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
Health service needs and access

**Key findings**

**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.

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**SLOVAKIA**

- 107,000 persons from Ukraine applied for Temporary Protection in Slovakia by end of January 2023
- 87% are women and children

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

Man, age 70
Health service needs and access

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.

> "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.” © WHO/Agata Grzybowska/RATS Agency

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World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe
UN City, Marmorvej 51, DK-2100 Copenhagen Ø, Denmark

Tel: +45 45 33 70 00
Fax: +45 45 33 70 01
Email: eurocontact@who.int
www.who.int/europe