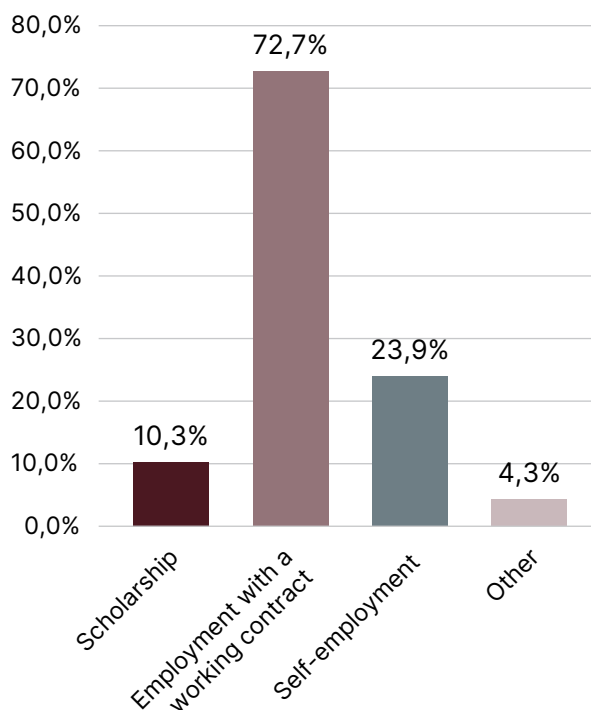
“There was no guarantee that I could continue my studies in Ukraine. [...] In the beginning, the feeling of the unknown created constant stress” – a female student, 21.

Another female student, 20, has mentioned unsatisfactory living conditions in the dormitories and difficulty for a student to find alternative accommodations. But this case is also more of an individual nature.

Employment and Financial Anxiety

The majority of respondents (65%) have a stable income in Lithuania. Over half of employed Ukrainians get their income through employment with an official working agreement (multiple answers were allowed).

If you have a stable income, what is it:



Graph 9

It is worth noting that a few respondents mentioned that they have their old job in Ukraine and use this income to get by.

The elderly couple (husband and wife, both 68 years old each) who participated in the semi-structured interview mentioned:

“We are working a full time-job as a university professor and a project specialist in the city council of Kharkiv. We are glad that we can work for our country remotely here and be useful to Ukraine.”

Another interviewee, a woman of 35, is self-employed and is working as a freelance-based journalist. After over a year in Lithuania she is at level B1 in the Lithuanian language and plans to use her knowledge for the benefit of Ukraine and Lithuania:

“I wouldn't be able to return to my work as a screenplay writer for a few years at least or continue it in Lithuania. [...] But I see the opportunity to do something else. I worked as a translator in a publishing house (from English to Ukrainian). I know that I can return to it.”

Yet, the same interviewee expresses financial anxiety because of her employment status as an individual entrepreneur:

“I am always in search of other projects. [...] I need to find additional side jobs to pay my rent. After my friend left it is getting harder to keep up by myself.”

Nonetheless, this woman does not let these circumstances get her down or compromise her ambitions. She expresses a strong urge towards feeling like her work has substance and meaning, and she feels that way as a journalist for the Ukrainian page in Lithuanian media. But she also has a clear goal to return to her original field of work (television) in the future.

Notably, this resolve to find a job is common among most Ukrainian refugees. A 60 years old female interviewee who works both remotely in Ukraine and in Lithuania says:

“In the beginning [after coming to Lithuania] I felt like I needed to be busy to cope with psychological pressure”.

Even students who receive scholarships from university seek employment. A female student, 21, is looking for a job to be more independent since it would be difficult for her parents to take full care of her financially. Another student who is already employed sees her having a job as a responsibility equal to getting an education.

However, there is still a certain financial anxiety among Ukrainians. Some of them receive compensation for accommodation or other forms of help through employment. And they doubt that they can get by when this assistance will expire.

“Generally speaking, the rent prices are unattainable in Vilnius considering the average salary” – a woman, 45.

This feeling not being fully financially secure despite a current stable income alters future plans for some interviewees. The above cited woman states:

“I will stay here until I am getting assistance from university. Otherwise, I wouldn't be able to afford to live here.”

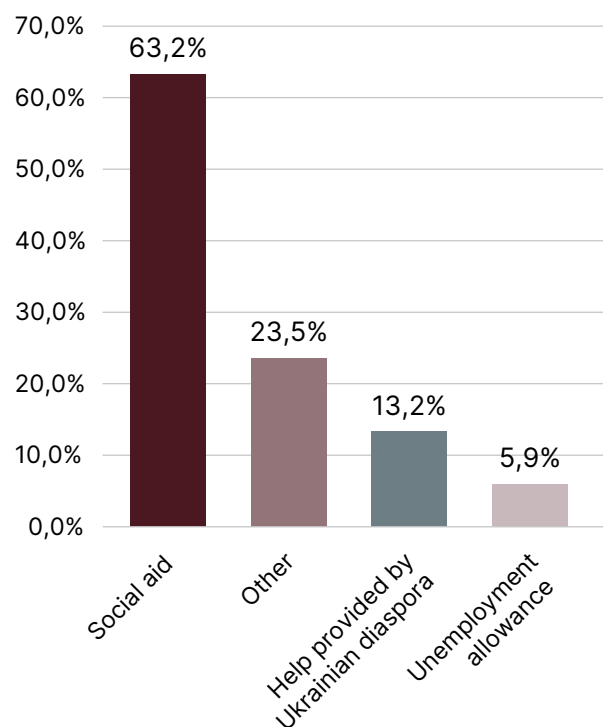
The rent price is a factor that can cause financial anxiety among Ukrainians. Since February 2022, rent prices have increased, especially in Vilnius. Ukrainians may fear that if they couldn't afford their current

rent they won't be able to find a cheaper flat either, because finding housing seems to be a problem for at least 31% of survey participants (who answered that they need help with finding a flat to rent). Also, a few respondents mentioned that they faced discrimination from the landlords who refused to rent to them because of their Ukrainian citizenship.

One of the probable causes of the financial anxiety among Ukrainians in Lithuania is the responsibility to provide not only for themselves and their family members who live with them, but also for those who are still in Ukraine to defend the country and who need financial support. For many Ukrainians abroad, regular donations to charity funds or to the servicemen they know in person have become a constant expense. Some of them experience guilt and shame for escaping to a safe country, so are trying to justify their decision by donating to the Ukrainian army.

However, for the most part, the interviewees expressed a willingness to find ways to stay and work to support themselves. Among the respondents who answered that they aren't receiving a stable income (35%), the answers were spread almost evenly (around 30% each) between three choices: “living out of income of relatives in Lithuania”, “living out of savings brought from Ukraine”, and “other”. In the last option the most repeated mentions were: “working with a Ukrainian company”, “receiving social aid” or “living out of Ukrainian pension”.

If you use social welfare program, what is it:



Graph 10

Notably, most respondents who use social welfare programs receive social aid from the state (multiple answers were allowed). The second choice consists of miscellaneous answers that mostly feature programmes for free food packages.

Interestingly enough, the third most picked category is “receiving help provided by the Ukrainian diaspora”.

As it is evident from the majority of responses on the matter of the Ukrainian community, Ukrainians do not keep in touch with the local Ukrainian diaspora for a variety of reasons. Yet, when it comes to dealing with social security issues, they tend to turn to each other.

This notion concerns older people especially. All three interviewees who are 60+ years old chose Lithuania because they had some sort of relation here from local Ukrainians.

In most cases, younger people tend to deal with their financial issues through seeking employment. Since the majority of respondents are employed, they have a sense of independence and focus on their families or personal relations.

Alienation and Social Adaptation

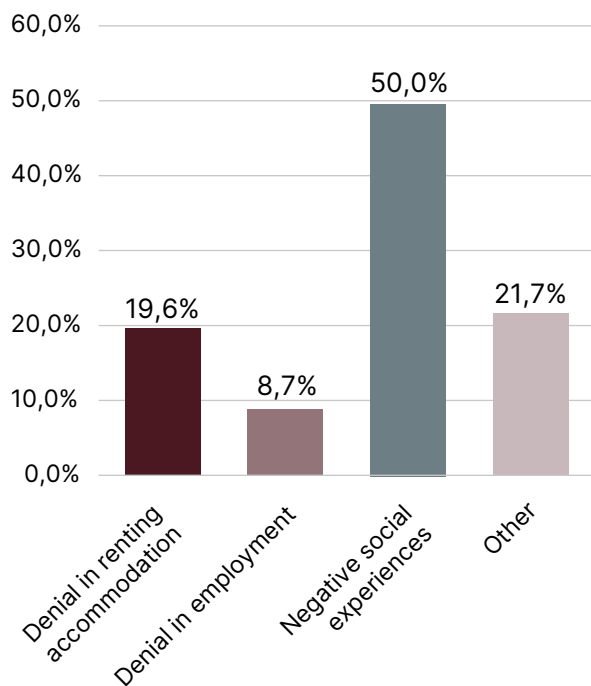
Even though none of the interviewees interviewed in person have experienced any discrimination, there are some recurring negative social experiences that cause feelings of alienation.

Half of the online survey respondents mirror this assessment. Most of them (more than 43%) have not experienced discrimination at all, but about 29% confirmed having experienced it personally and 28.7% have heard about such cases from Ukrainians in Lithuania. When asked what experiences of discrimination they have had, respondents mostly pick “negative social experiences” (50%).

“I cannot think about any discrimination. [...] Sometimes I hear negative sentiments on bus stops and such. For instance, there were people talking in Russian why Ukrainians are coming to Lithuania if they have a big enough country to fit them all” – a woman, 60.

It is worth noting that interviewees attribute such thoughts to pro-Russian individuals or Soviet-sympathizers. A woman of 45 attributes these negative

If so, what form of discrimination have you faced?



Graph 11

encounters to local “vata” (admirers of the Soviet Union and its politics) that are quite dissatisfied with Ukrainian refugees. She remembered:

“A cashier in the supermarket when understood that I am from Ukraine, murmured to himself in Russian: ‘All of these khokhols [Russian slur towards Ukrainians] came here to replace us.’”

Notably, experiences with discrimination usually consist in overhearing negative sentiments in public spaces. It is rarely about having a direct confrontation. Yet, one respondent mentions a situation where an elderly woman called her a prostitute in Russian after hearing that she is from Ukraine.

However, it is safe to assume that when it comes to the general Lithuanian public, such sentiments are a rarity. Yet, it does happen. 29% of survey respondents stated that they have faced discrimination. And 28% stated that they have heard about such cases but have not experienced any discrimination themselves. One such rare occurrence was mentioned by a 20-year-old student:

“In the dormitory I have experienced some negative comments from Lithuanian students who think that we [Ukrainians] are taking up space and resources. [...] But this is not a common case.”

Looking through comment sections on Lithuanian social media, it is possible to assume that Lithuanians have different attitudes to male and female Ukrainian refugees. While women are often welcomed or get a neutral reception, men are usually treated in a more hostile way. Lithuanian users typically write that 'Ukrainian men should defend their own country right now'.

Considering the continually expressed gratitude towards the Lithuanian state among interviewees, Lithuanians and Ukrainians do not face much conflict with each other. Most people find Lithuania and its people welcoming and supportive. That said, there is not much connection between Lithuanians and Ukrainians in their social lives.

A few interviewees have mentioned that Ukrainians are staying within their circle. There is not much effort on Ukrainians' part to build personal relationships with Lithuanians.

“I feel as if Ukrainians are not usually socializing with Lithuanians and communicating mainly with each other on a personal level” – a female student, 21.

There could be different explanations of why this phenomenon occurs.

Firstly, this issue mostly concerns a specific age group and family status. Younger people without children or any other family members tend to mingle more among Lithuanians. However, when it comes to women over 30 with children, they tend to stay within their circles of acquaintances.

This community of Ukrainian refugees revolves around common experiences that not even every Ukrainian can share.

“Most Ukrainians I know have children and completely different problems compared to mine. They talk about their children and husbands. I have neither of those. Thus, I do not have any common ground with them. That felt alienating” – a woman, 35.

Another factor which may cause the feeling of alienation is the struggle to maintain close relations with family members and friends who stayed in Ukraine. There is no precise data considering divorce rates due to involuntary separation, but the distance, combined with the difference in the problems faced, can lead to interpersonal conflicts. Comments on social

media illustrate the fact that some of the Ukrainians who stayed in Ukraine are holding a grudge against those who left. They are shaming refugees for 'letting their motherland down', sometimes going radical and calling male refugees 'cowards' and female refugees 'prostitutes'. These personal and social conflicts can increase feelings of alienation among Ukrainians abroad.

An elderly couple who are planning to return to Ukraine as soon as possible feel out of place in Vilnius, despite experiencing a warm welcome in the neighbourhood. A woman, 68, shares, holding back tears:

“We are strangers here. All of our lives were left there [in Ukraine].”

Another significant factor for Ukrainians being closed off is the language barrier. They first seek out people who speak their language in order to feel a sense of connection. And even though they are mostly willing to learn the language, it seems that the majority does not view it as a way to expand their social life.

Finally, psychological difficulties and previous trauma should be considered in the adaptation process as well. Ukrainians are mostly focused on rebuilding their lives and solving very practical problems. Meanwhile, the war continues to add new worries for Ukrainians who still have connections with their homeland. They have a sense of what needs to be done (including learning the language of their country of residence), but for the majority of respondents and interviewees it is hard to define a specific plan for their future. And some are tired of being viewed just as refugees and being defined by war:

“This mostly comes up in conversations with men. I am a bit tired of the expectation that I am a “poor refugee”. After we exhausted the topic of how I am doing here considering everything, there is not much to talk about [...]. They seem to be surprised that I have a job, an opinion, and a personality altogether” – a woman, 35.

An important factor remains the fact that social integration requires resources – effort, time, and sometimes money. Not all Ukrainians have time after work and study to devote to meeting new people. Also, not everyone has information about where they can practice their hobbies and meet Lithuanians who share their interests. And these events or classes are not always free.

It is also worth noting that more often than not, interviewees see their survival as an achievement. When asked about their personal achievements and regrets after moving to Lithuania, 'I am still alive' is something that comes up, accompanied by a nervous laugh:

“ I do not have any achievements really. I survived and that's it” – a woman, 45.

Another interviewee mentioned that she had to deal with negative stereotypes regarding Ukrainian refugees. She acknowledges that there are some people who abuse social aid programmes and create a false image of Ukrainians and their motivation to come to Lithuania.

“ I have heard stories about Ukrainians coming to a supermarket, getting the whole basket of food and telling the cashier that all of this should be compensated. I was hurt and almost wanted to cry after the assumption that I am here [in Lithuania] for the same purpose. I would never even think of doing something like that. But when you have a previous negative experience with Ukrainians, the stereotype is already formed” – a woman, 60.

Notably, this negative assessment came from her Russian-speaking colleagues. The assumption that Ukrainians 'have it easy' in Lithuania seems to be a popular sentiment among this crowd. Specifically, she mentioned her colleague from Belarus who was straight up hostile to her in the beginning of their partnership.

“ It got better [the attitude from her Belarusian colleague]. I guess she understood that not every Ukrainian is like this. But her attitude is still far from great” – a woman, 60.

Another interviewee mentioned experiencing a pressure to learn Lithuanian fast. Especially, this concerns people who work at jobs that require higher qualifications:

“ I was asked how long I had been in Lithuania. And after hearing that it was almost a year, they became visibly annoyed and asked why I am still not speaking Lithuanian” – a woman, 45.

However, there is also an understanding of the importance of the state language.

“ You can do anything here if you know the Lithuanian language. All your qualifications are valid alongside your education. The language is the only obstacle here” – a woman, 60.

Thus, Ukrainians generally accept their responsibilities but do not feel included in Lithuanian society.

Sense of Community

It is worth mentioning that Ukrainians who came after 24-02-2022 are not eager to connect with the Ukrainian diaspora in Lithuania. Over 50% of respondents do not keep in touch with local Ukrainians. The main reasons are difficulties in finding contacts (44%) and the lack of a sense of community (33%). Some explanations mentioned by respondents were arguments that they “did not know about the diaspora at all”; “did not feel the need to search for local community”, or “do not have time for socializing”.

Thus, even if people know about the local Ukrainian community and exchange some news or advices, they see this connection in a practical light (i.e. how to solve practical issues, how to find a job, etc.) rather than it being about sharing Ukrainian cultural experience. A few respondents also mentioned the lack of common values when it comes to preserving Ukrainian culture.

The same can be said about socializing. People tend to bond over a common experience rather than over being from the same country.

That said, when it comes to involvement in charities and initiatives to help Ukraine, the situation is reversed. Over two-thirds of respondents (67%) have participated in charity initiatives. Ukrainian refugees tend to be an active community, as staying connected to their country and its issues is a strong motivation for them to get involved.

When asked to specify the organization or projects they took part in, the most common answers were *UkreateHub* and *Ukrainian House*. Both of these organizations provide help to Ukrainian refugees in their adaptation processes.

Ukrainian House provides accessible Lithuanian language courses. One of the interviewees, a woman of 35, was attending them to get a basic level of Lithuanian.

UkreateHub's motto is "Activate. Enable. Create.", meaning to transform the Ukrainian diaspora into an active community and a part of Lithuanian society. One of their initiatives (TULA) is aimed at establishing personal connections between Ukrainian and Lithuanian families. The UkreateHub initiative is a vivid representation of the desire to be actors of change and benefit Ukraine, even from afar.

Also, [The Ukrainian Centre](#) was established in Vilnius, in cooperation with the Embassy of Ukraine, the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Lithuania and Vytautas Magnus University. It is an educational and cultural centre which provides different art and therapeutic events for all members of the Ukrainian community in Lithuania.

The other most recurring initiatives were student organizations, social media groups and gatherings in support of Ukraine. All of them are Ukrainian student initiatives. Younger people tend to be proactive and get together through networking and social media channels. They are the ones who are most politically engaged out of all the groups.

Yet, even people who just want to get by and lead their lives tend to feel obligations to Ukraine.

My biggest achievement after moving to Lithuania is that I am still working as a professor in a Ukrainian university and I have published a guide for students. They can already use it" – a man, 68.

Future Plans

Even though it is difficult for a lot of Ukrainians to define their future plans, most of them are leaning towards staying for a while. For a lot of interviewees, it is first and foremost a matter of employment and previously established commitments in Lithuania.

I was asked at work if I wanted to stay for longer. And I said that I would like to stay even if the war ended tomorrow" – a woman, 35.

This interviewee sees gaining Lithuanian knowledge as an opportunity to grow personally and get new skills. She is considering renewing her studies and getting a master's degree. Notably, her motivations are related to Ukraine and joining the rebuilding process after the end of the war, even if she ends up staying in Lithuania for good and becomes a citizen.

In most cases, people fear that they would not be able to find a job in Ukraine because of the difficult economic situation. The uncertainty around the theoretical post-war Ukraine pushes people to look for opportunities in their state of residence.

This trend is mirrored in the online survey as well. 76% of respondents are not planning to leave Lithuania anytime soon. Moreover, around the same number of people are considering getting Lithuanian citizenship in the future. A few of the interviewees also consider obtaining citizenship to settle down in Lithuania for good. Notably, these results partially come from the fact that the majority of the respondents are women with children. They are focused on rebuilding their lives and reaching stability, which Lithuanian citizenship can provide.

At the same time, it is peculiar that most respondents who do not plan to return to Ukraine soon, define their stay in Lithuania by the duration of the Russian full-scale invasion. When asked about how long they are going to stay in Lithuania, they mostly pick "until the end of war" (41%). And a longer-term stay (up to a few years) comes as the second most picked option (39%) Only around 10% of respondents are certain of their permanent stay in Lithuania.

These results seem to be contradictory, as getting Lithuanian citizenship (for which 64% of respondents would consider applying in the future) would probably imply staying in the country for good. However, this disparity is caused by the fact that the majority of respondents do not have long-term plans regarding their stay.

They would not rule out the possibility of getting Lithuanian citizenship. But for most, it is rather a valuable option than a specific plan. According to most interviewees, it is generally hard to define any plans. Ukrainians tend to focus on issues they have right now due to the reasons described prior.

That said, it is evident that the prospect of Lithuanian citizenship is a desirable objective among Ukrainians who came to Lithuania after 24-02-2022. This should be an important finding for the Lithuanian authorities: potentially, a big proportion of Ukrainians, especially if they would stay for a longer period, may apply for citizenship. In other words, the Ukrainian community in Lithuania should be not treated as a temporary occurrence.

One interviewee sees acquiring Lithuanian citizenship as gaining stability and physical security:

Yes, I would consider getting citizenship. I do wish I could go back to Ukraine. My child is there. My home. But I am afraid" – a woman, 60.

But for a lot of people this is a matter of practicality. Over 60% of survey respondents would consider reuniting later in Lithuania with their family members who cannot leave Ukraine now due to martial law. This decision might be attributed to the fact that most of the respondents are women with children – they may hope to invite their husbands and fathers when the situation allows. Thus, staying in Lithuania (an EU member) would provide certain benefits to them. Yet, there is no data to support this exact reasoning.

Another 'grey zone' is the status of Ukrainian men in Lithuania. Some of them are afraid to be accused of breaking Ukrainian martial law. The need to 'sit quietly' without drawing attention to themselves can prevent the development of an active social life not only for said men, but for their wives and children as well. The gender gap in the survey participants, which does not reflect the true number of male refugees, can be an illustration of this problem.

This issue is also time-sensitive. It is important to establish trust and better integration of Ukrainians from the beginning. Otherwise, they will become a closed-off community in Lithuania. In the future, if the war continues and financial support for Ukrainians from the government and the EU decreases, this may lead to negative sentiments in part of the Ukrainian community towards the state. In comments in groups of Ukrainians in Lithuania on social networks, you can already find comments like 'they forgot about us', 'nobody needs us here any more'. Also, there is the possibility of the apolitical part of Ukrainian community blending with apolitical (or even pro-Russian) immigrants from Russia and Belarus who are still glorifying Soviet Union times, which altogether can lead to an increase in pro-Russian sentiments in society.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study is dedicated to analysing the adaptation of Ukrainians who came to Lithuania after February 24, 2022. It is meant to highlight the main issues and challenges that Ukrainian refugees face in Lithuania.

According to the new data gathered from this research, Ukrainians are a motivated and law-abiding community that holds gratitude and respect towards Lithuania. Most of them are women over 30 with

children who are leaning towards staying in Lithuania in the long term and are even considering applying for citizenship.

Low level of socialization. At the same time, with all that willingness to fit in, Ukrainians are not striving to be included in the Lithuanian community. Notably, even the willingness to unite into Ukrainian communities or organizations or to participate in social activities is relatively small. Ukrainians in Lithuania tend to stick together in small social circles and deal with everyday challenges, rather than having political or social ambitions. Even when it comes to learning a language, the primary reason relates to feeling of duty rather than a need to improve socialization.

Keeping this in mind, it is important for Lithuania to build effective communication channels to include Ukrainians into society. It is crucial to support charities and initiatives in order to work on successful integration. The accessibility of information about rights and opportunities is key here. In this way, Ukrainians are more likely to feel like they are keeping up and using all opportunities, e.g. information about language learning, getting medical care as soon as possible, increasing their chances of stable employment, and channels to receive news about cultural and social events in their area.

Insufficient means and availability to learn Lithuanian. The biggest issue for Ukrainians in Lithuania is the accessibility of Lithuanian language courses. Ukrainians are willing to learn the language but often cannot afford to buy a course from a language school or private lessons. However, the biggest problem is the lack of public information about free language learning opportunities. The Employment Service began to compensate language courses more extensively only this year, but the number of Ukrainians using this opportunity remains low. We have to use their expressed motivation to learn Lithuanian without delay, as it may decrease later. Ukrainians who communicate in Russian or English may lose interest in spending time and other resources to learn Lithuanian if they adjust over time. This is the right moment for Lithuanian institutions to promote and increase the motivation for learning, as it may require much more resources later.

The very first task should be to expand communication channels and promotion of already available, state-sponsored opportunities to learn Lithuanian. There could be a dedicated online space with all the options and links to the organizations that provide free language courses for Ukrainians. The Employ-

ment Service already provides links to available language courses. However, not many Ukrainians turn to the Employment Service for language learning opportunities. Thus, this should not be the only channel for affordable Lithuanian language courses. Interviewees have mentioned a couple of options and ways in which they are learning Lithuanian, but this knowledge should be accessible to the public.

Another task to tackle is having a clear structure of the courses and a focus on developing higher-level courses (from B1 to C2), so there would be an opportunity for comprehensive language learning.

More affordable medical care. Another big issue is waiting for medical care. This is a problem that is common not only to Ukrainians, but to Lithuanians as well. It might also be the hardest to tackle on an organizational level as it transcends the issue of integration. However, some organizational issues can be addressed: providing explanations about other possibilities for consultations, like online consultations and registration for a consultation; private medicine consultations; existing state programs of free check-ups; free consultations from mental health specialists provided by Lithuanian and international volunteers; etc.

Even though most Ukrainians who came after February 24, 2022, are employed, there is a certain anxiety about keeping this employment status and dealing with overall financial anxiety. Also, general uncertainty about the future and constant thinking about relatives who live or fight in Ukraine may pose risks to mental health. Therefore, more attention should be paid to available psychological consultations. It would be worth considering a specific state-supported program for Ukrainians who require psychological consultations by employing Ukrainian-speaking professionals and motivating them to continue their practice in Lithuania.

Potential risks of tacit conflict between immigrant groups. Ukrainians are generally satisfied with their life in Lithuania. Yet, they also experience alienation and have had negative social experiences. Granted, these mostly involve people with pro-Soviet and pro-Russian sentiments. It is also worth noting that the Belarusian community in Lithuania is more prone to such sentiments, causing a potential conflict with the Ukrainian community. The increasing number of Belarusian immigrants should be monitored closely, as this group may bring with them more pro-Russian narratives and beliefs that consequently may lead to some conflicts with Ukrainians.

Preparation for long-term integration. Since a lot of Ukrainians are planning to stay, the long-term integration programmes and processes are crucial. We should be prepared that a considerable proportion of Ukrainians in Lithuania may want to invite and reunite with their family members who are now living or fighting in Ukraine. Also, we should evaluate the motivation and potential to provide Lithuanian citizenship to some Ukrainians. First, there should be a clear explanation about the process and requirements for acquiring Lithuanian citizenship. Second, a motivation system to seek citizenship could be created and employed for those Ukrainians who have clearly decided to stay in Lithuania for good.

There are already initiatives from Ukrainian House and UkreateHub that work on integration of Ukrainians in Lithuanian society. Thus, there should be more collaboration between local municipalities and such projects to initiate cultural and social events, in order to strengthen ties between Ukrainian refugees and Lithuanian society. Since Ukrainian refugees have different social backgrounds, interests and needs, the approach to their integration into Lithuanian society should also be differentiated. It is necessary to find possible points of contact between the interests of Ukrainians and Lithuanians, and then turn them into opportunities for mutual communication, exchange of experience, development, and growth. Future research may focus on finding these points and the opportunities they provide.