

# People from Ukraine in Slovak cities

Informedness, services, community support, inclusion.

## Summary and recommendations from qualitative research analysis

Authors:

Elena Gallo Kriglerová, CVEK

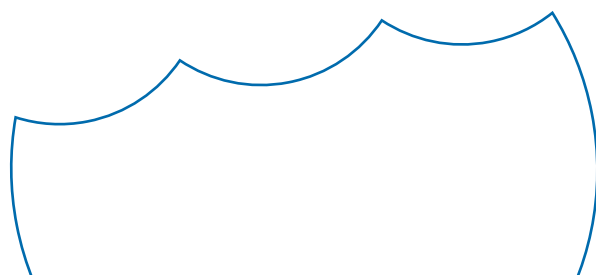
Alena Holka Chudžíková, CVEK





# Content

Informedness.....	4
Quality of services.....	6
Community support .....	8
Acceptance and inclusion .....	9



# 1. Informedness

**After arriving in Slovakia, people from Ukraine received information from many sources. They were most helped by compatriots from Ukraine, local residents and humanitarian organizations**

In the first weeks after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, people arriving in Slovakia got important information about their stay and available help mainly from three sources. The most important source was Ukrainian ex-pats who had already been living in Slovakia for quite some time. Gradually, an information network was created inside the community. The second source of information was local residents who provided accommodation or other forms of assistance to the refugees. A „collective“ accommodation providers proved to be an invaluable source of information, along with the community that was created around them. The third important source was humanitarian organizations and a wide network of volunteers. Volunteers played a key role at the border - a large number of respondents said that the very first information they received at the border came from volunteers.

**The Internet was also an important source of information**

After obtaining initial information, people looked for additional information on the Internet - on official state websites such as ua.gov.sk or on the websites of various organizations and institutions. Groups on social networks, especially Facebook and Telegram groups, proved to be an important source of information, too. However, some pieces of information were not reliable enough or were contradictory.

**Information for people from Ukraine was mostly comprehensible, interpreters played a key role**

Information provided were, for most part, easy to understand. Many respondents were surprised by how much information were available in Ukrainian, be it leaflets, websites, documents issued by state institutions or humanitarian and non-governmental organizations. However, volunteer translators and professional interpreters played a key role.

**People look for information about health care and „what's next“**

The absolute majority of respondents, in all cities where we conducted interviews, complained about the lack of information about health care. Another important issue was the legal status. People from Ukraine perceive the status of temporary refuge as only a temporary solution and do not know how long they can rely on it. Ukrainians are now looking for ways to obtain a temporary or permanent residence permit.

**Public institutions and aid centers are slowly taking over the responsibility for helping and supporting the people of Ukraine**

The willingness to help Ukrainians has not diminished as strong bonds have been forged over time. Many people from Ukraine have created strong ties with the existing Ukrainian community, friends or acquaintances from Ukraine and help each other even today. Assistance from various organizations, associations, and aid centers that are active in individual cities is becoming more frequent.

**After a few months, many people from Ukraine are self-sufficient, they do not want to rely only on help from others**

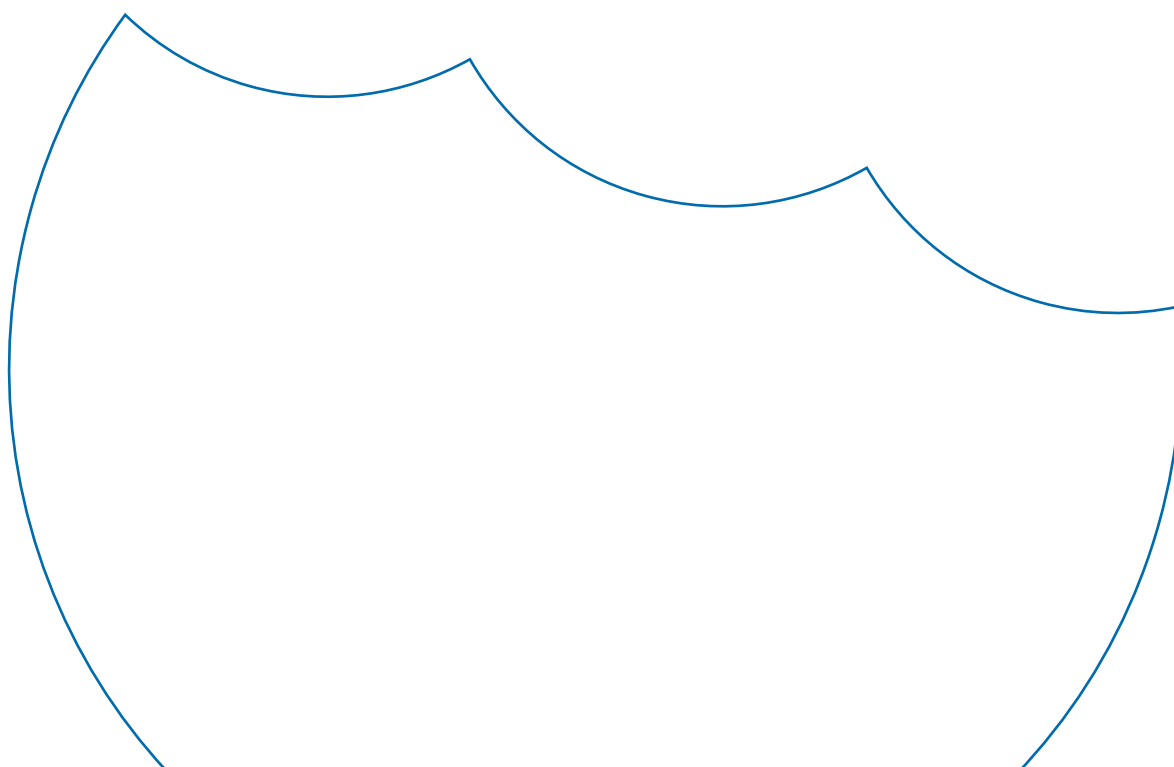
The research showed that a large number of respondents reported that they feel more self-sufficient, try to get information on their own and are also increasingly capable of taking care of themselves. Although they know who they can turn to in case of need (acquaintances or institutions), they try to solve many issues by themselves. Self-sufficiency is very important to these people, because, as they say, they don't want to be a burden on others.

**State and self-governing institutions were friendly and helpful to people from Ukraine, but they were not always able to help them**

The majority of respondents stated that the officials were very friendly. Institutions and their representatives were patient, calm and often accommodating to people. However, there have been cases where, despite their efforts, officials could not help people due to insufficient information, capacity, or a language barrier.

## Recommendations

1. Information for the people fleeing Ukraine should be available in one place - ideally provided directly by the state and public institutions so that it is accessible to everyone.
2. Public institutions – especially at the local level should coordinate with other organizations and volunteers to provide consistent information.
3. Information must be clear and easy to comprehend so that not only the people from Ukraine but also volunteers and local residents can understand it.
4. All information should be available in Ukrainian.
5. Public institutions should provide or allow for a provision of language courses as much as possible in order to overcome the language barrier, as it is the greatest obstacle on the way to integration.
6. It is also important to ensure there is enough staff – not only for providing information and giving advice, but also for integrating people into the community. Cultural sensitivity and intercultural communication skills are also important.
7. It is very important to implement measures that will lead to greater self-sufficiency of the people of Ukraine in the long term. Measures should be set so that these people can become independent and lead dignified life as soon as possible.



## 2. Quality of services

People fleeing from a war conflict are specific as they had no time to prepare to leave their home. They feel helpless and struggle with a lack of information. From the first moment they first arrived, people from Ukraine needed a lot of support to cope with the situation.

### **In the first days, the people of Ukraine needed basic services**

An absolutely key service in the first moments after arrival was accommodation. This was mainly proved by various volunteers (organized and unorganized). In the first days of the conflict, landing an accommodation was quite a challenge as a lot depended on who these people met on their way. Various dormitories, private apartments, but also parishes were the first to offer a helping hand. At that time, people needed not only humanitarian and financial aid but they were also concerned with red tape – how to obtain a residence status (they were again helped by volunteers and families with whom they stayed). In the first months, Ukrainians also needed to buy a Slovak SIM card and get online to get in touch with their loved ones in Ukraine.

### **In the later phases of the stay, services enabling integration are needed**

After a few weeks in Slovakia, people from Ukraine needed more comprehensive services as their primary needs were already fulfilled. The biggest issue was stable and long-term housing. The state housing support program for refugees has been very helpful, the people of Ukraine greatly appreciated it. However, they were also worried about what would happen next, once there is no more help from the state. In the search for long-term housing, social contacts played a fundamental role here - volunteers, Slovak apartment owners, people from Ukraine who had already lived in Slovakia prior the war, and humanitarian and non-governmental organizations.

In addition to the above, refugees considered language courses very important, many needed advanced Slovak courses (at least B1), which were not available at that time. Help with finding a job was also a hotly debated issue. A lot of work has been done by local labor offices. However, people emphasized the need for fair working conditions, as well as the desire to find a job in their field for a reasonable wage.

### **Ukrainians praised services mainly thanks to the human approach**

The majority of respondents had very positive experience with services provided, in particular the attitude of the staff. Most of them were kind, welcoming, and people from Ukraine felt these people were willing to help. People also reported isolated negative experiences, especially with regard to public transport. However, they also appreciated the financial availability of services and their closeness. The most appreciated services were free transport (especially in the first days as it allowed them to travel to places where they had their friends and family), the state housing support program (stable housing), and the work of volunteers (majority said that their life would be much more difficult had volunteers not been there for them).

### **The conditions under which certain services were provided were unclear and some services were even completely unavailable**

Ukrainians struggled with the vagueness of the rules and lack of communication on the part of public institutions. The most problematic area identified was the access to health care (struggles were reported in every city). Ukrainians complained about lack of information about the way health care in Slovakia works, as well as the fact that the health insurance did not cover the costs of the treatment they needed (e.g. treatment of chronic diseases). Many were unable to get an appointment with the doctors due to the long waiting lists, which, however, mirror the sorry state of Slovakia's healthcare system.

They also faced problems when trying to place their children in kindergartens, which are chronically underfinanced and understaffed.

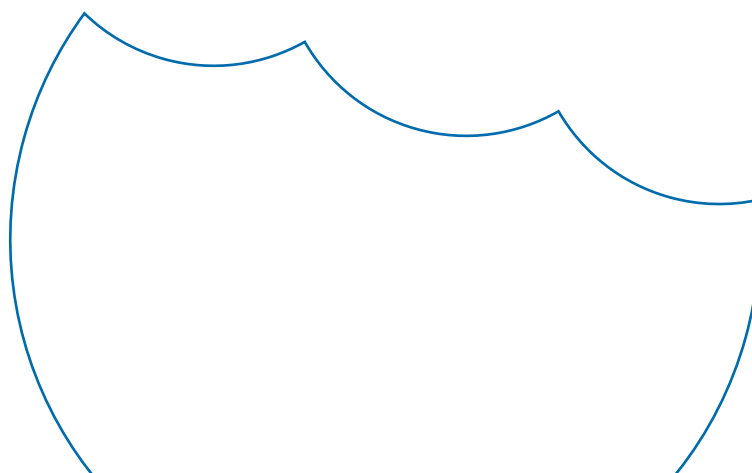
### **People from Ukraine want to be useful and use their potential**

People from Ukraine wish to integrate into the society. They want to use their potential and be useful not only for their sake but also for the sake of the country that let them in. However, this will not be possible without quality integration measures. Ukrainians face a lot of stereotypes, they are often branded as “those that always need help”. However, such a perception is often the result of (or lack of) integration measures.



## Recommendations

1. Create a standardized system for ensuring accommodation (a safe and adequate accommodation).
2. Timely and transparent information about the state-sponsored housing program, so that both people from Ukraine and landlords can make arrangements.
3. Improving “first-contact services”, in particular effective distribution of information leaflets, sharing of important information online through relevant channels, establishment of contact and information centers at the local level, etc.
4. The biggest obstacle identified was access to health care. It is necessary to improve the information sharing system so as to help them navigate the health care system and understand how to access it. Considering the language barrier, it is also necessary to enrol more people that would assist Ukrainians when attending medical facilities. It is a good idea to set up doctor’s offices with Ukrainian-speaking staff (general practitioners and paediatricians), as was done in Bratislava.
5. Communication on the part of public institutions towards the people of Ukraine could be more open and transparent. At the same time, staff working at public institutions needs soft skills training to be able to provide quality services to all people, including people from Ukraine with the status of temporary refuge.
6. Make childcare facilities available (open new classrooms), so that parents can find a job and become independent.
7. It is necessary to ensure fair working conditions for people from Ukraine to prevent labor exploitation, which, according to the respondents, is quite frequent.
8. The state and public institutions should work more intensively on fully integrating Ukrainians and provide more than basic services.



# 3. Community support

## Social networks play a key role in getting and keeping in touch

Already before the war in Ukraine broke out, almost 60,000 Ukrainians lived in Slovakia. Communities of expatriates can help with integrating the newcomers. Several respondents reported they did not know that there was a Ukrainian community in Slovakia, and so they did not even think of turning to other expats for help.

Some refugees tried to get in touch with their acquaintances who lived in Slovakia before the war, others met their compatriots only by chance. For many people from Ukraine, social networks played a key role in getting and keeping in touch with others. Some people talked with people online more than in real life - either they lived far away or were busy.

## Ukrainian community as a source of help

Intra-community help works wonders for Ukrainians. Those who arrived immediately after the start of the war help those who arrived later, be it basic information sharing, passing on experience in dealing with paperwork or directing them to places where they can receive humanitarian aid.

Advice and information from people who have been in similar situations and went through the same processes are the most reliable source of information, several respondents said. Help and advice from compatriots was more understandable for many than information they were given by the authorities. However, the risk here is that experiences may vary depending on individual situations, so shared experiences may not necessarily be the most reliable source of information.

## The Ukrainian community as a source of moral support

Ukrainian people are also a source of psychological and social support for people fleeing the war. They help alleviate feelings of loneliness and gain a sense of understanding (not just in terms of language). Several respondents, especially in Nitra, but also in Trenčín, lacked the feeling of belonging to the community and community meetings.

## Recommendations

1. It is important that people from Ukraine have access to official information that is easy to understand, thus diminishing the need to follow dubious advice posted on social networks.
2. Expatriate communities must also be involved in integration processes, as they are a source of support, moral and psychosocial alike, for newly arriving people.





# 4. Acceptance and inclusion

## People from Ukraine miss home, but feel welcome in Slovakia

People coming from Ukraine report they were warmly welcomed and were given the necessary information and help. Those who were welcomed into the private homes often state that they still have very good relations with their “host families”, as they help them with adapting to the new life and in becoming part of the community.

Not only “host families“, but also neighbors often help them with common everyday problems. However, many said that they are not close with their neighbors, at most they say hello.

## Despite the positive reception, all respondents have some negative experience with Slovaks

Ukrainians report most hostile attitudes when traveling by public transport. Regardless of city, the respondents state they have experienced verbal attacks, sarcastic remarks, hostile comments, and inconveniences, mainly due to being entitled to free travel.

Ukrainians also reported harassment on the streets, in shops or on children’s playgrounds.

Even though rare, some respondents stated negative experience with public institutions, doctors, and hospitals as due to the language barrier they felt hostility from the medical staff. It was the same in banks, the post office or the foreign police.

## Most conflicts take place in schools

Despite generally good reception, respondents stated that schools are the most prominent source of conflicts. Misunderstandings between Slovak and Ukrainian children are becoming more and more common – some are solved very quickly, sometimes, however, Ukrainian children are being bullied. Schools often fail to act swiftly in this regard.

## Good relations with Slovaks and finding a job are key to integration

Ukrainians stated that good relations with Slovak are key to their integration and a sense of acceptance in Slovakia. It helps people from Ukraine if they can share common interests with others and talk about everyday things. Friendliness and willingness to help were reported to be crucial integration factors. Several respondents think that them reaching out to Slovaks, learning the language and bonding are very important for their integration into the society. Finding work was also perceived as an important factor for feeling self-sufficient and accepted by the majority.

## Recommendations

1. Integration campaigns and work with public opinion (PR) are very important, especially at the local level, so as to keep misunderstandings and conflicts among the residents to a minimum.
2. At the same time, it is necessary to create and support community activities that bring the people together, as having a sense of community makes Ukrainians feel welcome and accepted.
3. Overcoming the language barrier, Slovak language courses and being able to talk to Slovaks are key for creating an environment of acceptance.
4. Practices that enable or aid self-sustainability, getting a job and opportunities to spend free time meaningfully significantly contribute to overall inclusion in the society.
5. In terms of integration, schools are key. Supporting teachers in their work with refugee children, their inclusion in the community, bullying-prevention measures, effective intercultural communication and psychological support are essential tools for ensuring the effective inclusion of children in the education system.

## Differences between individual cities

In individual cities, there were no significant differences in how people perceived the sources of information and the help they received. In Bratislava, however, more often than in other cities, people from Ukraine stated that they received help and support from local residents, here support activities from ordinary residents were more intensively organized. As for the support from non-governmental and humanitarian organizations, in all the studied cities, people received the same support, they always referred to the help centers where they could turn.

In the area of using different types of services, we did not notice significant differences between individual cities. We have identified certain differences in the area of activity of labor offices in relation to people from Ukraine. Respondents from Trenčín highlighted the help and support they received from employment offices more strongly than in other cities, either when looking for a job or during language training. At the same time, the theme of labor exploitation resonated more in Trenčín - several respondents mentioned their own or mediated experiences with unfair practices of a specific company from Trenčín. In Trenčín, the respondents also highlighted the language barrier they experienced when communicating with the authorities, which made them unsure whether they had understood important information.

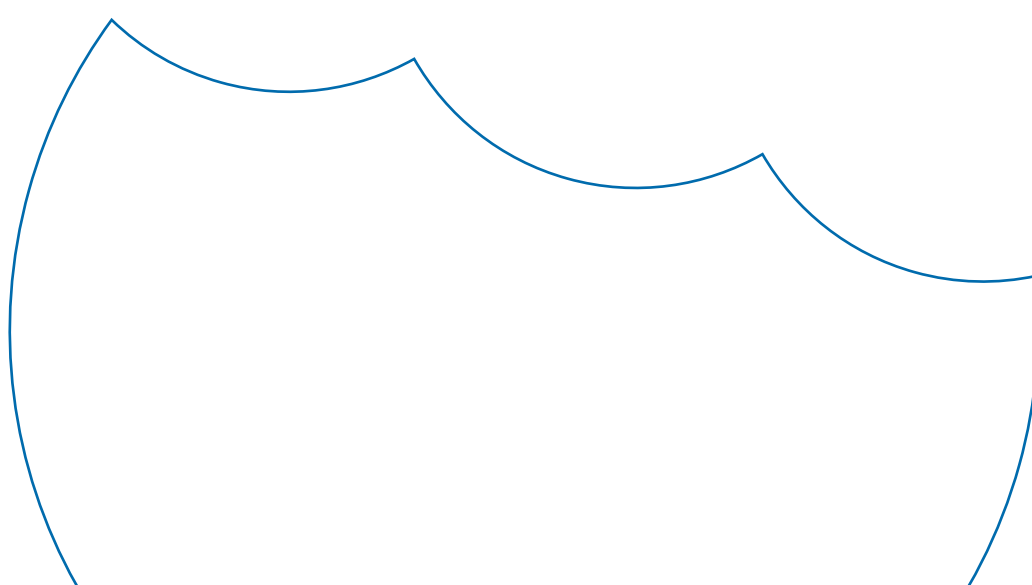
Differences between cities were also present in access to health care. This was a topic that resonated significantly in all cities, but in Bratislava respondents also stated that they use the services of the ambulance service for people from Ukraine in Petržalka. Paradoxically, however, the topic of inadequate access to health care was most prominently present in Bratislava. It may be related to the fact that Bratislava has the highest number of people from Ukraine and the health center in Petržalka simply does not have sufficient capacity to serve all those who need it.

It turned out that among all the investigated localities, the respondents found stable housing in Bratislava the fastest. It was here that we recorded the largest share of respondents who still lived in the place where they moved immediately after their arrival. In Banská Bystrica, there were problems with real estate agencies that refused to cooperate with people from Ukraine who were looking for longer-term housing on their own.

In the area of community support, several respondents, especially in Nitra, but also in Trenčín, lacked a more organized form of the Ukrainian community and community meetings. They perceived that there is such an organized community in Bratislava, but it is missing in Nitra and Trenčín.

As for the overall feeling of acceptance, there were no significant differences between individual cities. Both positive acceptance and negative experiences were shown by people in all the cities studied.

In the case of cultural activities and spending free time, respondents from Bratislava took part in them most often, the offer in this city was understandably the richest considering the size of the city and the number of people from Ukraine. But also in other cities, for example in Košice or Trenčín, many cultural activities were recorded, which were implemented by various public or non-governmental organizations.





**Mareena is a civic association that has been dedicated to assisting foreigners in their integration into Slovak society since 2017, with a specific focus on supporting refugees.**

Mareena's vision is for Slovakia to become a welcoming place for all people regardless of their nationality, ethnicity and religious background. Mareena assists foreigners with an integration process through volunteering programmes and educational activities. Through community activities it creates a friendly environment to connect Slovaks with foreigners. It participates in advocacy activities and develops discussion and awareness about the topics of migration, integration and their challenges.

[www.mareena.sk](http://www.mareena.sk)



**CVEK is an independent non-governmental organization that strives to contribute to building a more just and cohesive society through research, analytical and educational activities.**

The center was founded in 2005 and is based in Bratislava. CVEK's activities focus particularly on ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities. It specialises in promoting inclusion of marginalized groups, be it the Roma, migrants or other minorities. Thematically, it places emphasis on education, housing, social status, interethnic relations and political participation.

[www.cvek.sk](http://www.cvek.sk)

**Authors: Elena Gallo Kriglerová and Alena Holka Chudžíková**

**Photography: Ctibor Kočíš, archive Tabačka**

**Graphic design: Filip Lichtneker**

**Prepared with financial support from UNHCR**

**© Mareena and CVEK**

