



SLOVAKIA

Summary of a qualitative study among Ukrainian refugees

Health system challenges result in delayed access to care

Behavioural insights on health service needs and access
October–January 2023



World Health
Organization

European Region

Key findings



107,000

persons from Ukraine applied for Temporary Protection in Slovakia by end of January 2023

87%

are women and children



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We saw hospitals and polyclinics nearby in the city, but we do not know how to [get access] there.

Man, age 70

EMERGING ISSUES

People **delay getting medical services**

Low trust in the healthcare system

Reliance on Ukrainian doctors

Language barrier

Attitudes towards refugees

Increasing **mental health service** delivery and uptake



DRIVERS TO ACCESS SERVICES

Positive individual experiences

Personal experiences with caring healthcare staff, volunteers, and the local community increase trust and confidence in the healthcare system.

Support from civil society

Local communities help refugees find healthcare providers, make appointments, travel to the facility and assist with translation during the visit.



BARRIERS TO ACCESS SERVICES

Entering and navigating the healthcare system

People delay getting health services unless it is an emergency; many do not understand how to get insurance, schedule an appointment or get referrals for specialized care.



Low trust in the healthcare system

Challenges in getting health services contribute to low trust in health workers, including variations in the availability, quality of care and attitudes of healthcare staff.



Language

Language is a barrier for many when scheduling appointments and seeing a doctor and intensifies negative experiences of health services.



Location and hours of operation

People with disabilities, young children, and those who are working have more challenges with physical access to healthcare facilities and hours of operation.



BEHAVIOURS & ATTITUDES

Trust in Ukrainian doctors

Many consult with doctors from Ukraine to confirm diagnoses, treatment plans and medication; some travel to Ukraine to receive services.

Expectations of the healthcare system

Many perceived challenges may be due to differences between the health systems in Ukraine and Slovakia.

Mental health

Over time, availability and uptake of mental health services is increasing; however, some reject the group format.

Attitudes towards refugees

Participants report some attentive and caring experiences but also frequent neglectful, distant and uninterested treatment by healthcare providers.

Background and next steps

BACKGROUND



Ongoing war drives people away

War in Ukraine has resulted in the largest movement of people across Europe since WW2. Neighbouring countries opened borders and offered services, but refugee perspectives are essential for planning appropriate interventions and policies.

METHOD

Qualitative study on perceived health service needs as well as drivers and barriers to accessing these services October-November 2022.

21 in-depth online interviews::

- 18 were women, and 3 were men
- 16 aged 18-49; 5 over 50
- 15 people taking care of others
- 6 people are not caretakers

Recruitment via social media channels and personal networks.

Follow up interviews with 15 refugees in January 2023 to understand how their situation had changed.



PROPOSED ACTION

1

Increase appropriate use of health services

Clarify the strategy for accessing routine and preventative care to ensure the appropriate use of the system; and ensure support for health workers who provide service to refugees.



2

Provide clear and targeted information

Use study findings to tailor information about available health services and routes, health insurance, vaccination services, and referral systems; prepare a strategy to sensitize refugees to Slovakia's health system, especially for those with low health literacy



3

Praise and support citizens and civil society organizations

Acknowledge the important role of the host community, volunteers, healthcare workers and civil society organizations through media stories, joint social and cultural events.



4

Monitor attitudes and potential refugee fatigue

Refugees report a wide range of experiences when interacting with the health system; continue to monitor for negative attitudes toward refugees from health workers and broader society.



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Ideally, if a center for Ukrainian were created... it is very important that we be understood.

Woman, age 52

Learn more

This briefing note is part of a qualitative study among Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia. For more information, contact:

euinsights@who.int.

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Photo on the cover:

Tatiana and her 3-year-old son, who has cerebral palsy, left Ukraine seeking safety. “...[W]e never thought something like this could ever happen to us. I want to be safe and have medical attention for Nikita.”

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