Refugees from Ukraine struggle to find available doctors and dentists

Behavioural insights on health service needs and access
May–September 2023

World Health Organization
European Region
Health service needs and access

Key findings

**EMERGING ISSUES**

Recently arrived refugees and those who did not register with a family doctor upon arrival now **struggle** to find available **doctors and dentists**.

More vulnerable groups need **additional support**, including translation, transportation and child care, to increase their **access to health** services.

**BARRIERS TO ACCESS SERVICES**

- The language barrier complicates making appointments and visiting doctors.
- It is difficult to find family doctors taking on new patients.
- There are long waiting times for appointments.
- It is unclear which services and medications are covered by health insurance.
- Doctors’ office hours are inconvenient for those who work.

**DRIVERS TO ACCESS SERVICES**

- Government-provided health insurance is highly valued, especially for covering surgery, cancer treatment and maternity care.
- Emergency care is of high quality and accessible.
- Treatments follow standard protocols and are effective.
- Many Czech doctors make an effort to get along with Ukrainian patients.

**BEHAVIOURS & ATTITUDES**

- Differences between health systems cause concern, especially the need for referral for diagnostic testing and scans.
- Refugees say that stigma increases their reluctance to use mental health services.
- Some respondents perceive negative treatment of refugees.
- Many respondents report returning to Ukraine for health services.

By the end of September 2023:

**371,980** Ukrainian refugees were recorded in Czechia

**559,930** refugees had applied for asylum or temporary protection

- 60% were women
- 27% were under 18 years
- 4% were over 65 years of age

Dentists turned us away, claiming they were already full …while the ophthalmologist said they had reached their patient limit. …Services are much harder to access compared with Ukraine.

Woman, age group 18–49 years, Louny
Background and next steps

**BACKGROUND**

Ongoing war drives people away

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

**METHOD**

Qualitative study on perceived health service needs as well as drivers and barriers to accessing these services

In-depth online interviews with 25 refugees:
- 24 women and one man
- 18 were carers and seven were not

Recruitment via social media channels, personal networks, other community support networks, staff of nongovernmental organizations, and posters located in relevant places

Follow up interviews with 15 refugees conducted in August and September.

**PROPOSED ACTION**

1. Review and revise existing information regarding the location and availability of doctors.
2. Consider using study findings to create materials highlighting the differences between health systems to manage expectations.
3. Consider innovative options for translation and interpretation (telephone hotline, medically focused translation apps).
4. Review services available for the most vulnerable people; promote existing resources through targeted communication campaigns.
5. Consider strengthening (or establishing) coordination mechanisms between health and social services to ensure no one is left behind.
6. In the protracted context, shift the focus to preventive and routine care, which can help all in Czechia.
7. Continue mental health and psychosocial support; its use may be increasing.

"In Ukraine, people used to think of psychologists as if you were some kind of weirdo if you went to see them. But I'm not sure if that opinion still holds today.

Woman, age group 18–49 years, Prague"
Learn more

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

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Photo on the cover:
Svetlana Grék is originally from Irpin, Ukraine. She fled the city after it was bombed. © WHO/Jakub Zak

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