YOU DECIDE

Supporting Youth of Ukraine Making Informed Decisions

YoU Decide is an EU-funded initiative led by Missing Children Europe, in collaboration with Terre des Hommes Hungary, Organisation for Aid to Refugees in Czechia, Fundacja ITAKA in Poland and the Heartwarmingly Research Team.

The project focuses on supporting young people displaced from Ukraine as they navigate their transition into adulthood.

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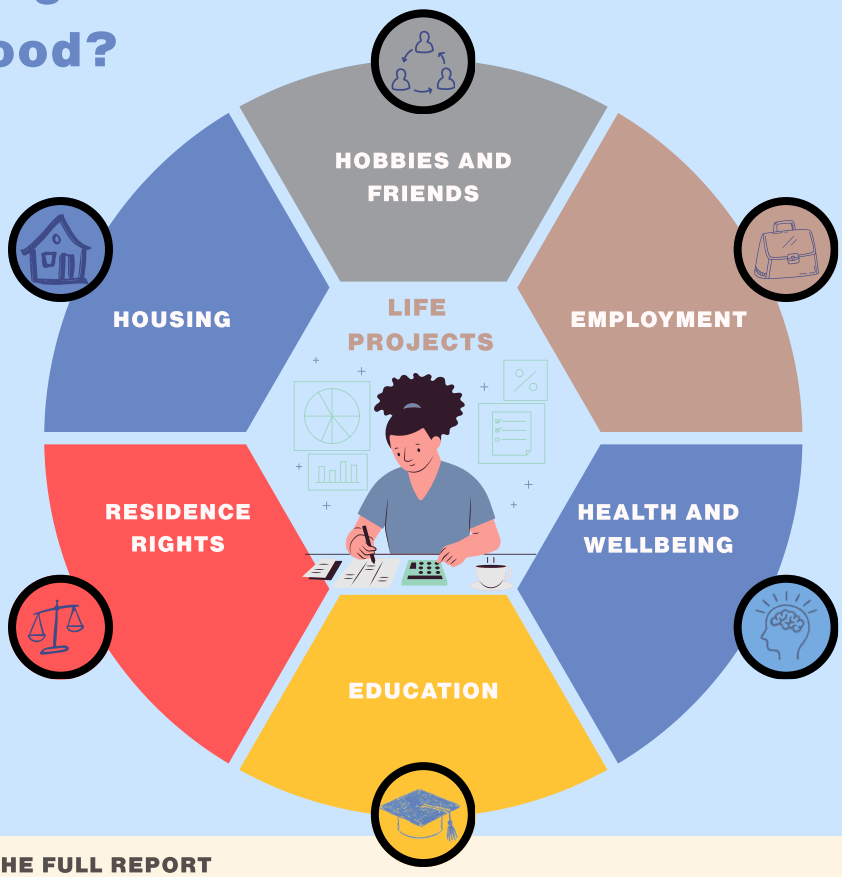
How are young people displaced from Ukraine navigating their transition into adulthood?

In our YoU Decide report 'Reclaiming Our Voices', we explored youth experiences through the concept of "life projects", broadening this concept to understand not only how they navigate education, employment, housing, residence rights and healthcare, but also how hobbies shape their transition into adulthood.

> I don't know [about my hopes for the future], but I will continue doing sports while I can'
> 16-y.o. boy, Czechia

> That the legislation will not change and I will be able to finish university under temporary protection status'
> - 23-y.o. woman, Poland



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DOWLOAD THE FULL REPORT

https://missingchildreneurope.eu/download/you-decide-report-reclaiming-our-voice/

Social Innovation Initiative

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organizace pro pomoc uprchlíkům

Terre des hommes A gyerekek szolgálatában

Heartwarmingly

How did we gather young people's voices?

We listened to **288 young people (15-24 years olds) displaced by the war in Ukraine:**

- **24** joined **focus group discussions** in Budapest , Prague, and Warsaw;
- **264** shared their experiences through an **online survey**.

So, who answered our survey?

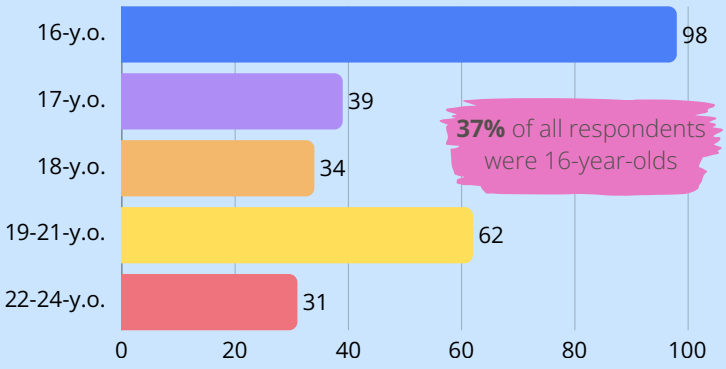
45% identified as **male**

50% identified as **female**

3% prefer not to say

2% identified as **non-binary**

How old are you?



Navigating uncertainty about residence rights

The **EU Temporary Protection Directive** covers the majority of people displaced from Ukraine, including youth.

Do you plan to stay in the country where you currently live?

45% plan to stay longer in the country they currently reside

23% do not know where they will be

Less than 1 in 10 respondents' plan to come back to Ukraine

1 in 5 plan to move to another country

"I will finish university, earn some money to get started (ideally working in my field), decide which country I want to live in, and then move there."
-19 year-old woman, Poland

"It's difficult to make plans for the future because nothing feels certain.."
23-y.o. woman, Poland

How hobbies and friends help to re-build 'life projects' ?

- Group hobbies support connection, identity, and belonging.
- Individual hobbies support reflection and stress management.

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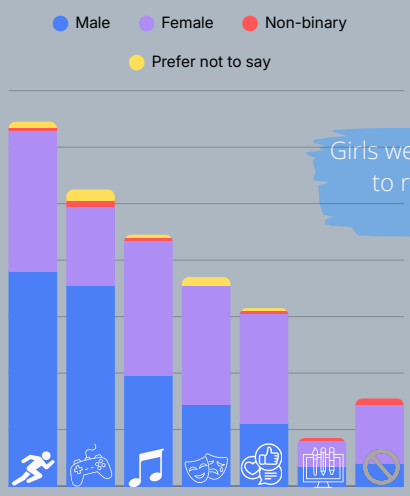
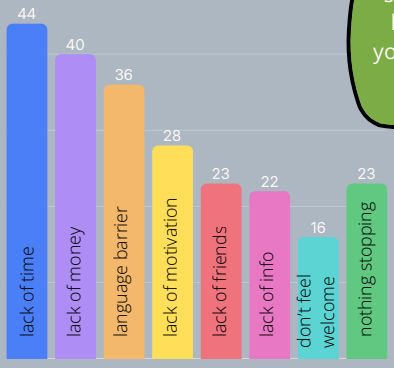
What are your hobbies?



Girls were twice more likely to report having no hobbies.

What is preventing you from enjoying hobbies?

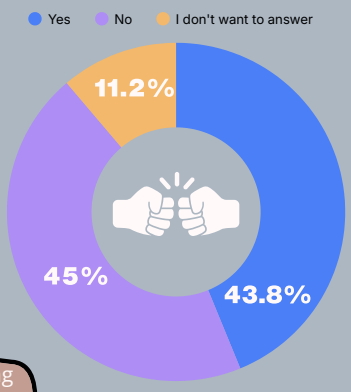


When you live alone and support yourself, you don't have time for hobbies; on your day off, you just want to sleep.
-19 -y.o. man, Czechia

- Only **1 in 5** respondents had no difficulty to enjoy their hobbies.

Was it difficult to find local friends here?

- Finding local friends was an important part of feeling included.
- Many found even more essential to connect with other young people of Ukraine.

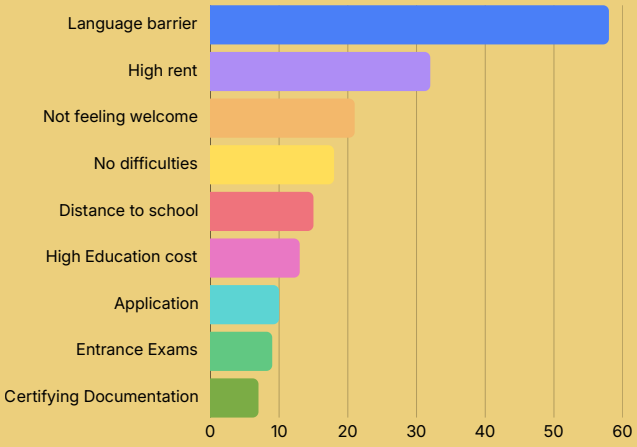


Despite actively searching online, there doesn't seem to be a community that brings together all Ukrainian youth...
-18 year-old boy, Poland

Many integration spaces have recently closed... it's hard to connect with people who share similar experiences.
-22-y.o. woman , Poland

How young people are continuing interrupted education?

The main barriers to continuing education were insufficient local language skills, high living costs, and feeling unwelcome, **while only 1 in 5 reported no difficulties**



1 **in 5** of our survey respondents were **enrolled in two or more educational institutions**, usually an in-person local school or university and an online Ukrainian equivalent.

I would like to get a higher education, gain experience and capital, and then return to Ukraine to realise my full potential there.
-19 year-old man, Hungary

Keeping Ukrainian education meant a wish to come back one day, or the understanding that...

I won't be able to achieve the same things as citizens of this country
-20 year-old man, Poland

I receive a scholarship that does not fully cover my expenses, so I have to work.
-20 year-old woman, Poland

1 in 3 of survey respondents reported balancing studies with work.

Access to mental-health was found to be essential for education and employment:

'I can't regularly attend any free courses because of my mental health...'
- 23-y.o. woman, Czechia

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How young people experience employment?

1 in 3 of our survey respondents were working or doing an internship.

50%

Half of respondents indicated that their **employment contracts did not reflect actual working hours or salaries.**

Some young people reported experiences of exploitative working conditions:

Talk about your rights? You're fired. Don't follow orders because they violate safety regulations? You're fired. Got sick and took sick leave? Look for a new job.

-24 -y.o. woman, Poland

if you break, they will throw you away. No one cares about your rights, let alone your safety.

-19-y.o. man, Czechia

While others found the empowerment in their work through putting their hobbies and skills into their careers :

I'm a lash maker, I do eyelashes.... And I decide for myself when I can leave

-17-y.o. girl, Czechia

First I was an administrator, now I'm an SMM [Social Media Marketing] manager

-23 -y.o. woman, Poland

Another bottle-neck issue was lack of access to scholarships and paid internships:

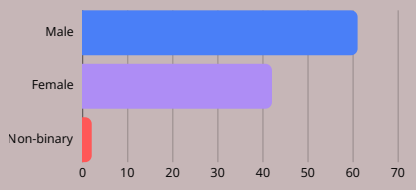
I work and am doing an unpaid internship

-17-y.o. girl, Poland

The ambitions of young people should also be nurtured by offering opportunities for internships and self-development.

-20-y.o. woman, Poland

Young persons caring for members of their family, by gender



How they find place to live?

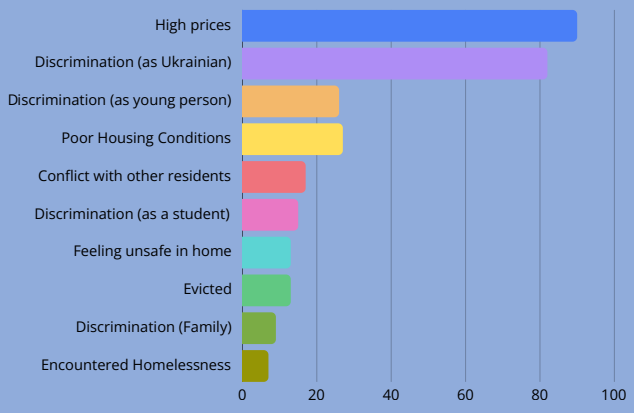
3 in 5 respondents reported having difficulties in finding adequate housing.

Find a decent flat to live in permanently so that we don't have to move every three months was one of the hardest things.

- 18 y.o. girl, Hungary

- **7 respondents of our survey** reported experiencing **homelessness.**

What are the barriers for housing?



While **independent living** was aspired by many young people who lived with their parents, living by oneself also became a source of stress:

Hardest [it was] to organise school, work, housing, my time

- 20-y.o. man, Poland

Dealing with all the bureaucratic issues. It took me a month to get all the necessary documents and pay all the taxes'

- 20-y.o. woman, Hungary

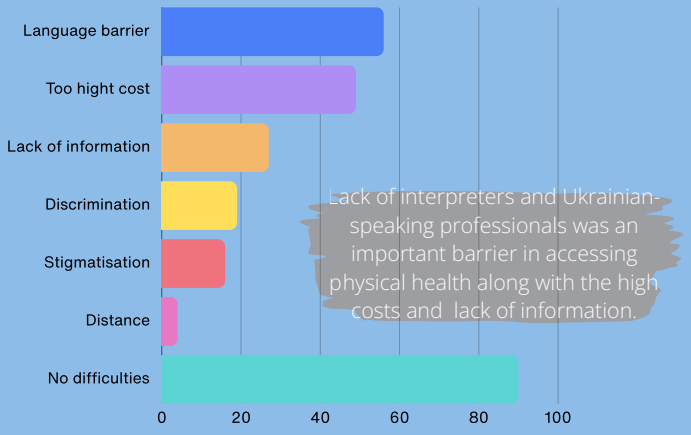
Living on my own, learning English, speaking Polish, going to the shop, cooking — it was scary

- 19-y.o. woman, Poland

Access to physical and mental health services

2 in 3 young people experience **challenges in accessing physical or mental health services**.

What kind of difficulties you experienced in accessing physical and mental health?



Feeling supported?

Do you feel you have someone you trust and can talk to?

I rarely talk to her [aunt living in Prague] about my problems... I don't want to burden her.
- 18-y.o. boy, Czechia

I have a very good friend, but I can't talk to him about everything.
- 21-y.o. woman, Poland

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What was most difficult?

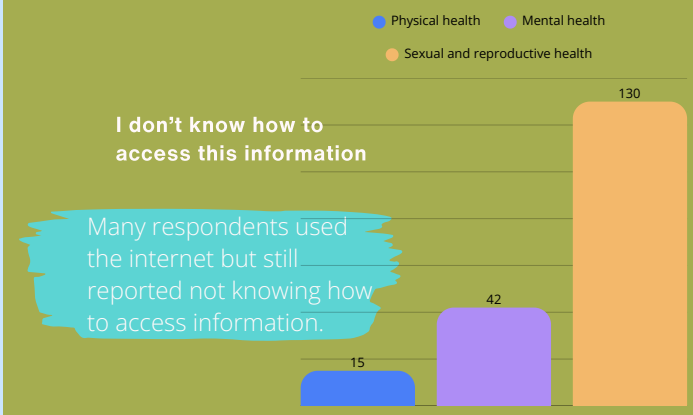
I miss home, I don't feel supported no matter what I do, I have a lot of responsibilities
- 18 y.o. boy, Poland

I don't fit into the new country, I feel that I don't belong here. But I won't go back to Ukraine either, because no one is waiting for me there. This feeling of loneliness and insecurity causes anxiety.
- 17 y.o. girl, Poland

How they find support and information ?

Youth also rely on family, local friends, Ukrainian community to access information on health services, opportunities for jobs, housing, hobbies, and other guidance.

Do you know how to find information about physical, mental and sexual reproductive health?



Where do you find information about the labour rights?

When it comes to labour rights, reliance on **informal channels rather than formal or official support was even more striking** (including colleagues, lawyers, and trade unions).

Many agencies advertise on Instagram and TikTok, promoting jobs that do not correspond to reality
- 22-y.o. young man, Czechia

Therefore, ability to pursue 'life projects' and to thrive depends on strong personal and community resources.

Find support and friends so that I feel comfortable
- 16-y.o. boy, Hungary

Language barrier, new environment, you don't know anything
- 16-y.o. boy, Czechia

RECOMMENDATIONS: WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

EU and Member States shall:

- **Ensure legal certainty and continuity of residence rights** for people displaced from Ukraine under the Temporary Protection Directive, including clear and timely communication on their status beyond March 2027 and **access to long-term residence after five years of de facto residence**

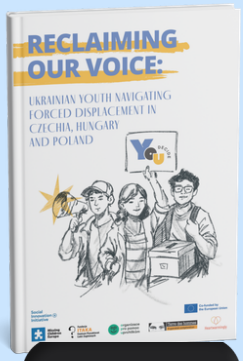
- Shall create meaningful consultation and co-creation mechanisms for Ukrainian **displaced youth to have a voice and to participate in policy design,** especially on questions affecting their 'life projects'.

National and local authorities shall:

- Support Ukrainian displaced youth navigating **complex enrolment procedures into (higher and vocational) educatio**n with expedited qualification recognition, and expanded access to flexible education, with a particular focus on free and accessible language learning.

- **Monitor employment conditions and ensure effective enforcement of labour rights** by creating dedicated contact points for displaced Ukrainian youth to access information on their rights and safely report unpaid wages and abusive working conditions, including through online mechanisms.

- **Expand accessible and culturally appropriate physical and mental health services.** Mental and sexual and reproductive health should particularly entail a proactive online outreach to Ukrainian youth.



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missingchildreneurope.eu/youdecide/

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