



# PROTECTION BRIEF CZECHIA

## Operational Context

Based on the number of refugees who applied for an extension of Temporary Protection in 2024 (320,000), the figures of Temporary Protection holders in Czechia, including new arrivals, were updated to **338,736** people as of 31 March 2024, compared to 373,745 at the end of 2023 (source: Ministry of the Interior).

In January 2024, *Lex Ukraine* was amended to extend Temporary Protection until March 2025. Changes introduced include an adjustment of the initial level of humanitarian benefits, maintaining support for the most vulnerable individuals, and the reduction of cost-free accommodation for all new arrivals from 150 to 90 days.

This report presents an overview of refugees' demographic profiles and displacement patterns as well as main findings regarding protection risks, priority needs and intentions of refugees from Ukraine in Czechia. The analysis is based on 480 Protection Monitoring interviews and findings from focus group discussions with refugees from Ukraine across the country in the first quarter of 2024.

## Key Figures

**338,736**

Temporary Protection holders in Czechia

**320,000**

among whom have registered for an extension

**92%**

of Protection Monitoring respondents are Temporary Protection holders

**75%**

of respondents are women and children

**32%**

of respondents have at least one household member missing documentation or whose documents have expired

**39%**

Consider accommodation an urgent need

# Protection Risks and Needs

UNHCR Czechia continued to conduct Protection Monitoring while also consulting different groups of refugees through focus group discussions on protection risks and priority needs. Specific challenges in accessing rights were reported. The key findings are highlighted below.

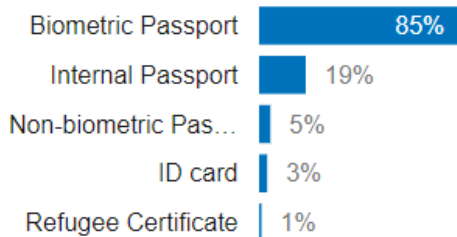
## Protection Risk I

The number of respondents reporting a lack of critical documentation increased from 28% to 32% in the first quarter of 2024 compared to the last quarter of 2023. The increase was mainly in relation to obtaining or renewing biometric passports (85%) and internal passports (19%), which impacted the possibility to move freely, to access basic services as well as work and education. Various factors hinder refugees' access to documentation, including associated processing fees, long waiting periods, unavailability of services or lack of information on procedures.

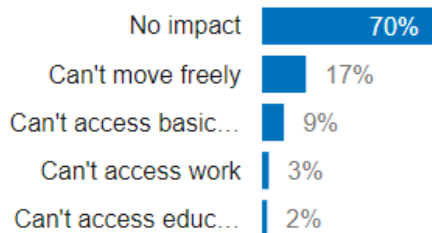
# 32%

of respondents have at least one household member missing documentation or whose documents have expired

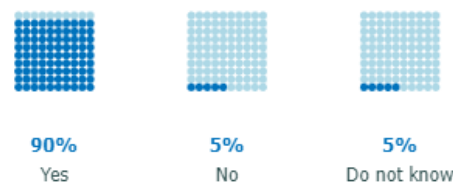
### Top missing documentation\*



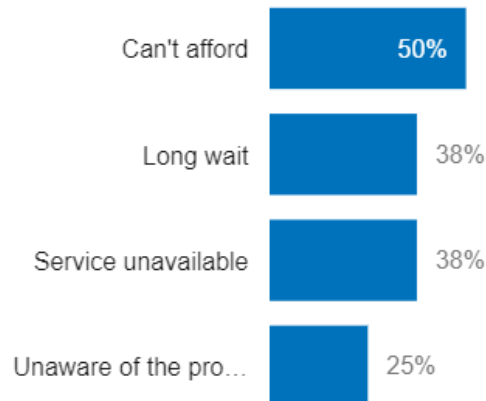
### Challenges faced due to lack of documentation\*



### Ability to replace/renew documentation in the host country\*\*



### Reasons for inability to renew/replace documentation in the host country\*



10% of the respondents also reported facing challenges in registering births, deaths, marriages, and divorces, and obtaining corresponding documents.

## Protection Risk II

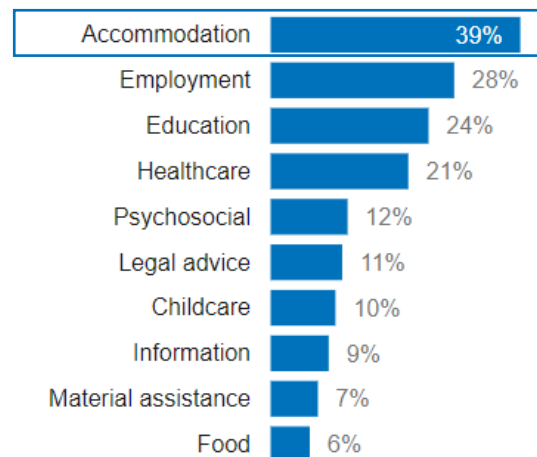
**Access to housing:** Protection monitoring findings and focus group discussions have highlighted that accommodation was the most urgently reported need (39% of respondents in first quarter of 2024 compared to 27% in the last quarter of 2023), followed by employment.

Protection monitoring shows a positive trend in the percentage of respondents residing in rented accommodation with an increase from 46% in the last quarter of 2023 to 59% in the first quarter of 2024. In parallel to this, the percentage of residents in collective accommodation facilities decreased from 12% to 6% during the same period. It is likely that many refugees residing in collective accommodation facilities have already begun to relocate to rented housing as a result of the changes in the provision of cost-free accommodation. This applies also to vulnerable persons, who previously continued to benefit from cost-free accommodation beyond the 150 days. Findings from Protection Monitoring for this quarter confirm that 38% of those having to leave their accommodation was on account of the accommodation closing, compared to only 22% in the last quarter of 2023.

# 39%

Consider accommodation an urgent need

### Most urgent needs \*



Focus group discussions conducted in March with 114 respondents in collective accommodation facilities across seven regions<sup>1</sup> highlighted the challenges in accessing sustainable and affordable housing, including the psychological distress of a relocation to rented housing by some Ukrainian refugees. This was found to be a particular concern amongst elderly persons, persons with disabilities, single mothers, persons with serious medical conditions and their carers. Many expressed reluctance to relocate, citing fatigue and fear of the unknown; some also appreciated their current living conditions and sense of community support, which they prefer over individual housing. The motivation and/or possibility of refugees to relocate to standard housing varied significantly based on income and employment status, Czech language skills, vulnerabilities related to disabilities, age, family size and support from government services or informal networks.

The focus group discussions also underscored the precarious financial situation of many refugees, including those engaging in low-paid work below their qualifications, which creates a barrier for relocations to rented housing. 78% of respondents mentioned that they would not be able to cover costs of rented housing higher than CZK 5,000 (approximately USD 213) a month, which is well below market price.

In addition to the individual factors affecting relocations to standard housing, key informant interviews and consultations with NGOs, representatives of local and regional governments, and experts in social housing outlined a number of structural factors impacting relocations. These include the need to clarify and strengthen institutional roles and responsibilities in relation to refugee assistance, the need to provide clear, understandable, and timely information on the upcoming housing changes, and the need to ensure unimpeded access of residents to social services and counselling. Furthermore, findings suggest that the current situation and oversaturation of the rental market in bigger cities should not be disregarded. Coordinated support

<sup>1</sup> UNHCR-IOM: NEW BEGINNINGS: SUPPORTING THE DIGNIFIED RELOCATION OF UKRAINIAN TEMPORARY PROTECTION HOLDERS TO STANDARD HOUSING. Report on the Relocation of Ukrainian Temporary Protection Holders from Collective Accommodation Facilities to Standard Housing, April 2024

is required to prevent debts, social exclusion, and homelessness of the most vulnerable refugees ahead of further anticipated transition from collective accommodation to rented housing.

## Protection Risk III

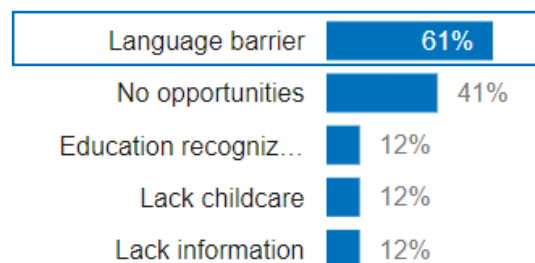
**Access to work:** 10% of respondents who are unemployed reported challenges in accessing employment, mainly due to language barriers, a lack of opportunities, as well as a lack of education recognition, caring responsibilities for dependents, or a lack of information.

Focus group discussions conducted by UNHCR<sup>2</sup> highlighted challenges with women accessing employment due to a lack of childcare, kindergarten places and other childcare arrangements, including for school-age children. Given the large proportion of single female caregivers, addressing this challenge will be key to increase access to work for this group and to mitigate protection risks including gender-based violence, human trafficking and exploitation. Women also raised challenges related to language barriers in accessing employment. Specific challenges in accessing quality language courses at the correct level were also raised (high demand for quality B1-level courses). The lack of adequate language skills leads to the inability to upscale professional skills and to seek meaningful employment opportunities matching qualifications.

# 61%

Face language barriers in accessing employment

### Barriers to accessing employment \*



When seeking employment through agencies, women reported cases of labour exploitation with jobs that often involve long working hours, no breaks, no social protection coverage, and no annual leave. From protection monitoring, 24% of respondents reported working excessively long hours. 12% indicated they did not have an employment contract, while 3% reported the confiscation of their documentation (e.g., passport) by their employer.

## Protection Risk IV

**Access to adequate healthcare:** In focus group discussions conducted by UNHCR with elderly Ukrainian refugees<sup>3</sup>, access to adequate healthcare emerged as the main concern. Participants highlighted significant barriers, including difficulties finding a general practitioner and understanding a medical insurance system that is new to them.

Refugees highlighted a particular challenge in doctors neglecting to consider medical histories from Ukraine, resulting in misdiagnoses and incorrect treatment. Some instances, such as when prescribed medications conflicted with known conditions, illustrated a disconnect between patient backgrounds and treatment approaches in the Czech healthcare system. This forced some refugees to rely on bringing medications from Ukraine, exacerbated by difficulties obtaining long-term prescriptions.

Language barriers also hinder effective communication of health needs. Many focus group discussion respondents highlighted the need to rely on assistance during medical appointments. It was also observed that participants face uncertainty about obtaining disability certificates, with most participants unaware of the process. Notably, healthcare emerged as the fourth most important information need during protection monitoring.

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR Focus Group Discussion with 10 Ukrainian refugee women 25-59 years of age in January 2024 in Prague.

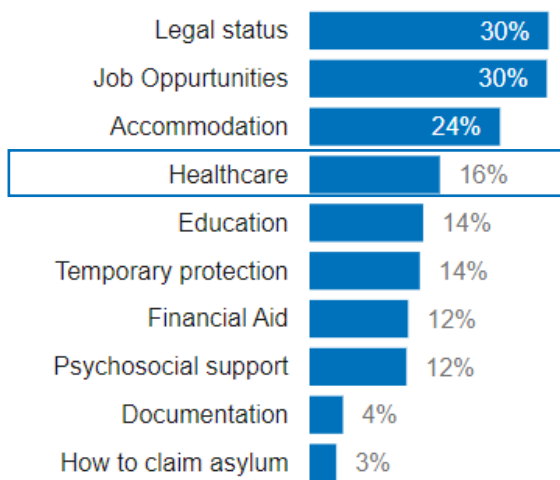
<sup>3</sup> UNHCR Focus Group Discussions with 28 Ukrainian elderly refugees aged 60-79 (26 women, 2 men) in Prague and Plzen in March - April 2024.

Protection monitoring also indicated an increase in the number of applicants for government-provided social protection benefits, with cash assistance remaining as the most sought-after benefit, followed by grants for vulnerable groups. In comparison to Q4 of 2023, the main challenges faced by respondents or their household members in accessing social protection benefits remained as language barriers, a long waiting time and a lack of documents. Notably, the percentage of respondents citing language barriers as a challenge rose from 56% to 75%.

# 16%

Healthcare is the fourth most important information need

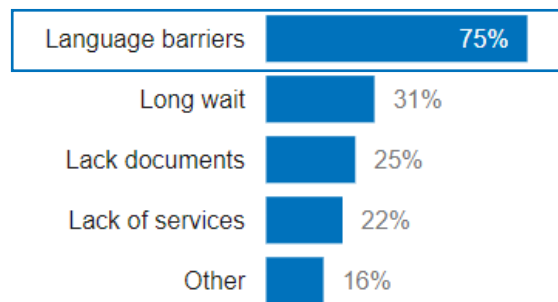
### Information needs \*



# 75%

Of respondents citing language barriers as a challenge

### Challenges faced\*



*Note: out of those who applied*

\*\* Due to rounding some percent totals do not add up to 100%

\* Multiple responses were possible, so percentages can go over 100% when added

## Calls to Action

UNHCR and partners will continue to share identified needs and support the national response:

- Tailor financial assistance to the specific needs of refugees residing in collective accommodation facilities to mitigate potential protection risks in the continued relocation of residents to rented housing. The financial assistance should include access to the Czech social welfare system and tailored incentives based on the specific needs of the vulnerable group in question, including support to cover the cost of relocating, support to pay the housing deposit, assistance in purchasing furniture, or more sustainable financial support.
- Conduct effective information campaigns complemented by counselling and community-based support programs for vulnerable residents of collective accommodation facilities.
- Prioritize support to single female caregivers, including childcare, and mitigate protection risks through the prevention of exploitation and trafficking, and supporting mental health and psychosocial wellbeing.
- Ensure that public and private healthcare providers introduce or increase the number of volunteers who serve as interpreters at doctors' appointments and spread information on such availability to improve the communication of ailments by Ukrainian refugee patients.
- Disseminate information in languages and formats accessible to Ukrainian refugees of different ages responding to the healthcare information needs of patients. Notably, information materials explaining insurance coverage and differences in healthcare protocols in Czechia and Ukraine would be useful, as well as a description of actions for obtaining disability certificates.
- Strengthen the access of service users to complaints and feedback mechanisms to improve the quality of services and to inform refugees of procedures to provide feedback on services received, including through hotline numbers or other mechanisms to report complaints and/or to seek assistance in accessing services. Healthcare providers should implement functional feedback and complaints mechanisms in accessible languages and locations for refugees, including elderly persons.
- Increase the availability of Czech language classes at higher levels.