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Settlement, integration and employment under a temporary perspective: Experiences and perceptions of Ukrainian refugees and municipal refugee services (2023-2024)

Vilde Hernes, Aadne Aasland, Oleksandra Deineko, Marthe Handå Myhre and Trine Myrvold

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Abstract:	This report is part of a yearly research project which maps and analyses how Ukrainian refugees have experienced the settlement, integration and employment in Norway, and also, what their prospect are for the future. Further, the report maps and analyses the experiences, challenges and opportunities for municipalities, and particularly the municipal refugee services, concerning the settlement and integration of Ukrainian refugees.

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Preface

This report has been written in response to a yearly assignment from the Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi). We want to start by thanking our contact persons at IMDi, Nadiya Fedoryshyn and Konstantinos Skenteris, for very pleasant and constructive cooperation throughout the project period.

The assignment was carried out by a team of researchers at the Institute for Urban and Regional Research (NIBR) at OsloMet consisting of Vilde Hernes (project manager), Aadne Aasland, Marthe Handå Myhre, Oleksandra Deineko, and Trine Myrvold.

We are very grateful to all the Ukrainians and frontline stakeholders who shared their experiences with us in interviews and/or the survey.

We also want to thank the project's reference group for stimulating discussions and comments on the project design and preliminary findings.

NIBR, December 2024

Kristian Rose Tronstad
Head of Research, NIBR

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Summary

Part 1: Introduction and background

As the war in Ukraine continues – currently in its third year since the Russian full-scale invasion in February 2022 – Norway has continued to receive a steady flow of displaced persons from Ukraine (hereafter Ukrainian refugees). As of October 2024, Norway had received 86 000 applications for collective, temporary protection, and Ukrainian refugees now constitute 1,5% of the total population of Norway. Although there has been a decline in number of arrivals and settlements in Norwegian municipalities in 2024 compared to 2022 and 2023, the numbers are still record-high compared to previous influxes.

After February 2022, there was an initial period of more liberal policies for Ukrainian refugees. However, after the fall of 2023 where Norway had relatively high arrivals compared to the other Scandinavian countries, the Norwegian government introduced a series of policy restrictions to ensure that Norway did not have more favourable policies for Ukrainian refugees than other European countries.

This report is part of an annual study conducted by the Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research (NIBR), OsloMet on assignment from the Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi). It aims to answer the following main research questions:

1. How do Ukrainian refugees experience their reception, settlement and integration in Norway, and what are their aspirations for the future?
2. What are the municipalities' assessments of the challenges and opportunities related to the reception, settlement and integration of Ukrainian refugees?

The study builds on various types of data collections, conducted between February and November 2024, including: 1) individual and group interviews with 43 Ukrainian refugees in Norway, 2) a survey of adult Ukrainians who had fled to Norway (1548 respondents), 3) case studies in four municipalities with interviews with a total of 66 frontline workers, volunteers and employers[1], 4) a survey of leaders in the municipal refugee service (63% response rate from all Norwegian municipalities), and 5) documentation of policy developments from February 2022 to October 2024.

This report is a follow-up study of the 2022 report '*Ukrainian refugees – experiences from the first phase in Norway'* (Hernes, Deineko et al. 2022), and the 2023 report '*Reception, settlement and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Norway: Experiences and perceptions of Ukrainian refugees and municipal stakeholders (2022-2023)*' (Hernes, Aasland et al. 2023).

Building on these previous reports and our longitudinal data collection, we are able to compare developments in the Ukrainian refugees' characteristics, experiences and perceptions over time, along with the experiences and perceptions of municipal refugee services.

[1] These interviews were conducted as part of the UKRINT project (see chapter 15 for more information).

Part 2: Ukrainian refugees' experience of the settlement, integration and employment in Norway

Who are the Ukrainian refugees who have arrived in Norway?

Although there were substantially more adult Ukrainian women arriving the first year after the full-scale invasion, the share of men has steadily increased, and in 2024, there was just a slight overweight of women. Concerning the age distribution for adults, we see only minor changes over time, but there is a small rise for those aged 18-29 years, and a small decline for the those aged 30-49 years. However, for children under 18 years, there has been a clear increase in the share of male teenagers aged 16–17 years. One assumption for this development is that more 16–17-year-olds move from Ukraine while it is still legal for them to leave the country (because of the travel restrictions for most male Ukrainians between 18-60 years).

Concerning their family situation in Norway and Ukraine, most Ukrainian refugees have some relatives living in Norway (78%). About half of the respondents are in Norway with their partner, and 41% with children below 18 years. Although the majority has family in Norway, most Ukrainian refugees also have some close family remaining in Ukraine. Over half have parents left in Ukraine and 14% have their children remaining there. We see a clearly decreasing trend since 2022 concerning the share having their partner left in Ukraine: 24% reported having their partner left in Ukraine in our 2022-survey while only 6% report this in the 2024 survey.

Concerning prior network in Norway, half of the respondents did *not* have a pre-existing network in Norway. One third knew other Ukrainian refugees, and 12-14% knew Norwegians or Ukrainians who lived in Norway pre-2022. Those who arrived in the initial phase more often had a prior Norwegian network, while those who arrived after 2023 mostly knew other Ukrainian refugees prior to arrival.

Concerning prior qualifications, almost 80% worked before arriving in Norway. Most Ukrainian refugees also have higher education: about two thirds have completed higher education, and an additional 15% have incomplete higher education. 14% have vocational-technical education. The education levels were highest among the 2022 cohort, but the levels for the 2023 and 2024 cohorts are rather similar.

The refugees' knowledge of English is limited. Only 38% speak at least basic English. Although we saw a decline in the English levels for the 2023 cohort compared to the 2022 cohort, we find that those arriving in 2024 have almost the same English levels as the first-year arrivals.

The majority of the Ukrainian refugees in Norway previously lived in Eastern or South-Eastern parts of Ukraine (60%), i.e., areas that have been most affected by the war. Just under 40% came from territories that previously had been, or currently were, occupied by Russian forces.

How and why did they come to Norway?

Three out of four respondents arrived directly in Norway, while one in four stayed (not just transited) in other countries before their arrival in Norway. Poland was by far the most common country of stay before coming to Norway (with 40%), followed by Germany, Romania and Lithuania. Intermittent stays were less common for those arriving in 2022, but the share having stayed in other countries prior to arrival in Norway has been stable – and actually declined somewhat – from 2023 to 2024.

We also asked the Ukrainian refugees why they chose Norway as a destination country. Network was an important factor for those who had prior networks. Almost half of respondents chose Norway because they considered that refugees' rights were well protected in this country, and this is more prominent among those who arrived after 2023

than for the initial arrivals. This may indicate that while those arriving in 2022 must have made a rather rapid decision to flee, those arriving in 2023 and 2024 had more time to think about conditions in different destination countries.

The justification for choosing Norway is multifaced and varies significantly among individuals. Safety considerations was the absolute main reason for choosing Norway, and most parents also highlighted education and good conditions for their children. Otherwise, the Norwegian reception and integration system is mentioned by many, including access to language courses and integration support, a good public support system for Ukrainian refugees, help to get housing and Norway's financial support system. Other important reasons mentioned are related to Norwegian society and country characteristics, such as Norwegian nature and culture, and that Norway is a stable democracy.

How do they assess their overall reception, and different actors and services in Norway?

The respondents expressed very high satisfaction with their overall reception in Norway, with results almost identical to the positive assessments in 2023. Furthermore, survey respondents expressed high satisfaction with most services and procedures, related to the registration, reception and settlement. Displaced persons from Ukraine who are not eligible for collective protection – who must apply for individual asylum – are substantially less satisfied.

Like previous years' surveys, schools and kindergarten get very high scores, while healthcare services, access to necessary medication, recognition of education, and assistance in finding or applying for a job get lower scores with more varying assessments.

There are some subgroups differences, and our analysis reveals that the following groups are generally more satisfied: older persons, those who arrived in Norway more recently (particularly in 2024), the employed, those with higher Norwegian language skills, and those living in more urban areas.

We also provided shorter analyses of the respondents' assessment of 1) information for different service, 2) healthcare services and psychological help, 3) their economic situation in Norway and 4) interpreting service.

First, the most commonly used sources of information are websites of Norwegian public actors, direct communication with other Ukrainian refugees and social media channels. Most respondents confirm having received sufficient information regarding various services and procedures for registration and settlement. However, there are more varying assessments of the information about the procedure for to return permanently to Ukraine and opportunities for short visits. Information about services and procedures about the labour market and access to education in Norway also get positive, but somewhat lower scores, implying that there is room for improvement, particularly information about how to start a business in Norway.

Second, 30% of the respondents answered that they, or someone in their close family in Norway, had a severe health issue. This year's report shows that there is still a 'culture clash' between the Norwegian and Ukrainian cultures regarding the threshold to see a doctor or a specialist, and access to or use of medicine. However, cases involving the treatment of serious illnesses often show a high level of satisfaction, both in terms of medical care and the compassion shown by healthcare professionals. About one fourth state that they have needed psychological services in Norway. Interestingly, there is a higher share of those who arrived in 2022 who say that they have needed psychological services. Thus, the newest arrivals are not the only ones in need of such services. Among those who answered that they had needed psychological service, over half responded that they had not received such services in Norway.

Third, concerning their financial situation, 30% said that they were fully self-sufficient, while the rest received (partial) financial or housing support from the public. Half of the

respondents report that their household's current economic situation is (minimum) satisfactory, while 41% report that it is neither satisfactory nor difficult. One in ten is struggling to make ends meet, and 1% say that they live in poverty. Those currently living in reception centres assessed their economic situation as worse than those who were settled.

Fourth, the majority of Ukrainian refugees (86%) have needed interpreting services. Overall, the analysis show that the majority has received interpreting services when needed and that they were very generally satisfied with these services. Over 70% reported having received such services every time they needed them, while the remaining said they only got in on some occasions. The majority of respondents consider interpreting services to be good or excellent, but a substantial share – one in four – indicates that the skills and qualifications of interpreters vary. While only 5% gave bad assessments of the interpreting services – saying that the interpreting was poor or very poor, several respondents provided examples of challenges and concerns about the interpreting services, echoing three main concerns also raised in the 2023 report: 1) Poor quality of interpreting services, 2) deliberate errors and interpreter interference in the conversations, and 3) concerns related to interpreters with Russian language and/or origin.

Where and how do they live?

Refugees from Ukraine have settled in all types of municipalities, from big cities (25%), small towns, (45%) to remote rural districts (29%), in line with the whole-country approach used during high influxes of protection seekers. We also find that there has been a rather dispersed settlement: almost half of the Ukrainian refugees lived in a neighbourhood with a majority of other native Norwegians, about 40% are settled in mixed neighbourhoods, while only 10% in total live in areas with predominantly other immigrants or other Ukrainian refugees.

The respondents were on average very satisfied with different aspects of their housing situation, including the social environment, size, and quality. People in rural areas rate their housing situation somewhat more negatively than those in big cities and small towns when it comes to access to services and public transport.

When asked if they had plans to move to another municipality in Norway, the majority (45%) were unsure whether they want to move to another municipality or not, while 40% said that they do not plan to move. 15% planned to move to another municipality, but this was most prominent for those settled in rural areas, and to some degree small towns.

Integration measures after settlement

Ukrainian refugees have the right to introduction programmes after formal settlement in a municipality. After the introduction programme, they are entitled to regular financial and employment-related assistance from Nav (if eligible).

As part of the policy changes after the fall of 2023, the government intensified the work-oriented focus of introduction programme. While only 15% of those arriving in 2022 had shorter programmes (six months or less), the corresponding number for those arriving in 2023 was 29%. Second, compared to those who had finished the programme, a significantly larger share of those enrolled at the time of the survey had unpaid work practice, subsidised employment, shorter courses/upskilling for work, and mentorship at the workplace. These findings indicate that there has been a clear turn towards shorter and more work-intensified introduction programmes, in line with the government's new regulations after the fall of 2023. About half of the respondents found the introduction programme useful, 37% found it a little useful, and only 8% did not find it useful. These figures represent a decline compared to the 2023 survey results, where over 70% found it useful, and 20% found it a little useful.

For those who had completed the introduction programme, only 23% had not needed financial or employment-related assistance from Nav after the introduction programme. 60% had got some sort of financial support from Nav, and a similar share had got help to find a job. One in five had got assistance related to children. Among those who had finished the

introduction programme, about half got work practice while 39% continued with language learning. 30% got other types of courses or job training programmes, and one in four had got subsidised employment. Subsidised employment is a more commonly used measure after transition to Nav (26%) than in the introduction programme (11%). When assessing NAV's employment and financial services, most respondents were (moderately) satisfied, but assessments varied when it came to whether they got sufficient consultations or whether their skills and/or previous education have been taken into account. The interviews showed that the refugee's assessment of Nav was very much based on their experiences with individual Nav employees, illustrating very varied experiences.

The integration measures most used after settlement (both in the introduction programme and through NAV's employment services) is 1) Norwegian language training and 2) work practice, and we asked further questions about these services.

First, respondents are on average satisfied with the quality and flexibility of the Norwegian language training, with a score of over 4 out of 5. The assessment of the progress of the language training receives somewhat lower scores. Respondents also more often tend to disagree with the statement that the language training they receive is sufficient to become integrated into Norwegian society. When it comes to respondent's command of Norwegian, there are large differences depending on the time of their arrival in Norway. Among those who arrived in 2022, 10% say that they speak fluent Norwegian, and another 50% assess their Norwegian skills to be basic. To compare, only 26% of those who arrived in 2023, and 5% of those who arrived in 2024 asses that they have at least basic Norwegian skills. After the introduction programme, it varies across municipalities whether the Ukrainian refugees had been offered more language training or not, but many (70%) also studied Norwegian through other arenas than those offered by the public.

Second, in line with the new regulations concerning more work-oriented programmes introduced by the government after the fall of 2023, a larger share of recent arrivals had received work practice. However, respondents' assessments of work practice varied widely in both the survey and the interviews. The main criticism of work practice is related to inability to practice Norwegian. However, when comparing different cohorts, we see an improvement for those arriving more recently. The respondents are very divided on the statement that employers exploit work practice to obtain free labour. While many interviewees were very satisfied with their work practice, other perceived work practice as a way for employers to exploit free labour.

Employment in Norway: experiences and challenges

SSB statistics show that in October 2024, 30% of Ukrainian were employed, which aligns with our 2024 survey sample. In the interviews, those who had become employed highlighted this as the most influential change in their lives in Norway. Many emphasised how their employment had ensured a better financial situation, and the positive experience of becoming self-sufficient. Our regression analysis shows that the following factors had a positive correlation with being employed: proficiency in Norwegian, having children, residence time in Norway, age (higher probability for younger age groups), good health, and living in small towns compared to rural areas (with big cities in the middle). Factors that (surprisingly) did not correlate with the employment chances were gender, English skills, higher education and having prior network in Norway.

Ukrainian refugees had searched for jobs via a variety of channels. Half of the respondents had registered with Nav as a jobseeker, while many had actively applied for advertised jobs, contacted employers directly and/or used their network to search for jobs.

Although 20% of the Ukrainian refugees were self-employed in Ukraine, only 5% of the respondents had tried to set up their own business in Norway (and only 1% reported to be self-employed). The interviews illustrated that despite initial optimism to start their own businesses in Norway, some came to realise that succeeding was much more challenging than it was in Ukraine, leading them to abandon the idea.

How did they find their jobs? The most common ways into the labour market were to approach an employer directly or apply for an advertised position. These alternatives had become more common compared to the 2023 survey, implying that the Ukrainian refugees in 2024 are more actively searching for jobs on their own. One fourth found their job through their work practice. Others got help from the contact person in the municipality or Nav.

Concerning the scope and type of work, 62% of those employed worked full time, while the rest worked part time. A higher share of men worked full-time than women. A majority worked on different types of temporary contracts (60%), and temporary contracts were much more common in the public than in the private sector. In the interviews, many stressed that they strived for permanent and full-time work, and that the insecurity of temporary positions was a source of additional uncertainty and concern. About two third had found jobs in the private sector, and one third in the public sector. The Ukrainian refugees work in a variety of branches, with the top three branches being education, the service industry, and retail.

Just over half were able to use their previous *work experience* to a large or some extent in their current job, while a lower share was able to use their previous *education* in their current Norwegian job (43%). 37% reported that they were not able to use their education at all. Irrespectively, the majority were very satisfied with most aspects of their work conditions. The interviews provide a more nuanced view of Ukrainian refugees' job satisfaction. Experiences varied significantly, ranging from those who described their jobs as ‘dream jobs’ to others who expressed low motivation, working merely to get by. However, several interviewees highlighted positive cultural differences from Ukraine, praising the sense of humanity, trust, and mutual support in the workplace, and feeling less stressed compared to their experiences in Ukraine.

The respondents were generally motivated to find a job in Norway even if it did not exactly fit with their previous education or experience. Only 5% were categorically against taking such a job, while 4% were unsure. 43% said that they would take any kind of job, while 45% stated that they would be willing to take a job not related to their previous education and qualification, but that it would depend on the type of job.

When asked about barriers for getting a job (or a more relevant job for those who were employed), insufficient Norwegian (and English) were identified as the main barriers, but almost half of the respondents also highlighted that the temporary permits made employers sceptical of hiring Ukrainians. Other reasons mentioned were lack of network or relevant skills for the Norwegian job market. About 20% also reported lack of opportunities in the municipality they lived as a hinder, and this was particularly relevant among those who lived in rural areas. Respondents were generally eager to upskill their qualifications to better match the Norwegian labour market. Two thirds said that they had thought of enhancing their education or take other courses in order to qualify for a new profession in Norway.

When asked about experience with work in the informal economy, only 2% reported that they themselves had worked in such jobs, while 13% knew of other Ukrainian refugees who had worked in the informal economy. Overall, the qualitative data supports the survey results indicating that informal work is not common among Ukrainian refugees in Norway. Further, 82% report that they have not experienced any types of exploitation in their jobs in Norway, but there were also examples of different types of exploitation: 10% had experienced not receiving correct salary, and 8% not getting a formal work contract. 4% reported having too extensive work hours. No one reported experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace. Some interviewees mentioned that they lacked information and knowledge about their work-related rights in Norway, and worried that employers could exploit this vulnerability.

Social integration and children’s schooling

About 30% of the Ukrainian refugees who have arrived in Norway are children below 18 years. Unlike many other European countries, the survey shows that a very high share of Ukrainian children was enrolled in Norwegian kindergartens and school system. 86% of the parents with children aged 1–5 reported that their children attended Norwegian kindergarten,

and almost all children of school age under 18 attended Norwegian schools. Among children aged 16–17 the percentage was slightly lower, but still 91% of respondents reported that their children in this age group attended Norwegian school. Kindergartens and schools are among the services that get the highest scores, with score of 4.6 out of 5 for both. In the qualitative interviews, parents spoke very warmly about the kindergarten and how going there contributed positively to the development of their children. Generally, parents felt well-supported by teachers and school administrators. However, one concern was that teachers may not have relevant competence for handling pupils who struggle with war trauma.

Ukrainian authorities have encouraged Ukrainian children abroad to continue their Ukrainian education online, particularly Ukrainian language, literature and history. 58% of the parents answered that their children participated in some form of distance education from Ukraine. This share was higher among the new arrivals: while 75% of those parents who arrived in Norway in 2024 reported that their children participate in some form of distance education from Ukraine, just over half of those arriving in 2022 and 2023 reported the same. In the interviews, parents described how dual schooling can be both mentally and physically exhausting for their children. The general impression, however, is that with time, parents are increasingly inclined to discontinue their children's education in Ukraine.

As to children's social integration, about two thirds of the 6–15-year-olds participate in after-school activities, but the older teenagers (aged 16–17 years) participate to a lesser extent, with only 43%. We see a similar pattern when it comes to whether the children are reported to have Norwegian friends. Overall, parents with younger children reported few barriers to integration, while there were more challenges reported concerning the social integration for Ukrainian teenagers.

The adults' social integration in Norway, sense of belonging and political trust

70% reported to have someone who is close to them in Norway, and with whom they could talk about personal issues. Not surprisingly, those who had lived in Norway for a longer time had more close *Norwegian* friends and acquaintances. While contact with the 'Ukrainian community' in Norway played an important role in the daily lives of refugees, staying in touch had become more challenging due to differences in work schedules or a lack of shared interests. Two thirds participated in some type of local social activity. The interviews exemplified how the Ukrainian refugees' involvement in local activities played a significant role in their social integration and forming friendships with locals. Nevertheless, the recognition of the temporary nature of their stay in Norway, due to the collective protection status, also influenced some refugees' motivation to invest in close friendships here.

In the survey, we asked about the respondents' sense of belonging to both Ukraine and Norway and compared the answers to a previous SSB (2016) study on these topics among immigrants in Norway. We find that Ukrainian refugees have somewhat lower score for their sense of belonging to Norway compared to other immigrants in Norway, but they also have shorter residence time in Norway compared to the immigrants in the SSB study. More surprisingly, was the Ukrainians refugees' lower scores on their assessment of sense of belonging to Ukraine compared to other immigrants' sense of belonging to their home countries. Interestingly, men answered that they felt a higher sense of belonging to Norway than women, and reversely, a lower sense of belonging to Ukraine.

Concerning political trust, the differences are striking. Ukrainian refugees generally have exceptionally high trust in the Norwegian political system (around 8 out of 10), and very low trust in the Ukrainian political system (around 2 out of 10). In the qualitative interviews, some interviewees reflected upon societal differences when comparing Norway and Ukraine, highlighting benefits of the Norwegian society and welfare state, where you would be supported regardless of who you were or how much you earned. Others emphasised a more humane and less strict working life in Norway, which left more time to spend with your children and loved ones.

Future prospects – to stay or return?

Although the majority were unsure about how long the war will last, very few believed in a rapid solution. Concerning return aspirations, there is a clear trend when we compare the surveys conducted in 2022, 2023 and 2024. Although by 2024, there was still a large share stating that they were unsure, there has been a clear decline in refugees wanting to return to Ukraine – from 26 % in 2022 to only 10% in 2024. Further, the share that stated that they would *not* return has more than doubled from 2022 to 2024: now, almost half said that they do *not* want to return to Ukraine after the war. 82% answered that they would rather continue to live in Norway than restart their life in a new city in Ukraine.

The following subgroups were more inclined to want to stay in Norway: men, the younger age groups, parents with children in Norway, and those who have experienced severe damage to their house, neighbourhood and/or local infrastructure. Those with children or their husband/wife left in Ukraine were more inclined to return to Ukraine. It is also noteworthy that the first arrivals to Norway (the cohort arriving in 2022) are more motivated than those arriving in the two following years to return to Ukraine. In the interviews, stability for their children (and their education) and risks of living with a war-traumatised population in a future post-war Ukraine were mentioned as reasons for not wanting to return to Ukraine. Further, many were concerned about how the Ukrainian society would treat those who had escaped if they returned, referring to an ongoing debate in the Ukrainian society.

The temporary perspective and residence permits were a prominent topic in the interviews, and people's awareness of their temporary status had increased compared to the studies in 2022 and 2023. Several interviewees were calling for possibilities to change their status and for information about what to expect with regard to their status. Work visas were mentioned as a way of switching to a more permanent status, and half of the survey respondents either planned to (7%) apply for work visas or planned to apply when they fulfilled the criteria for a work permit (44%).

The Ukrainian refugees' assessment of the Norwegian policy restrictions after 2023

After the relatively high number of arrivals from Ukraine (compared to the other Scandinavian countries) during the fall of 2023, the Norwegian government introduced several restrictions for Ukrainian refugees, including abolishing some of the more initial liberal policies for Ukrainian refugees, restricting some financial benefits, and several regulations related to who were eligible for collective, temporary protection. In the survey, we asked about the respondents' assessment of these policy restrictions. Most respondents understood the restrictions and thought they were appropriate (43%). One third thought that some of the restrictions were appropriate while others were not, while only 13% did not agree with the restrictions.

While some were familiar with several of policy changes the recent year, the amendment that was most frequently mentioned (in both the interviews and survey) was the prohibition to travel to Ukraine. Among the interviewees, there were people who were very critical towards it and very supportive of it. Though ban on travels to Ukraine was dominating, several respondents also brought up other restrictions introduced by the authorities that they did not agree with. Some mentioned the recognition of six Ukrainian regions to be 'safe', and therefore not offering automatic collective protection to refugees from these regions. Although there were fewer respondents reporting opposition to the reduction in financial support, disagreements with these restrictions were also quite common, often highlighting that the inflation of prices in Norway constrained their financial situation severely. Lastly, some respondents also mentioned the reduction in time offered in the introduction programme and thereby often cuts in the length of language training (in practice).

Part 3: The municipal refugee services' experiences with Ukrainian refugees and related policies

Part 3 is based on a survey of leaders in the municipal refugee service (63% response rate from all Norwegian municipalities).

Local organisation and cooperation, and multi-level governance

Norwegian municipalities play a crucial role in the settlement and integration of refugees. Through local refugee services, they are responsible for providing all frontline public services to refugees within their municipalities and for providing introduction programmes and Norwegian language training. There are considerable differences between municipalities in their follow-up of refugees due to factors such as population size and location.

The organisational structure of refugee services is relatively stable, with most being either a separate administrative unit or part of the broader Nav (employment and welfare) office. Larger municipalities tend to integrate refugee services within Nav. Intermunicipal cooperation often involves smaller municipalities purchasing services from larger ones.

The work with refugees is generally well anchored politically and administratively, though smaller municipalities tend to have less formalised structures. Most municipalities report a need for increased capacity in their refugee services, but this appears somewhat less pronounced in 2024 compared to 2023. Strategies to address capacity issues have evolved, with fewer municipalities relying on temporary hires and more focusing on service reorganisation. Cooperation with local services and actors is generally assessed positively, particularly for education, but less so for health services. Municipal refugee services also rate the information and guidance provided by the national integration authority (IMDi) highly.

The study highlights the important role of voluntary organisations in supplementing municipal services, especially for language practice, activities for children/families, and services for the elderly. Larger municipalities tend to have more formalised agreements and stronger cooperation with the voluntary sector.

Introduction programme and language training

The introduction programme for Ukrainian refugees must contain elements like language training, work-oriented elements and parental guidance (for those with under-age children), otherwise, there are fewer obligatory elements for this groups compared to other refugee groups. Generally, the municipalities have some leeway in their provision of the introduction programme and language training, and we observe variations in what the municipalities offer. On average, larger municipalities offer a wider range of content than do smaller municipalities.

Most offer a full-time introduction programme, and the proportion of municipalities offering a full-time programme is increasing. A larger majority now extend the introduction programme dependent on individual assessment, and not for all. It is not obligatory for municipalities to offer refugees aged over 55 the introduction programme, nor is it obligatory to offer refugees over the age of 67 language training. The municipalities vary widely on concerning whether they provide these services to these age groups.

The past year, the work-related content of the introduction programme has been more pronounced, in line with the new signals and instructions from the government after the fall of 2023. A little less than half of the refugee services report that they fulfil the newly introduced regulation of 15 hours per week of activities related to work and employment. However, relatively few report that they are far away from reaching this goal. The survey respondents reveal different views with regard to how clear the criteria for extending the introduction programme are, however, more refugee service leaders find the criteria clear in 2024 compared to 2023.

The right to language training is limited to one year for most Ukrainian refugees, but the municipalities may provide an additional six months. Most, but not all, municipalities offer more than one year of language training to at least some of the refugees. The main reasons for not offering additional language education are scarce resources and strained capacity. The flexibility of language training has increased from 2023 to 2024, mainly due to better digital education options. One in five municipalities are using the digital courses offered by the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills, and many are considering using it. Those who have experience with the digital courses are generally positive, and many of the refugee services use them primarily as supplements to ordinary training. Critics underscore that language training, particularly spoken language, is better done in person and in groups. Moreover, some think the municipalities should get the courses without costs.

Cooperation on labour market integration of Ukrainian refugees

The most common forms of cooperation between Nav and the refugee service during the introduction programme comprise regular cooperation meetings, appointing a designated contact in Nav to work with Ukrainian refugees, use of wage subsidies, and provision of information about the labour market and job vacancies. The overall impression is that refugee services are more satisfied with their collaboration with Nav in 2024 compared to 2023.

We hypothesised that organisation of the refugee service within the Nav office, as opposed to being a separate unit, is likely to have a positive effect on cooperation. Our findings confirm this hypothesis. The respondents in municipalities where the refugee service is organised within Nav rate the various forms of cooperation with Nav far better than do other respondents. However, it is important to emphasise that these assessments are merely on the cooperation of Nav and do not assess the quality or results of the measures.

We also identified some challenges in the cooperation with Nav. Some respondents point out that Nav’s capacity, particularly when it comes to personnel, has not increased in line with the growing number of Ukrainian refugees.

Barriers and opportunities in the labour market

The labour market integration of Ukrainian refugees in Norway remains a challenge.

Individual factors are seen as the primary barriers. Insufficient Norwegian and English language skills are identified as the most significant obstacles, along with lack of work experience and formal qualifications relevant for the Norwegian labour market.

Systemic and local factors, while less influential, still present obstacles. Misalignment between the refugees’ skills and local labour market needs, limited job availability, and long commuting distances are notable barriers. Lack of capacity in refugee services and insufficient information about job opportunities are lesser concerns now compared to 2023. Discrimination from employers is not perceived as a major issue.

Differences emerge based on municipality size. Geographical mismatch between housing and workplaces is a greater problem in smaller, less centralised municipalities. Larger municipalities report more flexibility in combining language training and employment.

Municipalities themselves are potential employers yet face challenges related to integrating refugees into their workforces. Formal qualification requirements, even for jobs like cleaning, pose barriers. Language demands are seen as a larger hindrance in the public sector compared to private enterprises.

Cooperation between refugee services and municipal HR departments is limited, with only 12% reporting close collaboration, but smaller municipalities show higher levels of cooperation. Work practice and temporary employment in municipal services like schools, kindergartens and care are common, but permanent positions are rarer.

Possibilities and challenges in further refugee settlement

Since 2022, local refugee services have been scaled up in most municipalities. However, refugees require a wide range of services in their new communities, and there may be several local obstacles and capacity issues in further refugee settlement.

Very few municipalities report the capacity to receive significantly more refugees than they already have. Around 70% say they can settle some additional refugees, while 25% cannot accommodate more. Capacity varies by municipality size and region, with larger cities and those in Agder and South-Eastern Norway reporting somewhat greater capacity.

The primary challenge is the availability of suitable housing. Other key issues include municipal finances, Nav's follow-up of refugees after the introduction program, and limitations in health services. Municipalities report somewhat fewer capacity challenges related to their own refugee services, language training and interpreting services in 2024 compared to 2023.

Municipalities see several benefits to refugee settlement, notably that refugees can fill labour needs in the private and public sectors, as well as help counter population decline. Smaller municipalities emphasise refugees' importance for sustaining local services.

Municipalities call for increased financial support, especially for refugees who are unable to work (e.g. elderly and persons with disabilities). They also desire more predictability in refugee placements and better collaboration with the state on settling refugees with special needs. Further, they request state measures to incentivise employers to hire refugees and improve transportation solutions in rural areas.

In summary, Norwegian municipalities face a mix of capacity constraints and service delivery challenges in accommodating additional refugees, while also recognizing potential benefits for their communities. Targeted state support and coordination appear crucial for addressing these issues.

Part 4: Current and future challenges, opportunities and dilemmas

In the final part of the report, we synthesise our findings across topics and data sources to discuss some of the most prominent challenges, opportunities and dilemmas.

Challenges, dilemmas and future prospects for a diverse group

In the fall of 2023, Norway received more refugees from Ukraine than all its Nordic neighbours combined. As a result, Norwegian authorities introduced several measures aimed at limiting the large influx. Our study shows that the restrictions have not significantly affected Ukrainian refugees' satisfaction with the reception in Norway or their experience with the Norwegian reception system. The vast majority of Ukrainian refugees rate their interactions with Norwegian national and local authorities very positively. Ukrainian children have, as a rule, integrated well into the Norwegian school system. However, this does not mean that Ukrainian refugees do not face challenges related to both the ongoing war in their home country and adapting to a life in Norway with an uncertain duration.

The insecurity concerning the temporary status arise as an even more prominent topic in the interviews with and survey of Ukrainian refugees this year, influencing motivation and strategies for their integration in Norway. We also see that the refugees to a larger degree hypothesise and explore different alternatives for ensuring a more secure status in Norway, including plans to transition to a work visa if, or when, they fulfil the criteria for such a visa.

We find that with residence time in Norway, more people are determined to stay. Many Ukrainian refugees in Norway worry about how they will be received by the community in Ukraine if they return after the war, which makes some more hesitant to return. Some interviewees have noted a growing tension in Ukraine between those who fled and those

who remained. Further, Ukrainian refugees describe being caught under 'dual pressure', receiving conflicting signals from both Ukraine and Norway.

Ukrainian refugees have different ways of tackling the challenges of uncertainty. While some of them become more and more focused on building a life in Norway and see their future here, others choose to maintain "a double life" between Ukraine and Norway. However, great pressure falls on children and youth, who are often compelled to follow education in both countries simultaneously. The long-term outcome – whether it will lead to double inclusion or double exclusion – remains an open question.

Pressure and challenges evolving through the reception and integration system

Despite Ukrainian refugees' positive overall assessment, the process has been challenging for the Norwegian reception and integration services that have had to quickly adapt to the new arising challenges. The yearly studies of municipal services from 2022 to 2024 tells a story of how the pressure and challenges evolve through the reception, settlement and integration services. In 2024, we find that the reception and integration services have been upscaled and stabilized to a larger degree, but the prominent challenges now are related to the general service apparatus and more long-term solutions combined with a continuing temporary perspective of the Ukrainian refugees' stay in Norway.

Two emerging concerns are more prominent in this year's survey of municipal refugee services: 1) concerns about what a potential down-scaling of the municipal services would imply (with potential decreased settlements) and 2) the question of national financial support for refugees who will not be able to work in Norway, e.g., elderly and persons with disabilities or health issues.

Clear work-oriented turn, but not without challenges

Overall, our study indicates the introduction programme has become more work-oriented, in line with the new regulations introduced by the government in February 2024. However, the implementation has not come without challenges.

The Ukrainian refugees are very divided in their opinion of work practice as an integration measure. While some are very positive, others express dissatisfaction, particularly if they experience that they are not able to practice Norwegian, or if the prospects of employment afterwards are absent.

Combined with record-high numbers of introduction programme participants, the municipalities have increased their search for employers to provide work practice. The municipalities report that the high number of arrivals have made it challenging to find enough work practice placements. When municipalities have to search for a high number of work practice placements to fulfil national regulations, it increases the challenge of securing the potential for learning and development of each individual refugee. Thus, the risk is that in the effort of obtaining enough work practice placements, what the individual refugee will gain from the placement becomes secondary to fulfilling national requirements. The interviews and survey of the Ukrainian refugees also show that expectation management of how the work practice may be valuable for different purposes is crucial.

The municipality as an employer

The study shows that there is unexploited potential for the public sector (and particularly municipalities in need of workforce) to include Ukrainian and other refugees into their workforce. Most municipalities – and particularly smaller municipalities – believe that Ukrainian refugees can be a major resource in meeting the needs of the local labour market and to mitigate population decline.

However, municipalities often demand formal qualifications and high Norwegian language skills. The importance of political anchoring and signals – that this should be a priority across the municipal services – is highlighted as important for getting the regular municipal service

apparatus on board. Irrespectively of political will, formal requirements do constitute barriers for employment in the public sector, particularly the qualification principle. Two elements are important in this regard. The first is whether formal requirements are set too high for municipal positions. Second, newly established agreements about exceptions from the qualification principle were introduced in March 2024. Although 30% of the municipalities report to have already used this exception, our study implies that there may be more potential for the municipalities in using this option to increase the labour-market integration of both Ukrainian and other refugees.

New reception and integration challenges with an increase of arrivals of (unaccompanied) teenagers

The prognoses for 2025 indicate a 20% increase in the resettlement of unaccompanied minor refugees. Our analysis shows a significant rise in the share of male teenagers (particularly those aged 16–17 years) arriving after 2023. This increase may be interpreted in connection with the age limit for serving in the Ukrainian military which is 18 years. Thus, it may be plausible to assume that those aged 16–17 years move from Ukraine while it is still legal for them to leave the country. In light of the temporary perspective and with the increased arrivals of Ukrainian teenagers, more research about their – and in general, Ukrainian children's – social integration, mental health, educational dilemmas and challenges, is essential.

Part 1

Introduction and background

1 Introduction

As the war in Ukraine continues – currently in its third year since the Russian full-scale invasion in February 2022: What are the experiences, aspirations and challenges that persons who have fled Ukraine meet after their arrival in Norway? And what are the assessments, challenges and opportunities for the municipalities who are responsible for settling and including them into their local community?

From 2022 to 2024, Norway has continued to receive a steady flow of displaced persons from Ukraine (hereafter Ukrainian refugees). As of October 2024, Norway had received 86 000 applications for collective, temporary protection, and Ukrainian refugees now constitute 1,5% of the total population of Norway.

That Norway also received more arrivals from Ukraine, compared to the other Scandinavian countries, led to a rather drastic shift in the policy development after the fall of 2023. After February 2022, there was an initial period of more liberal policies for Ukrainian refugees (compared to other groups of protection seekers). However, after the fall of 2023 where Norway had relatively high arrivals, the Norwegian government introduced a series of policy restrictions to ensure that Norway did not have more favourable policies for Ukrainian refugees than other European countries.

In this study, we map and analyse how the Ukrainian refugees themselves have experienced the reception, settlement and integration in Norway and also, what their prospect are for the future – 2.5 years after the full-scale invasion. Further, as almost all Norwegian municipalities have received Ukrainian refugees, we map and analyse the experiences and perspectives of the leaders of municipal refugee services.

1.1 Assignment and overall research questions

This report is part of an annual research project conducted by the Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research (NIBR) on assignment from the Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi). The annual studies assess how displaced persons from Ukraine experienced their initial reception, settlement and integration in Norway, with a particular focus on qualification and labour market integration.

This year's assignment is a follow-up study of the 2022 report '*Ukrainian refugees – experiences from the first phase in Norway'* (Hernes, Deineko et al. 2022), and the 2023 report '*Reception, settlement and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Norway: Experiences and perceptions of Ukrainian refugees and municipal stakeholders (2022-2023)*'. (Hernes, Aasland et al. 2023)

The main research questions in this study are as follows:

1. How do Ukrainian refugees experience their reception, settlement and integration in Norway, and what are their aspirations for the future?
2. What are the municipalities' assessments of the challenges and opportunities related to the reception, settlement and integration of Ukrainian refugees?

The report is structured in four parts:

- Part 1: Introduction and background
- Part 2: Ukrainian refugees' experience of the settlement, integration and employment in Norway
- Part 3: The municipal refugee services' experiences with Ukrainian refugees and related policies
- Part 4: Current and future challenges, opportunities and dilemmas

1.2 Overall research design

In this study, we have a research strategy where we actively build on data and preliminary findings from preceding steps in the research process. In this section, we present the overall research design for the whole research project. More detailed descriptions of the types of data and methods of data collection used for the respective subreports (parts 2 and 3) are provided in the introduction to each of the subreports.

Figure 1.1: Overall research design.

Step 1: Policy analysis and qualitative interviews

Step 1 consisted mainly of two types of data collection: a policy analysis and qualitative individual and focus group interviews with both Ukrainian refugees and frontline workers.

We conducted an updated mapping of national policy changes and other measures related to the reception, settlement and integration of Ukrainian refugees (based on the initial mapping in the 2022 and 2023 report). The policy analysis was important to ensure that the interviews and surveys were based on an updated understanding of the policy developments, which both the Ukrainian refugees and the municipalities were subject to and affected by, in order to develop relevant questions.

This study draws on data and insights from qualitative case studies in four Norwegian municipalities conducted in winter/spring 2024 as part of another NIBR-coordinated research project, the UKRINT-project, in which KS and Nav are active project partners[2]. In these case studies, the UKRINT team members interviewed a wide range of front-line workers and Ukrainian refugees. The data from these interviews have been used as background information to develop the surveys to the Ukrainian refugees and Norwegian municipalities.

Further, we also included 10 follow-up interviews with Ukrainian refugees that we had interviewed previously for the 2022 and/or the 2023 study, to include a longitudinal perspective. The majority of the qualitative interviews with Ukrainian refugees were conducted between February and June 2024. For a more detailed description of the data collection and method of analysis for the qualitative interviews with the Ukrainian refugees, see chapter 4.1.

Step 2: Qualitative collective analysis and the development of the two surveys

To ensure longitudinal analysis, the two surveys in this project largely build on the previous surveys to ensure comparability. However, the surveys needed to be adjusted to recent

[2] https://www.oslomet.no/en/research/research-projects/preparing-long-term-stay-fast-return-labour-market-integration-of-ukrainian-refugees-norway-ukrint

developments. To use the qualitative data in the development of the surveys, we conducted a workshop in August 2024 for the entire research team based on the collective qualitative analysis procedure developed by Helga Eggebø (2020). The collective qualitative analysis procedure includes four steps: 1) a joint review of the data material (group discussion of interview summaries), 2) a mapping of the main topics, 3) grouping of themes and subthemes, and 4) establishing the main topics and a work plan based on the themes and subthemes identified. The aim of the workshop was to conduct a preliminary analysis of the main themes that emerge in the policy analysis and interviews so that we could develop (or adjust) relevant questions for the two surveys.

The two surveys were developed in August/September, and data collection took place in October/November. For a more detailed description of the data collection and method of analysis for the surveys, see chapter 4.2 on the survey of Ukrainian refugees, and chapter 15 on the municipal survey.

Step 3: Synthesising analysis

In Part 2 – the analysis of experiences and perspectives of Ukrainian refugees – we actively combined insights from the qualitative interviews and the survey. The survey enables analysis of the scope and extent of different experiences and background factors, in addition to more complex analyses of how different background variables correlate with selected dependent variables. In addition to providing invaluable knowledge used to develop the survey, the qualitative interviews enable more in-depth analysis of the mechanisms behind different assessments and experiences, and the respondents' rationales in this regard.

For Part 3 – the experiences and perspectives of the leaders of municipal refugee services – this year's study has a more limited scope than the 2023 report. As mentioned, the qualitative data from the four case studies were used to develop the two surveys using data collected as part of the UKRINT-project. However, the scope of this 2024 report is restricted to analyse the municipal survey. It has not been part of this assignment to include qualitative analyses of the UKRINT data on frontline workers to supplement the presentation of the municipal survey results.

The report has been co-written by all the project members and quality assured by the project manager. The first draft of the report was finalised 29 November 2024 and sent to IMDi, Nav, and KS for comments and clarification. Based on their comments and clarifications, NIBR revised the report and submitted the final version on 13 December 2024.

1.3 Structure of the report

The report is structured into four main parts.

Part 1: Introduction and background

After this introductory chapter, in chapter 2, we present statistics about the asylum and refugee situation in Norway the last decade and up until October 2024, and particularly related to displaced persons from Ukraine. In chapter 3, we describe the initial policy developments related to the reception, settlement and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Norway, along with recent policy changes the last year – until November 2024.

Part 2: Ukrainian refugees' experience of the settlement, integration and employment in Norway

Part 2 presents the Ukrainian refugees' own perspective and experiences with their reception, settlement and integration in Norway. First, in chapter 4, we describe the data collection processes for both the interviews with and the survey of Ukrainian refugees. In chapter 5, we provide further background information about the Ukrainian refugees in Norway, before we present why the Ukrainian refugees have chosen to come to Norway in chapter 6. Chapter 7 presents the Ukrainian refugees' overall assessment of different

services and actors in Norway. The continuing chapters focus on different topics related to the processes after being granted protection: the housing and settlement process (chapter 8), integration measures after settlement (chapter 9), and experiences and challenges with employment in Norway (chapter 10). The social integration of children – including kindergartens and schools as arenas for children's social integration – is the topic in chapter 11, before we present the adults' social integration in chapter 12. Lastly, chapter 13 presents the Ukrainian refugees' future prospects, and chapter 14 explores how they have reacted to the new policy restrictions from the Norwegian government.

Part 3: The municipal refugee services' experiences with Ukrainian refugees and related policies

Part 3 presents results of the investigations of the settlement and integration of Ukrainian refugees, from the perspective of refugee service leaders. First, in chapter 15, we describe the data collection processes for the survey, as well as a dropout analysis of the quantitative material. In chapter 16, we present the main modes of organisation and cooperation of the municipal refugee services. Chapter 17 analyses variations and challenges in municipalities' provision of introduction programme and language training. Chapter 19 looks at the cooperation on labour market integration of Ukrainian refugees, while chapter 19 explores the barriers and opportunities for labour market integration of Ukrainian refugees. Chapter 20 discuss the possibilities and challenges with future refugee settlements.

Part 4: Current and future challenges, opportunities and dilemmas

In part 4, we synthesise findings across data sources, combining insights from the analyses of both the Ukrainian refugees and the municipal refugee services. We highlight some of the main and most prominent questions and topics to discuss current and future challenges, opportunities and dilemmas in the continuing work with the reception and integration of Ukrainian refugees in Norway.

2 Protection seekers and settlements in Norway, 2012-2024 (Oct)

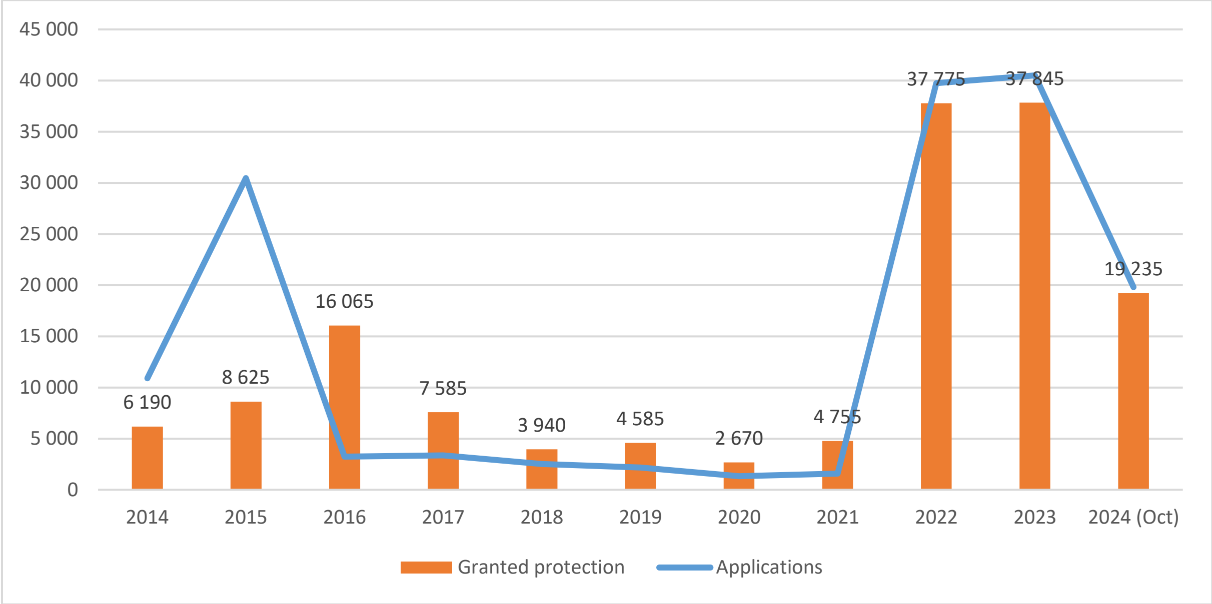
How does the situation of a large influx of people seeking protection from Ukraine from 2022 compare with earlier arrivals of protection seekers to Norway? And how has the number of new arrivals developed during the first 2.5 years after the full-scale Russian invasion?

To put the current influx of protection seekers into context, we first present official statistics from Eurostat, UDI and IMDi, showing how the current situation differs from previous large influxes of protection seekers. Then, using data from UDI, we narrow in on developments after the full-scale Russian invasion in February 2022.

2.1 Inflows of protection seekers to Norway

Over the past decade, Norway has experienced significant fluctuations in the number of persons who have applied for and been granted protection.

Figure 2.1: Logged asylum applications and persons granted protection in Norway 2014–October 2024.



*Data: The figure is based on data from Eurostat (2024a-g) on all persons granted protection (all statuses, including collective, temporary protection and resettled refugees). UDI data is used for applications of collective temporary protection. For resettled, there is not available data for 2024. However, the Norwegian government had decided to accept 1000 resettled refugees in 2024, so these numbers would (by October) constitute only a small increase in the total number of granted protection permits.

Figure 2.1 shows that there have been large fluctuations over the past decade in both the number of applications for protection (blue line) and the number of persons granted protection (orange stacks). There was a significant increase in asylum arrivals in 2015, with over 30 000 applications for protection, mostly persons from Syria, Afghanistan and Eritrea. About two-thirds of those who applied for protection in the period 2015–2017 had their application for protection approved in the period 2015-2017 (Hernes, Danielsen et al. 2023b).

From 2016, Norway experienced a substantial drop in asylum applications, and the number of asylum applications lingered between 1 300 and 3 400 in the following years. In this period with low numbers of asylum seekers, Norway accepted a larger share of resettled UN quota refugees than previously. Still, the total number of persons granted protection (including

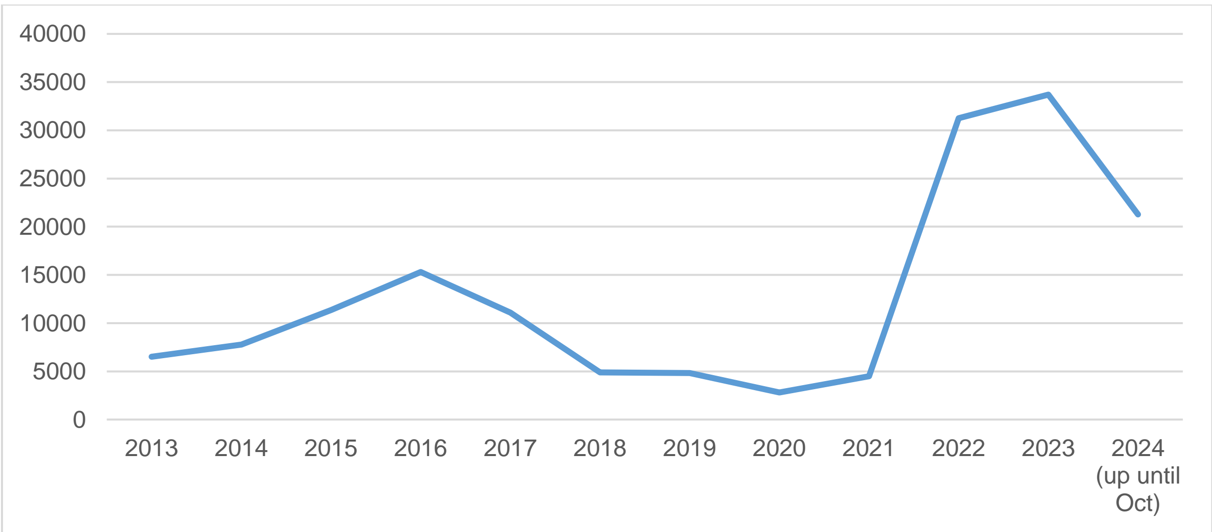
resettled refugees) was around 4 000 between 2018 and 2021 (which exceeds the number of asylum applications, because about half of these were UN Quota refugees).

The large number of Ukrainians fleeing the war in Ukraine after the full-scale invasion by Russia in February 2022 led to record-high numbers of persons applying for and being granted protection, far exceeding the levels in 2015–2017. Since the majority of persons who fled Ukraine were eligible for temporary collective protection, almost all of them were rapidly granted protection. In 2022 and 2023, more than 37 000 persons were granted protection each year, the large majority being displaced persons from Ukraine. By October 2024, about 19 000 had been granted protection in total, where 90% were granted collective, temporary protection. UDI's forecast for 2024 on 3 December is that Norway will receive 19 000 applications for collective protection (UDI 2024c).

2.2 Settlement in municipalities

Since the collective, temporary protection does not imply an individual assessment of asylum claims, the processing time for most displaced persons from Ukraine has been considerably shorter than for persons seeking asylum based on an individual assessment. Further, compared to other asylum applicants from many other countries, almost all applicants get granted protection. These two aspects have led to a record-high number of settlements in municipalities the last 2.5 years.

Figure 2.2: Number of publicly registered settlements in Norwegian municipalities, 2011– October 2023.



*Data: IMDi (2024a).

Figure 2.2 shows the annual number of registered settlements by those who have been granted protection in Norway. From before 2015, there was around 7 000 who were settled yearly. There was a steep rise following the 2015 influx, peaking in 2016 with around 15 000. However, after increasing municipal capacity substantially to accommodate the large number that was to be settled in 2015–2017, the number of municipalities that were petitioned to settle – and the number of settlements in each municipality – was drastically reduced in the following years. This reduction made it necessary for many municipalities to downscale their settlement and integration capacity (Hernes et al. 2020).

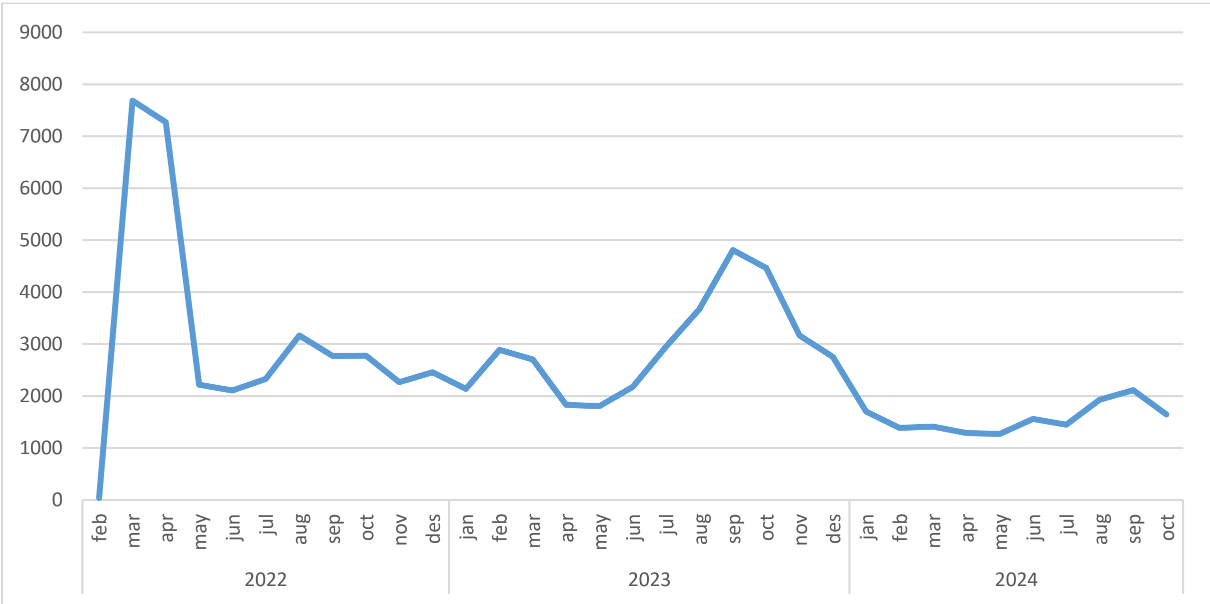
When the number of protection seekers again rose dramatically in 2022, municipalities again had to upscale their capacities (either by upscaling existing services or by reintroducing these services again), and by even more than previously. With over 30 000 settlements, the number of settlements in 2022 was twice as high as in the peak year of 2016. 2023 topped

the 2022 record with almost 34 000 settlements. For 2024, there is a small decline in settlements compared to the two previous years. However, the preliminary number as of October also shows a very large number of settlements (more than 21 000 as of October), and the municipalities had agreed to settle more than 28 000 in 2024 (IMDi 2024a).

2.3 Developments in the total number of Ukrainian refugees after February 2022

There have also been great fluctuations in the numbers arriving from Ukraine since February 2022.

Figure 2.3: Total number of applications for protection from Ukrainian citizens, February 2022–October 2024.



*Data: UDI (2024a): Registered applications for collective, temporary protection.

Figure 2.3 shows the number of applications for protection from displaced persons from Ukraine in Norway from February 2022 to October 2024. The largest inflows came in March and April 2022, with more than 7 000 registered applications each month. After the initial months, the number of applications lodged from May 2022 to June 2023 was around 2 000–3 000 per month. However, the numbers rose again during the summer of 2023 and peaked again in September 2024 with about 4 800 applicants. It later decreased again, and from January to July 2024, it averaged on about 1 500 per month, with a small increase in August and September of around 2 000.

In November 2024, a total of 87 000 displaced persons from Ukraine had applied for protection, and almost 85 000 of this group had been granted collective, temporary protection (those who are not eligible for collective, temporary protection may apply for regular asylum). UDI also reported that 77 500 persons had a valid collective protection permit at that time (as some persons may have moved from Norway after being granted protection) (UDI 2024b).

3 From initial liberalisation to a restrictive policy turn after September 2023

How have the policies towards Ukrainian refugees developed in the first 2.5 years after Ukrainians started arriving in February 2022?

The influx of protection seekers in this period has been the largest migration flow to Norway since World War II. The policy development for Ukrainian refugees in the initial period after the full-scale invasion included several exceptions and liberalisations for Ukrainian refugees compared to other protection seekers and beneficiaries. However, after the fall of 2023, when Norway received a relatively higher share of arrivals from Ukraine compared to its Nordic neighbour countries (Hernes and Danielsen 2024), the Norwegian government has introduced a series of restrictions.

In this chapter, we outline the key changes to legislation concerning reception, asylum processing, settlement and integration since February 2022. Under each topic, we first (shortly) summarise the initial policy development from 2022 (based on the analyses from the 2022 and 2023 report), before we highlight the policy development after September 2023. For more thorough descriptions of the policy development the initial phase, see the 2022 report (Hernes, Deineko et al. 2022) and 2023-report (Hernes, Aasland et al. 2023).

We start by presenting regulations on protection permits for displaced persons from Ukraine, and the processes for registration and accommodation before being granted protection. Furthermore, we present changes in the regulations related to the settlement process, introduction programmes and language training, and lastly, information to Ukrainian refugees.

3.1 Protection permits and application procedures for displaced persons in Ukraine

After the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Norwegian government triggered the use of section 34 of the Immigration Act in March 2022, providing temporary collective protection for displaced persons from Ukraine. The new legislation mirrored the EU Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), which the European Council decided to activate on 4 March 2022 (Hernes, Deineko et al. 2022). Persons who were granted collective protection in Norway were granted a residence permit for one year at a time, with the possibility to extend it for up to three years. The period a person lives with a collective protection permit in Norway does not count as residence time towards permanent residence (as other protection permits do). The Norwegian government decided in January 2023 and February 2024 to extend the protection with an additional year.

Several changes have been made regarding the protection permit for displaced persons from Ukraine after the fall of 2023.

First, unlike other refugees in Norway who risk losing their protection status if they travel back to their home country, those on collective, temporary protection from Ukraine were initially exempted from this regulation, allowing for temporary visits back to Ukraine (UDI 2022). In December 2023, however, the government abolished this exemption, implying that those who travelled back to Ukraine (even for short visits) would risk losing their protection permit in Norway. Only travels with a ‘legitimate purpose’ subject to very strict criteria would be allowed without losing the protection permit. The Minister of Justices argued that travels back to Ukraine indicated that they were no longer in need of protection. In addition, the changes were argued to lead to more equal treatment between groups of protection holders. As of November 2024, Norway was the only European country that had introduced such a restriction on temporary travels back to Ukraine for collective protection holders.

Second, in December 2023, the government also made a restriction in the scope of who were eligible for collective protection. Ukrainians with a dual citizenship in another safe third country would no longer be granted temporary protection in Norway. This change also applied to those who had already been granted collective protection, which implied that they would not get their permit renewed after March 2024.

Third, in May 2024, the Ministry restricted the access for Ukrainians – who previously had received temporary protection, but who have had their residence permit revoked or not extended – to reapply for temporary protection. The Minister of Justice and Public Security argued that Norway uses many recourses on processing applications and settling Ukrainians in Norwegian municipalities, and that it would be wrong 'that asylum seekers who moved back or broke the rules should receive special treatment again' (Ministry of Justice, Mehl[3]).

Fourth, in June 2024, the EU decided to expand the Temporary Protection Directive for displaced persons from Ukraine with an additional year, until March 2026. Norway is not bound by the directive, but similarly to the EU TPD, the Norwegian Immigration Act was initially limited to providing collective, temporary protection for maximum three years. Thus, already in April 2024, the government presented a proposition to the parliament suggesting expanding the number of years temporary collective protection could be granted, from three to five years (Prop. 94 L (2023-2024)). The proposed expansion from three to five years would apply not only to displaced person from Ukraine, but generally to all situations where it will be relevant to implement the scheme of temporary collective protection. The proposed changes of providing temporary collective protection up to five years could have entailed that the path to permanent residency would be 10 years (first five years on a collective temporary protection permit, and then potentially five more years on another protection permit that count as residence time). However, the proposed changes suggested to reduce the number of years needed on a regular protection permit from five to three years (after the five-year period on a collective protection permit). This change implied that the total residence time would continue to be a total of eight years (from three years with collective, temporary protection + five years with another protection permit, to five years on a collective protection permit + three years on another protection permit). Lastly, the government proposed to extend the access in § 34 third paragraph to put asylum applications on hold, from three years to five years. The proposals were passed with a cross-partisan majority in November 2024.

Lastly, in September 2024, Norway became the first European country to restrict the scope for those eligible for collective, temporary protection to specific parts of Ukraine. Persons who previously lived in areas in Ukraine which were considered safe by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration would now be processed accordingly to the regular asylum system. As of October 2024, there were six Ukrainian counties in the western part of Ukraine that were defined as safe. The Minister of Justice justified the change by arguing that:

> The immigration to Norway must be controlled and sustainable, and not disproportionately larger than in countries we naturally compare ourselves to, such as the Nordic countries. The government is therefore making new restrictions. Going forward, asylum seekers from Ukraine will be treated more equally with other asylum seekers. The collective protection scheme is now more precisely aimed at those who need protection. (Minister of Justice and Public Security Emilie Mehl)[4]

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[3] https://www.regjeringen.no/no/aktuelt/ytterligere-innstramninger-i-ordningen-med-kollektiv-beskyttelse-for-fordrevne-fra-ukraina/id3041348/

[4] Press release: https://www.regjeringen.no/no/aktuelt/regjeringen-endrer-reglene-farre-ukrainere-vil-fa-kollektiv-beskyttelse-i-norge/id3055194/

3.1.1 Application process and accommodation during the application period

Unlike many other European countries, displaced persons from Ukraine need to apply for protection through the regular asylum system, though most applicants do not have to undergo an individual assessment or asylum interview (Hernes, Danielsen et al. 2023a). This collective assessment simplified and shortened the application process for displaced persons from Ukraine compared with persons who had to undergo an individual asylum assessment. Also, registration of all asylum applications generally took place at the National Arrivals Centre in Råde (south of Oslo). However, from March 2022, the government allowed registration at other police districts throughout the country.

During the application phase and until formal settlement in a Norwegian municipality, most asylum seekers live in reception centres. Asylum seekers are not obliged to reside in reception centres, but they normally forfeit their access to free housing and pocket money if they opt out of the reception system. The exception is a system called 'alternative reception placement' (AMOT), where an asylum seeker may live outside of the regular reception system without losing their rights to financial aid. However, the criteria are very strict, and the AMOT scheme has not been widely applied for before 2022. Because many Ukrainians stayed with friends and family in the initial period after the full-scale invasion, and due to the lack of adequate reception capacity, in March 2022, the government introduced a new scheme: temporary alternative reception placement (MAMOT). The MAMOT scheme applied solely to displaced persons from Ukraine and included less restrictive criteria to live privately than the original AMOT system, providing Ukrainian refugees with more freedom to find alternative housing without losing their rights to public assistance.

Those who needed help to find accommodation got channelled through the reception system. The reception centres are formally overseen by UDI but are run by private companies, NGOs or municipalities. With the rapid increase in arrivals after February 2022, UDI engaged in tender processes where new and existing operators were invited to establish new emergency reception centres (*akuttinnkvartering)*. Such emergency reception centres also included hotels, which were used to rapidly expand capacity in case of mass inflows.

Asylum seekers living in reception centres normally have the right and obligation to participate in courses in Norwegian language and civic education, and in competence mapping (*kompetansekartlegging)* conducted by the host municipality in order to prepare for settlement. However, amendments to the Integration Act exempt displaced persons from Ukraine from these rights and obligations.

By the end of 2023/early 2024, several changes were made concerning registration and accommodation.

In December 2023, Ukrainians who had travelled to other parts in Norway than the National Arrival Centre at Råde would no longer be offered accommodation or get transportation costs to Råde covered. Those in need of accommodation in reception/asylum centres now had to contact the police and UDI at the National Arrival Centre in Råde, in line with other protection seekers. Further, during the initial influx, hotels had been used as new emergency reception centres (*akuttinnkvartering),* but the government announced that it would tighten the use of hotels as (emergency) asylum centres.

In January 2024, the MAMOT system for displaced persons from Ukraine was abolished. The arrangement had been widely used in 2022, when approximately 30% of the Ukrainians who were settled had lived privately before settlement. However, by late 2023/early 2024, the number using MAMOT had decreased to roughly 3% (Meld. St. 17 (2023–2024)).

Further, the temporary exception allowing protection seekers to have accompanying pets at the asylum centres was removed, and newly arrived protection seekers would no longer get covered expenses related to pets[5].

3.2 Settlement in a municipality after granted protection

Norway has a publicly steered settlement model, where refugees are allocated to municipalities on the basis of agreements between the state and the municipalities. After 2015, the Norwegian system has also allowed so-called 'agreed self-settlement', whereby refugees may find their own housing, although they still must apply to the municipality to be formally settled there in order to retain their right to financial assistance and introduction programmes (Søholt & Dyb 2021).

The Norwegian settlement model has not been formally changed since February 2022, but the initial phase after February 2022 involved a high increase in "agreed self-settlements". Whereas most refugees in Norway previously followed the traditional path of living in a reception centre until they were assigned a municipality for settlement through IMDi, the Ukrainians had to a larger extent made use of alternative paths to settlement initially, particularly through agreed self-settlement, where the refugee and the municipality agree directly on settlement (Hernes, Deineko et al. 2022). However, in 2023 and 2024, a lower number of Ukrainians has lived privately the initial phase. The proportion of refugees who have been resettled from residence outside the reception system (private residents and refugees in alternative reception facilities [MAMOT]) continued to decline and accounts for 8.9% of those resettled so far in 2024 (as of 1 December). In 2022 and 2023, the proportion was 33% and 14%, respectively.

Although the Norwegian settlement model has not undergone any formal legislative changes. the government introduced other strategies to ensure enough settlements. It introduced the 'whole-country' strategy, where all municipalities were asked to settled refugees. In 2023, the municipalities also received an extra grant if they settled a higher number of refugees than their original petition from the government (e.g. if they were petitioned to settled 50 refugees and decided to settle 100 refugees, they would get an extra grant per person for the extra 50) (Hernes, Danielsen et al. 2023b). This extra grant was not continued in 2024.

3.3 Integration measures

Persons who have been granted a residence permit on the basis of an application for asylum, and their family members, have a right and obligation to take part in the introduction programme offered by Norwegian municipalities. In April 2022, the Norwegian government presented a comprehensive proposal for temporary amendments to various pieces of legislation in order to adapt to the influx of displaced persons from Ukraine. Overall, the amendments resulted in a programme with somewhat limited elements and duration, but with more flexible options for temporary protection holders than for other groups. Some minor changes were made when the law was extended in July 2023.

Ukrainian refugees have the right to attend the introduction programme but, unlike other refugees, they are not *obliged* to do so. However, those in need of financial assistance after settlement may be obliged to participate in the introduction programme in order to be eligible for such financial assistance.

Like the regular introduction programme, the introduction programme for Ukrainian refugees should contain language and work-oriented elements, but the right to language training was initially more limited. Originally, the right to language training was limited to one year for this

[5] https://www.regjeringen.no/no/aktuelt/ukraina/id3023283/

group, but from 1 July 2023, the government allowed the municipalities to extend the language training element for Ukrainian refugees by an additional six months. Concerning the other compulsory elements in the introduction programme, Ukrainian refugees must complete the parental guidance course (*foreldreveiledning)* if they have children under 18 years. However, they have neither a right nor an obligation to attend civics classes, nor must they take the otherwise compulsory empowerment course (*livsmestring*), though the municipalities may still provide these courses as part of the programme. Furthermore, they got the right, but not an obligation (as other refugees) to carrier guidance. They were also initially exempted from the obligation to conduct a competence mapping, but from July 2023, this was also made obligatory for Ukrainian refugees (Hernes, Aasland et al. 2023).

Other differences between the regular introduction programme for refugees and the introduction programme for those with collective protection was that the latter could also include English language training. Unlike other refugee groups, they may complete the introduction programme on a part-time basis, and if they leave the programme, they do not lose the right to return later (Hernes, Deineko et al. 2022).

Because the majority of Ukrainians have prior education at upper secondary levels, most Ukrainian refugees were entitled to shorter introduction programmes, in line with the Integration Act of 2021, which introduced differentiated programme duration for participants according to age and educational background. Thus, most Ukrainians arriving in Norway were entitled to a shorter introduction programme, normally lasting six months with the possibility of a six-month extension.

With the restrictive turn after the fall of 2023, the government also intensified the focus on work-oriented introduction programmes for Ukrainian refugees. At the press conference in October 2023, the Minister of Labour and Social Inclusion argued that Ukrainians both wanted, and needed, to become a resource to the society. To contribute to this development, the government would send out a public hearing for proposals to sharpen the introduction program with the aim to expedite the job acquisition process for Ukrainians. In addition, they provided funding to establish a system for digital Norwegian language training, which could help the municipalities with buying language training services that could include a more flexible language training.

The new temporary regulations for increased work orientation of the introduction program were introduced in February 2024[6]. The new regulations implied that for (most) participants in the introduction programme, work-oriented elements should on average constitute at least 15 hours a week of the program time after three months. Further, the temporary exception for displaced persons from Ukraine to choose to take the programme part-time was removed. Now, the introduction program could only take place part-time if the municipality, due to capacity challenges, could not offer a full-time program. The municipality could also deny participation in the introduction program for people who had a job or a job offer on almost full-time basis.

3.4 Financial benefits

Generally, in Norway, protection seekers get so-called ‘pocket money’ during the application process, which are meant to cover basic needs if they live in reception centres. The amount depends on the age, family situation and whether the reception centre serves food or not. After receiving a protection permit and formal settlement in the municipality, the financial assistance is linked to participation in the introduction programme during the initial period. Participants get an introduction benefit linked to programme participation. The introduction benefit is reduced proportionally if the participant is absent from the programme without valid

[6] https://lovdata.no/dokument/LTI/forskrift/2024-01-30-146

reason. After the introduction programme, regular means-tested benefits apply for those who are eligible, although some welfare benefits are subject to minimum residence requirements (for details, see Hernes, Danielsen et al. 2023b). Such assistance is based on an individual assessment of the situation of the whole family, and what is covered may differ between municipalities.

During the spring and summer of 2022, several news articles (focusing on displaced persons from Ukraine) raised the question of the low financial benefits given to asylum seekers during the application process. As part of the general 2023 budget process, the financial benefit for asylum seekers during the application process was raised by 50 %. This rise in financial benefits, however, targeted all protection seekers, not only displaced persons from Ukraine (Hernes, Danielsen et al. 2023b).

After the increase in arrivals from Ukraine during the fall of 2023, the government implemented immediate regulations to restrict financial benefits, in addition to sending out proposals for public consultations for further restrictions that implied legislative changes. The government argued that it was necessary to bring the Norwegian level of benefits services closer the other Nordic countries, as a measure to limit the number of arrivals to Norway.

The immediate changes introduced in December 2023 included that people residing in Norway would no longer receive a back payment for child benefit for the first 12 months in Norway. Normally, persons do not receive child benefits the first year, but if they are still in Norway on a legal residence permit after one year, they would get the child benefit for the first year of residence as a pay back. This payback was now removed. The government also stressed that they would actively inform that there is a requirement of residence in Norway for refugees in order to gain access to a range of benefits through the National Insurance Scheme.

The other restrictions were introduced in June 2024 after a public consultation process (Prop. 101 L (2023–2024)). The changes included several restrictions in the financial benefits: 1) a reduction in the introduction allowance for couples without children, 2) a requirement of 12 months prior membership in the National Insurance Register to be entitled a one-time benefit at birth and adoption, and 3) a residence requirement for individuals between 19 and 24 years to be entitled to necessary dental care with reduced co-payment in the public dental service. The consultation response showed that most of the consultation bodies (*høringsinstanser*) were against the proposed changes, with the main argument that it would risk increasing the burden on municipalities both economically and administratively with more applications for social benefits. The government maintained the assessment that there was a need for more restrictive measures to help reduce the arrivals of displaced persons from Ukraine. It emphasises that a single measure probably wouldn't affect the arrivals alone, but that the restrictions put together could contribute to a decrease in arrivals. The changes entered into force July 1, 2024.

3.5 Information measures

During the initial phase after February 2022, one of the main challenges was to provide Ukrainians, municipalities, volunteers and other frontline workers with updated information (and, for Ukrainians, in a language and format they understood). However, most national agencies (e.g., IMDi, UDI, Nav, the police) rapidly started posting formal information to the target group in both Ukrainian and Russian on their respective websites, often with links to other government agencies where necessary. However, one of the major challenges reported by Ukrainian refugees during the initial months after February 2022 was finding the right information; they had to navigate between different websites and government actors, and information was perceived as unclear or insufficient (Hernes, Deineko et al. 2022).

In response to this identified challenge, IMDi collaborated with UDI, the Directorate of Health, the Directorate of Labour and Welfare (Nav) and the Norwegian Tax Administration on

developing a separate website. Here, newly arrived Ukrainian refugees would find the information they need to register, apply for residence and start their life in Norway. The first version of the website aimed at people with temporary collective protection was published on 1 June 2023 (nyinorge.no) and collected information from 13 different government agencies: IMDi, Nav, UDI, the Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority (*Arbeidstilsynet)*, the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir), the Norwegian Directorate of Health, the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (*HK-dir*), the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund (*Lånekassen*), the Norwegian Food Safety Authority (*Mattilsynet*), the police, the Norwegian Tax Administration (*Skatteetaten*), Norwegian Customs (*Tolletaten*) and Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (*Udir*)). The website has been continuously updated with new information as regulatory changes have come into effect and as needs have been identified in the user group.

It is also worth noting that the webpage will be expanded to target all refugees before Christmas 2024.

Part 2

Ukrainian refugees' experience of the settlement, integration and employment in Norway

4 Data and methods for analysing Ukrainian refugees' perceptions and experiences in Norway

The overall research design is presented in chapter 1.2. In this chapter, we present more detailed descriptions of the data collection process, methods and ethical assessment of the qualitative interviews with, and the survey of, Ukrainian refugees.

4.1 Qualitative interviews with Ukrainian refugees

In the period February 2024 – end of June 2024 we interviewed a total of 43 Ukrainians who had arrived in Norway since winter/spring 2022. We conducted 38 interviews (35 individual and 3 group interviews). The three group interviews were conducted with married couples. In one of them, a friend of the couple (also a refugee), took an active part in the interview.

10 of the interviews were longitudinal follow-up interviews with interviewees recruited either for the 2022 or for the 2023 report. All the longitudinal interviews were conducted digitally in May – June 2024.

The remaining 28 interviews were conducted in four different municipalities (combined data collection with the UKRINT project[7]), that we refer to as municipality A, B, C and D. The four municipalities were situated in different regions of the country and were of different size. One of the municipalities included one of the larger cities in Norway, two municipalities included smaller cities (*bystatus*) and one municipality was more rural with an urban area (*tettsted*) with no status as city. All the interviews in the four municipalities were conducted in person.

In the interviews this year, we put special emphasis on the Ukrainians' experiences with working life in Norway – be it through work practice or actual paid employment. Thus, most of the interviewees were of working age, and the majority of them arrived in Norway in 2022. In the report, the longitudinal interviews cited are referred to with an N and the number of the interviewee, for example (N1). The interviews from the four municipalities are similarly referred to as A, B, C or D and the number of the interviewee.

Summarised, the sample of interviewees were consisted of:

<u>Year of arrival:</u>

- 2022: 32
- 2023: 11

<u>Age:</u>

- 20–30: 1 (N) + 2 (B) + 3 (C) + 1(D)
- 30–50: 6(N) + 8 (A) + 5(B) + 4 (C) + 4 (D)
- 50–60: 3 (N) + 2 (A) + 1(B) + 1 (C) + 1 (D)
- 60+: 1 (D)

<u>Gender distribution:</u>

- Women: 29
- Men: 14

[7] https://www.oslomet.no/forskning/forskningsprosjekter/langtidsopphold-norge-eller-rask-tilbakevending-til-ukraina-ukrint

The project investigates the experiences of a complex group. To ensure that we captured the perspectives of a wide range of people, and in addition to age, sex and year of arrival, we sought to recruit interviewees who differed in terms of the following characteristics:

- arrived in Norway with/without children
- participation in the introduction programme or language courses
- employment in Norway or not
- geographical location in Norway
- geographical region of residence in Ukraine

The interviewees included persons from all parts of Ukraine (north, south, east, west, centre), both large cities and small towns. Interviewees were from the following regions: Donetsk, Kharkiv, Kherson, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzya, Kyiv, Odesa, Ivano-Frankivsk, Mykolaiv, Ternopil, Chernihiv, Mariupol, Cherkasy, Melitopol, Irpin, Lviv, and Crimea.

Figure 4.1: Map of regions in Ukraine.

At the time of the interviews, the Ukrainian refugees were spread geographically throughout Norway, staying in municipalities of various size and centrality located in Viken, Vestfold and Telemark, Vestland, Rogaland, Møre and Romsdal, Nordland and Oslo.

The interviewees from the four municipalities were recruited through several channels: 1) social media (an announcement was posted on the Facebook group 'Ukrainske flyktninger til Norge\Біженці з України до Норвегії'), 2) Nav offices in the municipalities provided contacts, 3) by searching local newspapers in the municipalities to identify Ukrainians who had been interviewed as well as other actors helping/employing Ukrainian refugees, 4) the researchers' networks among Ukrainians and locals in the municipalities, 5) by asking interviewees to provide us with contacts among their friends and acquaintances (snowball method), 6) by contacting voluntary organisations working with Ukrainians in the municipalities/putting up advertisements at language cafes etc., and 7) respondents from NIBR's previous surveys who had left their e-mail addresses and were open to be contacted again were recruited through personal invitations.

In the interviews with new interviewees recruited in 2024, we asked about the following topics: background, migration history, existing network in Norway, accommodation and settlement, expectations of Norway, contact with various actors (public and non-public),

integration measures such as introduction programme and language courses, work experience in Norway, financial situation, everyday life and communication in Norway, school/kindergarten for children, reactions to policy amendments that affect Ukrainian refugees in Norway, thoughts about the status of collective protection, contact with Ukraine, and thoughts about the future.

In the longitudinal interviews, we began by asking about the major changes that had occurred since our last interview. Further, we asked about their evaluation of the introduction programme in hindsight and their current situation with or without work. We also asked about language learning, their financial situation, everyday life and communication in Norway, school/kindergarten for children, reactions to policy amendments that affect Ukrainian refugees in Norway, thoughts about the status of collective protection, contact with Ukraine and thoughts about the future.

Two researchers participated in most (80%) of the interviews. One was responsible for taking notes while the other conducted the interview. Interviews were mostly conducted in Ukrainian or Russian, but two interviewees choose Norwegian in order to practice the language and one interviewee preferred English when interviewed by the researcher who is fluent in Russian but not in Ukrainian. The interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. All interviews were recorded so that the researchers could listen to them again to make more accurate notes, if needed. All the interviews were transcribed with Autotekst (https://autotekst.uio.no/nb), a digital tool for transcribing text from audio files. Transcripts were made in the original language of Ukrainian or Russian.

In August, the research group conducted a half day seminar. Based on the notes from the interviews and the transcripts, the researchers made power point presentations of each of the four municipalities and gave an oral presentation about each municipality and the overall findings – also based on the longitudinal interviews – to the research group. These presentations – and the following discussions in the research group – were used as input to the new surveys to Ukrainian refugees and the leaders of refugee services in the municipalities. For the report, the two researchers who conducted the interviewees did a focused reading of half of the material each and worked on analysis of topics to be included into the report.

4.2 Survey of Ukrainian refugees in Norway

The development of the 2024 survey questionnaire to Ukrainian refugees was based on the 2022 and 2023 surveys and the preliminary analysis of qualitative data collected from refugees and municipal services (see description of the collective qualitative analysis in chapter 1.2).

To enable comparisons, the questionnaire included questions asked previously about Ukrainians' experiences with the Norwegian authorities (e.g., the police, UDI, IMDi, the municipalities), how they obtained information about the system and their rights in Norway, the importance of personal networks and voluntary organisations, and future prospects. In addition, we asked about similar background characteristics such as gender, age, language skills, level of formal education, place of residence, family ties in Ukraine and in Norway, etc.

As more Ukrainian refugees by 2024 had completed the introduction programme and many had entered the labour market, the section on work and working conditions was substantially broadened.

The questionnaire was first developed in English and sent to IMDi, Nav and KS for comments. After revisions based on the comments received, and internal quality assurance by project members at NIBR, the survey was translated into Ukrainian and Russian by one of the team members who has both languages as their mother tongues. The Ukrainian and Russian versions were then checked and piloted by two Ukrainian refugees in Norway, one

Ukrainian-speaking and one Russian-speaking. Minor revisions were made based on their comments.

As was also the case in 2023, we had a twofold recruitment strategy. First, in the 2022 and 2023 survey, we invited respondents to leave their email address if they were willing to be contacted for future research purposes. In total 1366 respondents had left their email address in 2022 and/or in 2023. These respondents were then sent a personal invitation (link) to participate in the 2024 survey. We also recruited new respondents through a variety of channels (see description below).

Data collection took place between 27 September and 30 October ('old' respondents from the 2022 and 2023 survey) and between 7 October and 5 November (new respondents). We received 445 valid responses from respondents who had participated in the 2022/2023 surveys and 1162 valid responses from new respondents.[8] The two data files were merged and made up a joint data file with 1607 respondents, almost 99% of whom were living in Norway at the time of the survey (1% had returned to Ukraine). This report focuses on the 1547 respondents in Norway.[9]

4.2.1 Recruitment through different channels

Recruitment to the survey took place through several channels:

1. We sent emails to the respondents who had left their email address in the 2022 and/or 2023 surveys with an information letter about the new survey and an invitation to participate (personal link). Two reminders were sent.
2. We prepared a short information video about the survey in Ukrainian and shared it in multiple social media and online fora for Ukrainians.[10]
3. Emails with information about the survey (and links to all social media posts) were sent to all reception centres and municipalities in Norway and relevant volunteer organisations, inviting them to distribute the survey. In this email, we also included a flyer with a QR code that could be printed and displayed in relevant places. All members of UKRAINETT, a network of researchers on Ukraine in Norway with large networks in the Ukrainian community, also received an email with information about the survey which they were asked to help distribute.
4. We sent emails to participants in the qualitative interviews, inviting them to answer and to share the link with their networks and with refugees in the reception centres.
5. IMDi, UDI, Nav and KS shared the survey through their networks.

[8] 41 respondents did not respond affirmatively to the statement 'Are you a Ukrainian who stays (or has stayed) in Norway as a result of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and who is willing to participate in the survey?' and were therefore removed from the rest of the questions in the survey.

[9] For later research purposes, we are also interested in the experiences of those who have left Norway, but they are not the focus of this report.

[10] The Facebook groups 'Ukrainske flyktkninger til Norge – including info/Біженці з України в Норвегії', 'Ukrainians in Norway (Українці у Норвегії)', 'Допомога біженцям у Бергені/Hjelp til ukrainske flyktninger i Bergen', 'Help Ukrainian refugees', 'Ukrainere i Bodø/Українці в Будо', 'Ukrainere i Horten/Українці в Хортені', 'Ukrainere i Fredrikstad/Українці у Фредкістаді', 'Ukrainske flyktninger i Stavanger/Українці в Ставангері', 'Ukrainere i Skien/Українці в Шиєні', 'Ukrainere i Egersund/Українці Егерсунда', 'Ukrainere i Bergen/Українці в Бергені', 'Ukrainske flyktninger i Asker/Українські біженці в Аскері', 'Ukrainere i Larvik/Українці у Ларвіку', 'Ukrainere i Molde/Українці в Мольде', 'Українці в Норвегії (Møre and Romsdal)', 'Ukrainere i Gjørvik og Toten/Українці в Йорвіку та Тотені', 'Українці | Осло, Норвегія (Ukrainere | Oslo, Norge)', 'Ukrainere i Tromsø/Українці в Тромсьо', 'Ukrainere i Lillestrøm/Українці у Лілестрьомі' and the Telegram chats 'Біженство Норвегія', 'Україна Норвегія разом', 'Українські біженці в Норвегії'.

4.2.2 Sample and methodological limitations

The survey is based on open recruitment and self-selection (as opposed to a random sample)[11]. With a non-random sample, there is limited control over who answers and who chooses *not* to answer. If the non-response is random, this is not a major problem, but if the sample is selective, the biases may affect the results and, thus, the possibility of generalisation. For example, a limitation with a non-random sample is that it is not possible to estimate the margin of errors (calculating how our sample differs from the general population of Ukrainian refugees in Norway) or determine whether there are biases in the sample compared to the population regarding relevant background factors.

Nevertheless, we are able to check and balance our sample based on certain background characteristics based on register data of the population. The population we want to study comprises Ukrainians over 18 years of age who fled to Norway on account of the Russian invasion in February 2022. UDI has provided statistics about the population at the time of the survey, making it possible to check whether our respondents differed significantly from the population on selected observable background characteristics.

Our survey had a slight overrepresentation of women compared with the overall population of Ukrainian refugees in Norway (62% of those 18+ years, against 68% in the survey). Certain age categories were also underrepresented in the survey; especially respondents in the 60+ age group. This probably stems from difficulties in recruiting elderly people because they are less present in the arenas where recruitment mostly took place (digital platforms, integration arenas such as introduction programmes, language training, etc.).

Since there are certain differences between our respondent sample and the population with regard to age and gender, we include weights for gender and age in the statistical analyses. Weighting is a correction technique and refers to statistical adjustments that are made to survey data to improve the accuracy of the survey estimates and compensate for survey nonresponse (Bethlehem 2008).

Table 4.1: Differences between surveyed population and registered applications for collective protection by October 2024. Weights applied for survey respondents.

	Number of applications			% of applications		% in survey		Weights	
	Total	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
18-29 yrs	14439	8550	5889	14.47	9.97	12.40	6.60	1.17	1.51
30-39 yrs	16778	10105	6673	17.11	11.30	22.90	11.30	0.75	1.00
40-49 yrs	12527	7737	4790	13.10	8.11	22.20	9.10	0.59	0.89
50-59 yrs	6599	4502	2097	7.62	3.55	8.20	3.50	0.93	1.01
60+ yrs	8728	5666	3062	9.59	5.18	2.50	1.20	3.84	4.32
Total	59071	36560	22511	61.89	38.11	68.30	31.70		

*Population: Data from UDI on applications for protection lodged by Ukrainian citizens after 24 February 2022.
Respondents: Respondents in the 2024 survey.

Table 4.1 shows that the 2024 survey had a slight underrepresentation of men and, especially of elderly, compared to the population of Ukrainian collective protection seekers in Norway. Since male and elderly respondents are underrepresented among our respondents,

[11] There has not been room within the budget of this project to conduct a survey based on a random sample.

their responses were weighted extra when calculating averages or percentages in the different analyses in the report.

It is also worth noting that in our survey (as described further in chapter 10.1), 30% reported to be employed, which corresponds with the official statistics on the share of Ukrainian refugees who are employed from SSB (2024) for October 2024. This indicates that our sample has a good balance regarding the sample size that are employed or not, which is a substantially important topic for this research project.

Despite these controls of the sample's representativeness, it is important to emphasise the limitations for generalizations with a non-random sample. This is, however, mainly an issue for descriptive statistics, and not for regression analyses.

Since we conducted different types of analysis on the survey data, the statistical methods used are described in the relevant chapters of this report.

4.2.3 Ethical reflections and measures for interviews with and surveys of vulnerable groups

The overall project – along with the specific data collections – has been registered and approved by the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (SIKT) (formerly NSD) and has followed the research ethics guidelines from the National Research Ethics Committee for Social Sciences and Humanities (NESH).

All interviewees and survey respondents were provided with a detailed consent form that contained general information about the research project, voluntary participation, the participants' rights in terms of withdrawing and the researcher's obligations with regard to data storage, etc. In the survey, respondents had to actively accept these conditions before answering the rest of the survey. The interviewees received their consent forms via personal emails and consented in writing or orally before the start of the interview. All interviewees received written information about the project and their rights as research participants in Ukrainian or Russian.

All survey respondents were informed that participation was voluntary and that the information they provided would be treated anonymously and on an aggregate level, so that no individuals could be identified. Interviewees were further informed about the voluntary nature of participation, that information which could identify them would not be used in the report, and that we would ensure their anonymity and integrity.

Throughout the analyses, we have taken care to treat the research data in ways that ensured confidentiality. Data from the survey and interviews have been stored on OsloMet's password-protected server, accessible only for researchers involved in the project. In this report, we have anonymised any information that might make it possible for individuals to be identified.

Ukrainians who have recently arrived in Norway often find themselves in a vulnerable situation. As researchers, we should take care not to add stress to an already difficult situation. Although Ukrainians' experiences with the war are not in focus in this study, such experiences could surface during the interviews. A difficult topic for this group could be family members and friends still in Ukraine. Thus, it was important for project researchers to be prepared for emotional reactions from the Ukrainian refugees. We believe that it has been an advantage that the researchers who conducted the interviews have substantial familiarity with Ukrainian contemporary history, culture and language, because such knowledge enhances their understanding of the situation of the interviewees.

Several research participants saw the interviews as a welcome opportunity to share their needs and experiences so that we could convey them to Norwegian authorities.

5 Who are the Ukrainians who fled to Norway?

What characterises the Ukrainian refugees in Norway in terms of background factors, such as gender, age, and education, work and region of residence prior to their arrival to Norway? What is their family situation in Norway and Ukraine, and did they have prior network in Norway? And are there differences between subgroups, particularly between those arriving in 2022 until 2024?

In this chapter, we present background statistics about the Ukrainian refugees in Norway. We first present the gender and age distribution, based on data from UDI. Then, based on the survey, we describe background factors such as their educational background, work experience, language skills and where they lived prior to February 2022. Finally, we analyse their current family situation, both in Norway and in Ukraine.

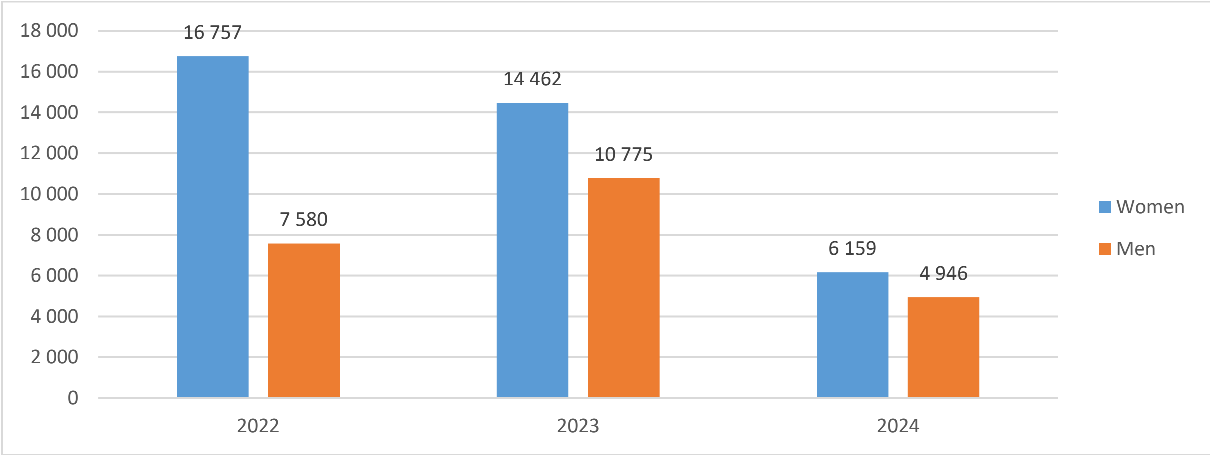
The main findings in this chapter are presented in the figures, but we have also conducted cross-tabulations of the main variables with relevant background variables to explore whether there are relevant subgroup differences (e.g., gender, age, etc.). We particularly focus on whether there are differences between arriving cohorts, meaning those who arrived in 2022, 2023 and 2024.

5.1 Gender composition

Although there were substantially more adult Ukrainian women arriving the initial months after the full-scale invasion in February 2022, there has become a more equal gender balance in most European countries (Hernes, Danielsen et al. 2023a).

As of October 2024, there were 57% women and 43% men in total among those who have applied for collective protection in Norway, including both children and adults. However, there have been different developments in the gender balance over time for adults and children.

Figure 5.1: Number of adult (18+ years) male and female protection applicants from Ukraine separated by men and women, 2022-2024 (until Oct) (N=59 071).

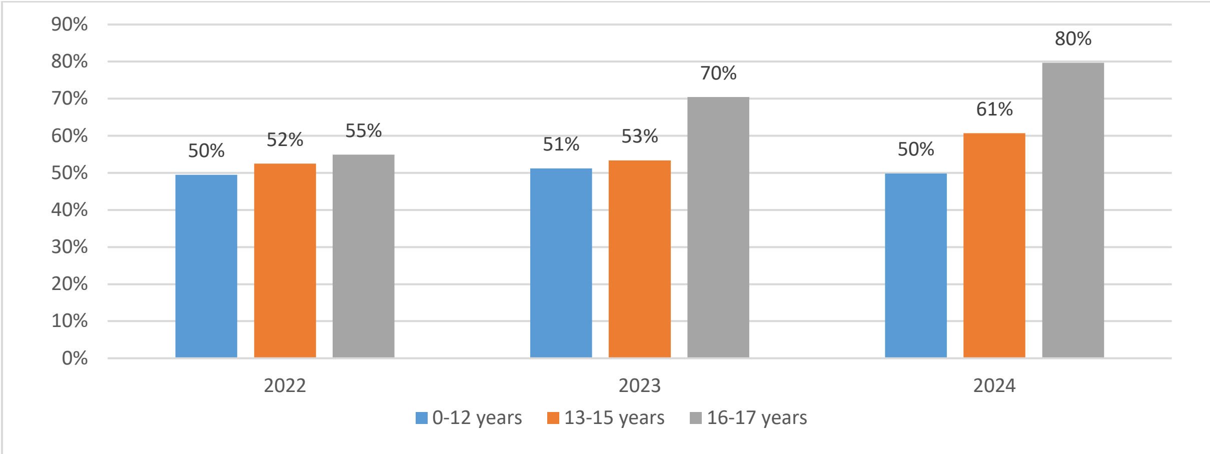


*Data: UDI (2024a).

For adults, figure 5.1 shows that there was a large majority of women in 2022, but that the gap has narrowed in 2023. In 2024, it is just a slight overweight of women compared to men.

We also see interesting developments in the gender balance for different age groups of children below 18 years.

Figure 5.2: Share of *male* children who applied for collective protection separated by age groups, 2022-2024 (until Oct) (N=27 155).



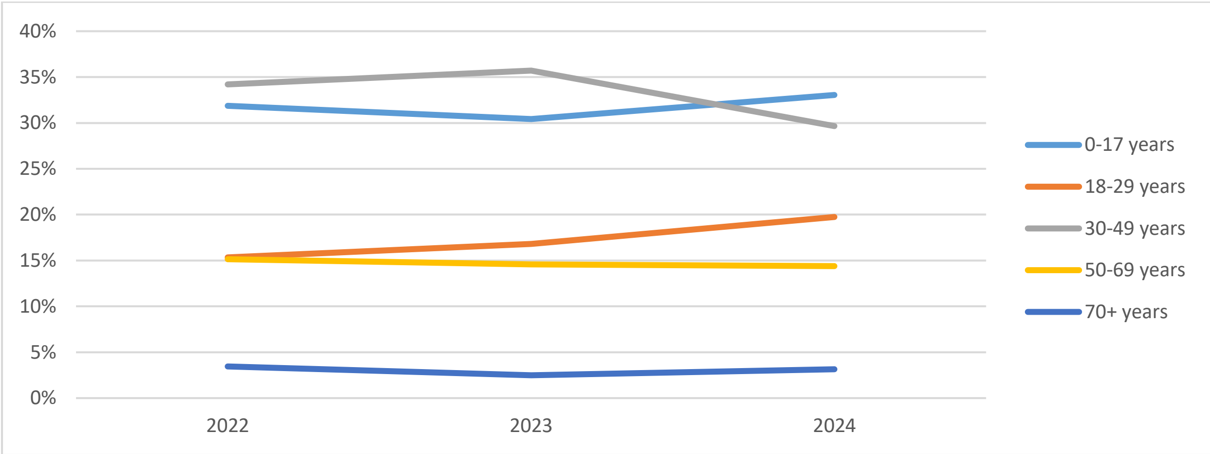
*Data: UDI (2024a).

Figure 5.2 shows that for the youngest age group (0-12 years), there has been an even and unchanged gender balance with about 50% boys in the period from 2022 to 2024. For those aged 13–15 years, boys also constituted about half in 2022 and 2023, but there is a small increase in the share of boys to 60% in 2024. However, for those aged 16–17 years, there is a substantial change. While this age group also had a relatively equal gender balance in 2022, it has steadily risen to 70% male applicants in 2023 and 80% in 2024. This increase may be interpreted in connection with the age limit for serving in the Ukrainian military which is 18 years. It may be plausible to assume that those aged 16–17 years move from Ukraine while it is still legal for them to leave the country (as there are travel restrictions for most male Ukrainians between 18-60 years).

5.2 Age composition

What is the age composition of Ukrainian refugees, and has it changed since February 2022?

Figure 5.3: Ukrainian refugees by age composition from 2022-2024 (N= 86 226).



*Data: UDI (2024a).

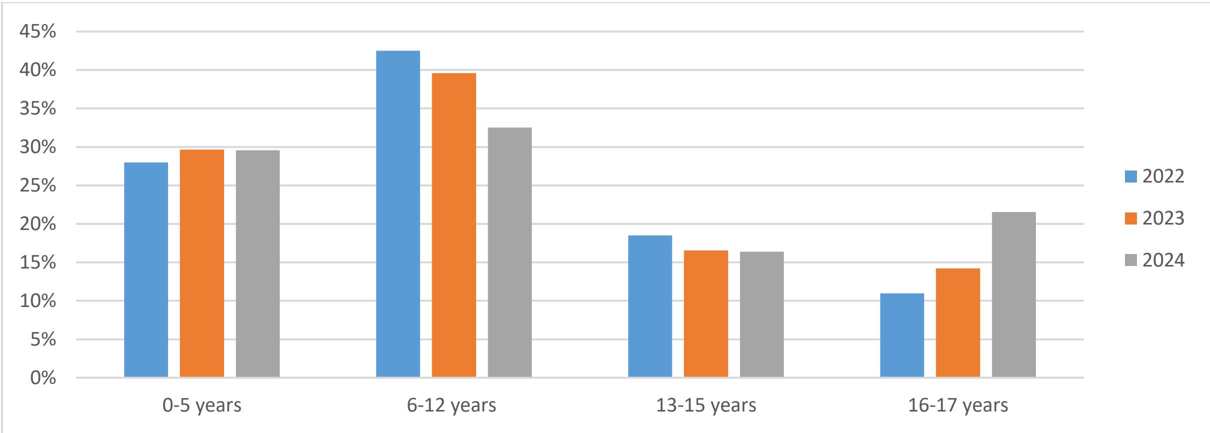
Figure 5.3 shows that there are minor changes in the share of different age groups over time. For the adults, there has been a small rise for those aged 18-29 years from 2022 to 2024; from 15 to 20%. The share aged 30-49 years decreased from 2023 to 2024, from 36% in

2023 to 30% in 2024. Otherwise, the two oldest age groups (50+ years) have remained very stable. The development in the age distribution is relatively similar for men and women.

5.2.1 Changes in the age composition for children

Of the total population of those who have applied for collective protection in Norway until October 2024, children under 18 years constitute about 32%.

Figure 5.4: Age distribution for children from 2022-2024 (N= 27.155).



*Data: UDI (2024a).

Figure 5.4 shows that the youngest age group has been relatively stable, while there has been a relative decline in the share of those aged 6–12 years from 2022 to 2024. The share of those aged 13–15 years has remained very stable of around 20%. However, there has been a large increase in the share of teenagers aged 16–17 years, from 11% in 2022 to 24% in 2024. As seen in figure 5.2 portraying gender differences for children over time (presented above), this increase is mostly driven by male teenagers.

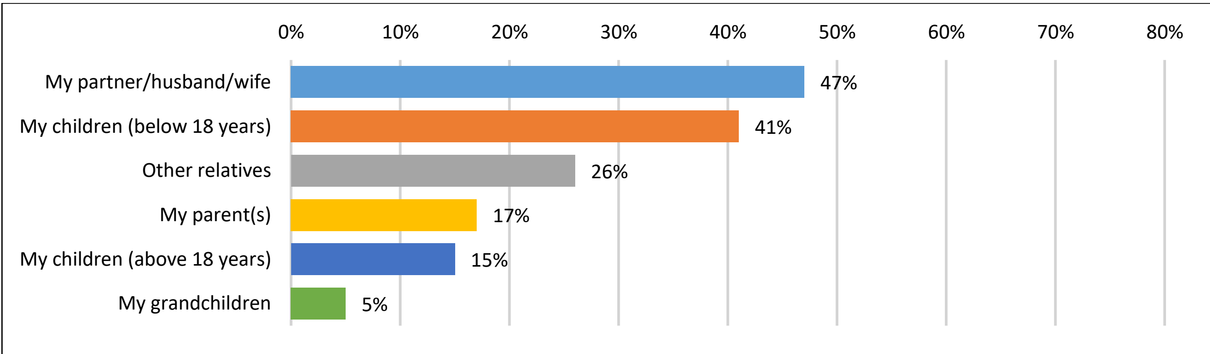
5.3 Family situation in Norway and Ukraine

What is the family situation for the Ukrainian refugees in Norway; what family members do they have in Norway, and do they have family members remaining in Ukraine?

According to our survey results, 41% of the respondents have children under 18 years. A lower share of the men is here with their children, 35% compared to 45% of the women. The majority of the parents have one or two children (85%).

6% of the respondents have children under 18 years that do not live with them in Norway.

Figure 5.5: Family in Norway (N=1547).

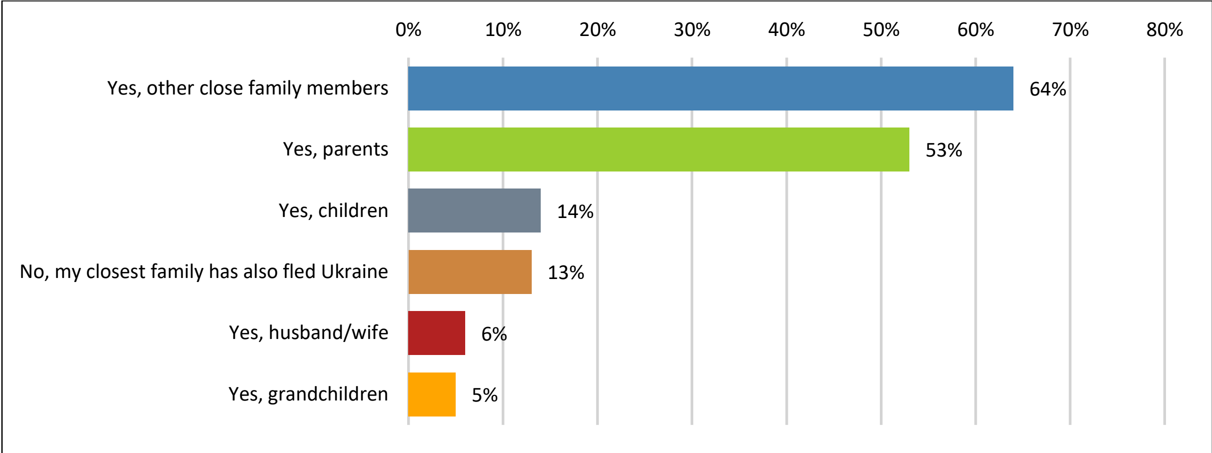


*Weighted by gender and age.

Figure 5.5 gives an overview of the respondents' current family situation in Norway. The majority of respondents (78%) have some relatives from Ukraine living in Norway (not portrayed in the figure). About half of the respondents are in Norway with their partner, and 41% with children below 18 years. A considerable share (both at 15-17%) has their parents or children aged 18 or older living in Norway, and 26% have more distant relatives.

But what family members are remaining in Ukraine?

Figure 5.6: Family remaining in Ukraine (N=1547).



*Weighted by gender and age.

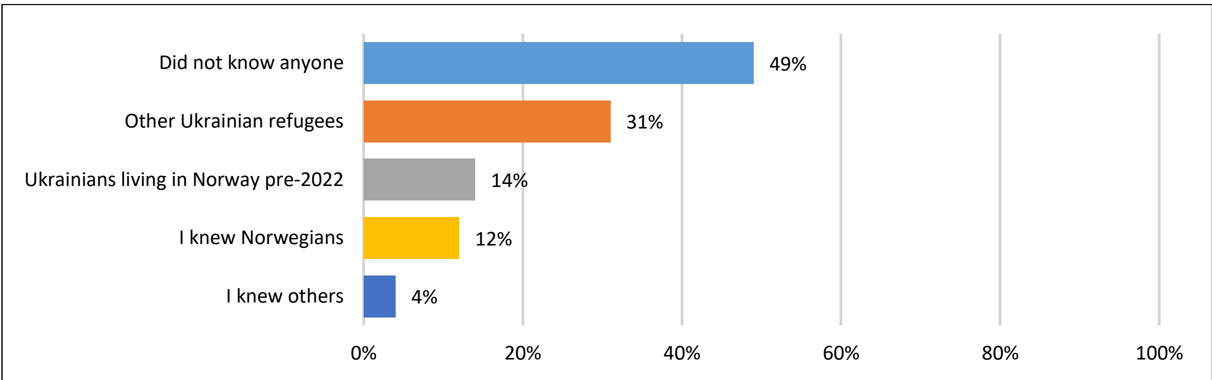
Most Ukrainian refugees have some family remaining in Ukraine, as figure 5.6 shows; only 13% answer that all their close family has fled Ukraine. Over half of the respondents have parents left in Ukraine and 14% have children remaining there (both above and below 18 years). Concerning the share having their partner left in Ukraine, we observe a clearly decreasing trend since 2022. In the 2022 survey, 24% reported having their partner left in Ukraine, while 11% reported this in 2023, and only 6% in the 2024 survey.

This decline could be caused by several trends: that more of those arriving after 2023 came together with their partner, that more people have got their partner to Norway since 2022, or that some of the women have later been divorced or lost their husband in the frontline.

5.4 Prior network in Norway

How many respondents had a pre-existing network in Norway before arrival, and what type of network was it?

Figure 5.7: Previous networks in Norway (multiple options possible) (N=1547).



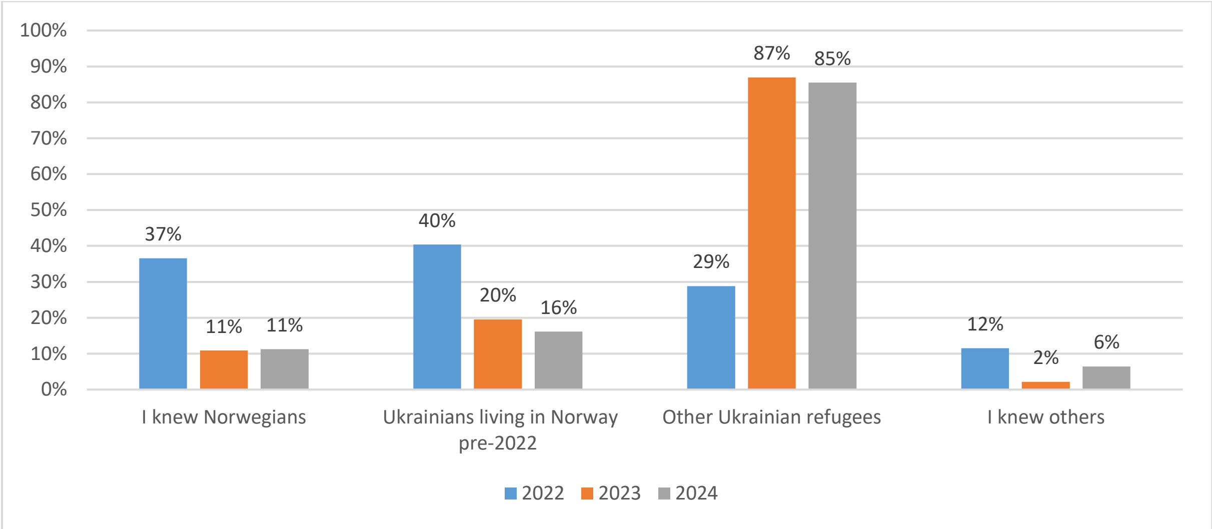
*Weighted by gender and age.

Figure 5.7 shows that half the respondents did not have a pre-existing network in Norway before they arrived. One third knew other Ukrainian refugees, and 12% knew Norwegians, and 14% Ukrainians who lived in Norway pre-2022.

There are some fluctuations across cohorts related to the share that did not know anyone before arrival. 48% of those arriving in 2022 did *not* have prior network in Norway, but a somewhat higher share answered the same among the 2023 cohort. Further, only 38% of those in arriving 2024 answered that they did *not* have a prior network in Norway.

However, there are large differences between cohorts concerning whether what type of prior network they had in Norway, as shown in Figure 5.8 which includes only those reporting to have a previous network in Norway before arrival.

Figure 5.8: Previous networks in Norway (N=758).



*Weighted by gender and age.

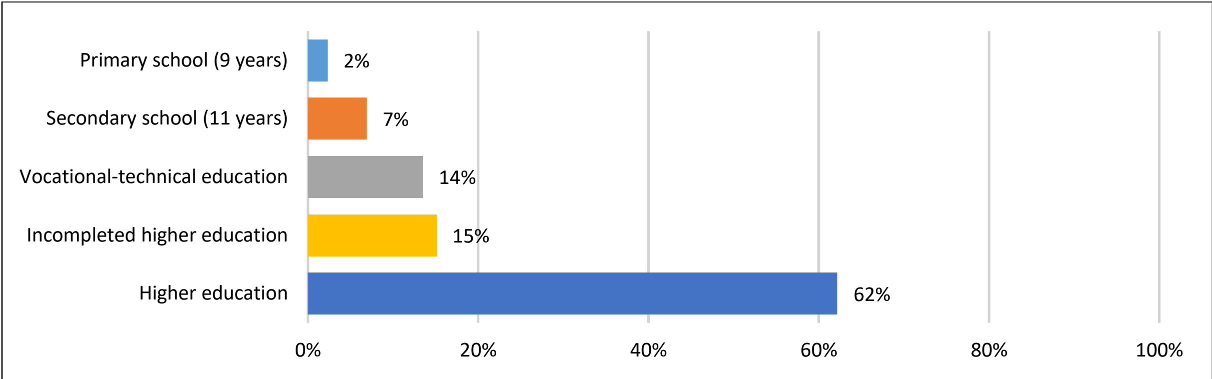
The figure shows that of those who arrived in 2022, 37% knew Norwegians, while only 11% reported this in the 2023 and 2024 cohorts. Similarly, over twice as many of those in the 2022 cohort knew Ukrainians who lived in Norway pre-2022. The predominant network in Norway for those arriving in 2023 and 2024 was other Ukrainian refugees, with 85-87% in the 2023 and 2024 cohort.

5.5 Previous education, work experience and language skills

What levels of education do the Ukrainian refugees in Norway have, and are there differences between cohorts?

Ukraine has a highly educated population. The length of compulsory education in Ukraine is nine years, and upper secondary education lasts for two years. The length of formal education is therefore 11 years (compared with 13 years in Norway).

Figure 5.9: Education level (N=1547).

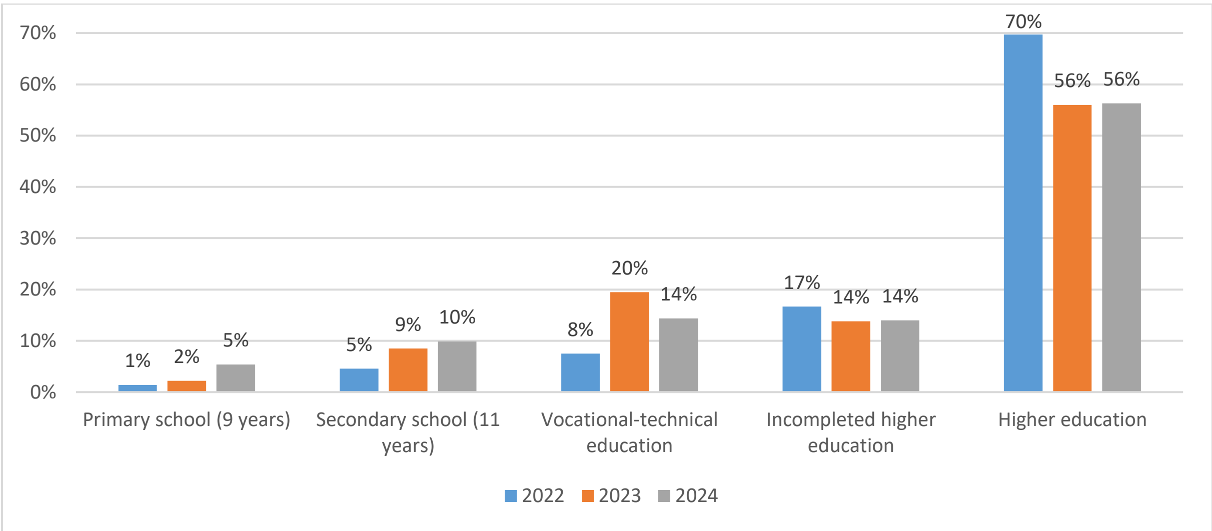


*Weighted by gender and age.

Figure 5.2 shows that a large share of Ukrainian refugees have higher education: 62% have completed higher education, a further 15% have incomplete higher education, and 14% have vocational-technical education. Only 2% of the respondents reported having only primary school. There are few differences between age groups and gender, with the exception of fewer persons in the youngest age group (18–25 years) who have started or completed higher education.

However, the educational composition of different cohorts (depending on year of arrival in Norway) varies.

Figure 5.10: Education level separated by time of arrival in Norway (N=1547).

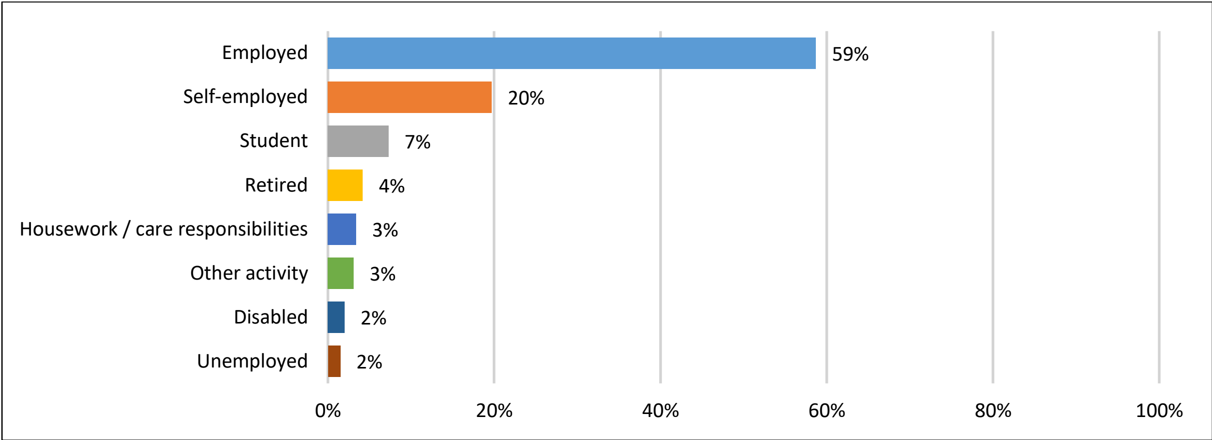


*Weighted by gender and age.

Figure 5.10 shows the differences in education levels between cohorts, depending on time of arrival in Norway. Generally, those arriving in 2022 had higher education levels than those arriving in 2023 and 2024. While 70% of those arriving in 2022 had completed higher education, the corresponding number is 56% for those arriving in 2023 and 2024.

For the 2023 cohort, there was a larger share that had vocational-technical education (almost 20%) than in the other two cohorts, while a larger share of those arriving in 2024 had only primary school, although still only 5%.

Figure 5.11: Main activity before arrival in Norway (N=1547).



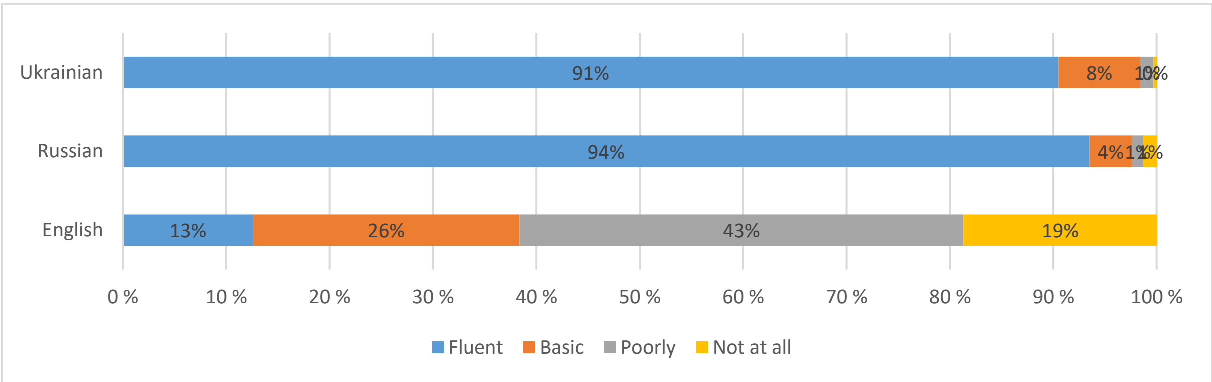
*Weighted by gender and age.

Figure 5.11 shows the main activity the respondents had at the time of the Russian full-scale invasion. As many as three in four were either employed (59%) or self-employed (20%), and 7% were students. Further, 4% were retirees, 3% homemakers, 2% disabled or unemployed.

When comparing cohorts, the 2024 cohort has fewer persons in the category employed, but a higher share who answered self-employed or student than the 2022 and 2023 cohorts. The similar pattern is apparent for those who came from the western part of Ukraine. A lower share was employed, but a higher share was self-employed or students. There is also a higher share that arrived from West Ukraine that ticked off that they were disabled, 7% compared to below 2% of those from the other areas.

In a follow-up question, we asked whether they had used their education in previous work in Ukraine. About one-third answered no, while two-thirds had used their previous education. Not unexpectedly, among those aged 18-29 years there was a higher share that had not used their education in their job (only 47%).

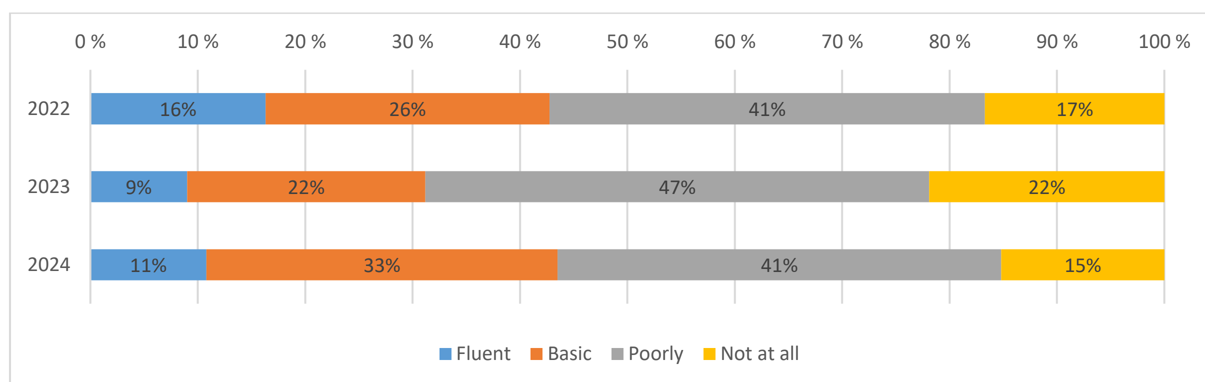
Figure 5.12: Language proficiency (Ukrainian, Russian, English) (N=1547).



*Weighted by gender and age.

Figure 5.12 shows that there are slightly more people who speak Russian (94%) than Ukrainian (91%) fluently, and 98% answer that they speak both Russian and Ukrainian at a minimum basic level. Their English levels vary much more: only 13% reported speaking English fluently, 26% assessed their own English skills as basic, and almost two-thirds (62%) reported speaking English poorly or not at all. The English proficiency substantially decreases with age. Among those over 50 years, over 80% answer that they speak poorly or not at all. Comparatively, just over 40% speak poorly or not at all in the youngest age group (18-29 years).

Figure 5.13: English proficiency separated by year of arrival (N=1547).



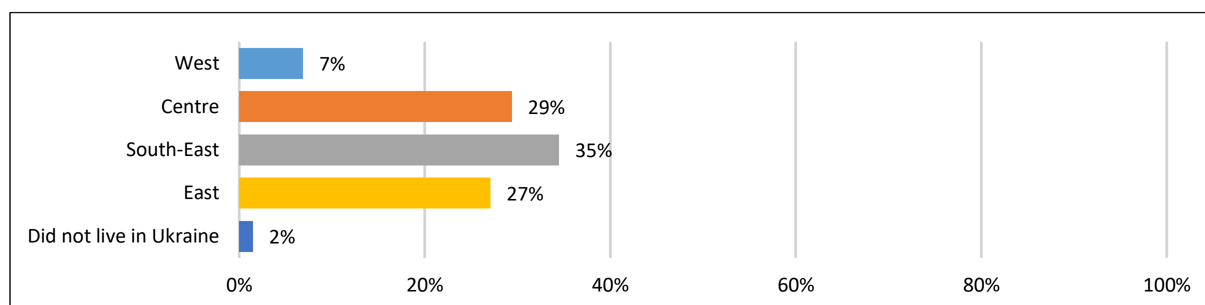
*Weighted by gender and age.

Figure 5.13 shows that the 2022 cohort had better English knowledge than the 2023 cohort. However, the 2024 cohort has better English proficiency than the 2023 cohort. Although the 2024 cohort has a lower share than the 2022 cohort who speak English fluently, the 2022 and 2024 cohorts have very similar shares for those who speak at minimum basic level (43-44%), poorly (both at 41%) and 'not at all' at 15-17%.

5.6 Region of residence in Ukraine before the full-scale invasion

Where did the Ukrainians refugees who fled to Norway live before February 2022?

Figure 5.14: Residence in Ukraine before the full-scale Russian invasion February 2022 (N=1547).



*Weighted by gender and age.

Figure 5.14 shows that, before arriving in Norway, the majority of Ukrainian refugees in Norway resided in the eastern or south-eastern parts of Ukraine (the parts that have been hardest hit by the full-scale invasion), just over 60%. Just below 30% lived in the central part of Ukraine. Only 7% resided in the western part of Ukraine (see the footnote below for the distribution of oblasts into different regions).[12]

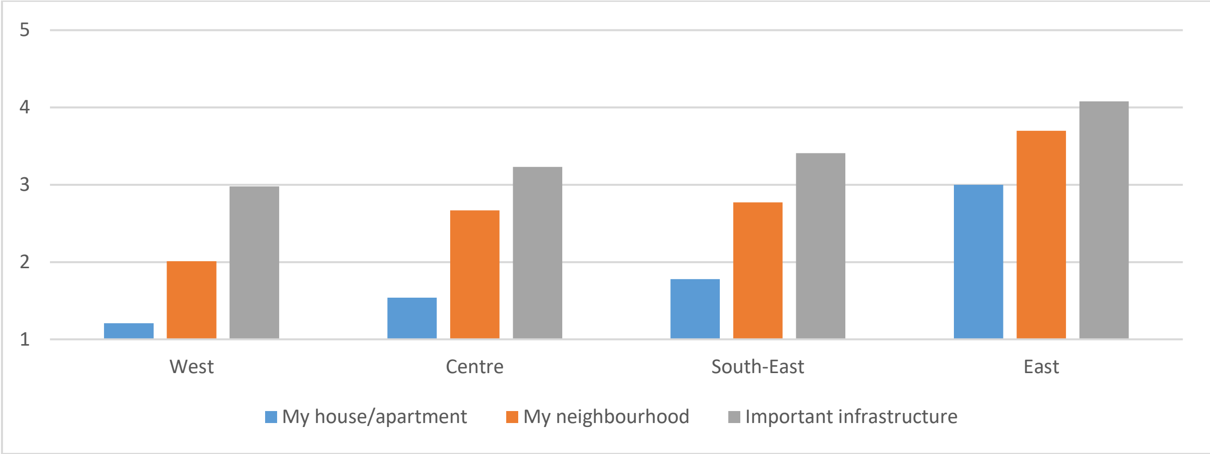
When comparing differences between cohorts (arrival in 2022, 2023 and 2024), we find that there was a higher share in the 2022 cohort that came from the East, and that there has been an increase in persons from the South-East. There are no major differences between men and women, but a larger share of the male refugees fled from the eastern parts of

[12] The following oblasts are included in the different parts of Ukraine in the figure (with number of respondents in parenthesis): **West**: Volyn (1%), Ivano-Frankivsk (1%), Lviv (2%), Rivne (1%), Ternopil (1%), Khmelnytskyi (2%) and Chernivtsi (2%). **Centre**: Vinnytsia (2%), Zhytomyr (1%), Kyiv oblast (10%), Kirovohrad (1%), Poltava (2%), Sumy (1%), Cherkasy (1%), Chernihiv (2%), and Kyiv city (7%). **South-east**: Dnipropetrovsk (6%), Zaporizhia (6%), Mykolaiv (2%), Odesa (8%), Kherson (11%), and Crimea (1%). **East**: Donetsk (14%), Kharkiv (10%), and Luhansk (3%).

Ukraine (30% compared with 26% of women) than central parts (26% men versus 32% women).

Further analysis (not portrayed in the figure) shows that a majority (59%) reported that, at the time of the full-scale invasion, they lived in a place which had not later been occupied by Russia. Another 12% lived in a place which had previously been occupied but which was no longer occupied, while 26% lived in a place which was occupied by Russia at the time of the survey. However, there are large differences in this regard depending on the region of residence in Ukraine prior arrival.

Figure 5.15: Assessment of destruction separated by region of residence in Ukraine before February 2022 (N=1547).



*Scale: 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Complete destruction).

Figure 5.15 shows the respondents' assessment of the statement 'The war has caused severe physical damage to…' the three alternatives: 1) their house/apartment, 2) neighbourhood and 3) important infrastructure (e.g., schools, roads, power supply etc.) separated by region of residence in Ukraine before February 2022. They were asked about the level of destruction for these three alternatives on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (complete destruction).

Generally, we see that more people answer that there has been damage to infrastructure or neighbourhoods than to their house and apartment. Not surprisingly, there are large differences between regions, with those from the east reporting more destruction across all parameters.

5.7 Summary

In this chapter, we have analysed the distribution and development of background characteristics and human capital, including gender, age, family situation in Norway and Ukraine, prior network in Norway, prior education, work experience and language skills, and lastly, the region of residence in Ukraine before February 2022.

Although there were substantially more adult Ukrainian women arriving the first year after the full-scale invasion, the share of men has steadily increased, and in 2024, there was just a slight overweight of women. Concerning the age distribution, we see only minor changes over time, but there is a small rise for those aged 18-29 years, and a small decline for the those aged 30-49 years.

However, we see a change in the age distribution for children. There has been a relative decrease in arrivals in the age group 6–12 years from 2022 to 2024, and a corresponding increase in the share of teenagers aged 16–17 years. In this latter group, there is also a high increase in the share of male teenagers. One assumption for this development is that more

16–17-year-olds move from Ukraine while it is still legal for them to leave the country (because of the travel restrictions for most male Ukrainians between 18-60 years).

Most Ukrainian refugees have some relatives living in Norway (78%). About half of the respondents are in Norway with their partner, and 41% with children below 18 years.

Although the majority has family in Norway, most Ukrainian refugees also have some close family remaining in Ukraine. Over half have parents left in Ukraine and 14% have their children remaining there. We see a clearly decreasing trend since 2022 concerning the share having their partner left in Ukraine: 24% reported having their partner left in Ukraine in our 2022 survey while only 6% report this in the 2024 survey.

Concerning prior network in Norway, half of the respondents did *not* have a pre-existing network in Norway. One third knew other Ukrainian refugees, and 12-14% knew Norwegians or Ukrainians who lived in Norway pre-2022. Those who arrived in the initial phase more often had a prior Norwegian network, while those who arrived after 2023 mostly knew other Ukrainian refugees prior to arrival.

Concerning prior qualifications, almost 80% worked before arriving in Norway. Most Ukrainian refugees also have higher education: 62% have completed higher education, a further 15% have incomplete higher education. 14% have vocational-technical education. The education levels were highest among the 2022 cohort, but the levels for the 2023 and 2024 cohorts are rather similar.

The refugees' knowledge of English is limited. Only 38% speak at least basic English. Although we saw a decline in the English levels for the 2023 cohort compared to the 2022 cohort, we find that those arriving in 2024 have almost the same English levels as the first-year arrivals.

The majority of the Ukrainian refugees in Norway previously lived in Eastern or South-Eastern parts of Ukraine (60%), i.e., areas that have been most affected by the war. Just under 40% came from territories that previously had been, or currently were, occupied by Russian forces.

6 How and why did they come to Norway?

Did the Ukrainian refugees live in other countries before arriving in Norway? And why did they choose Norway as a destination country?

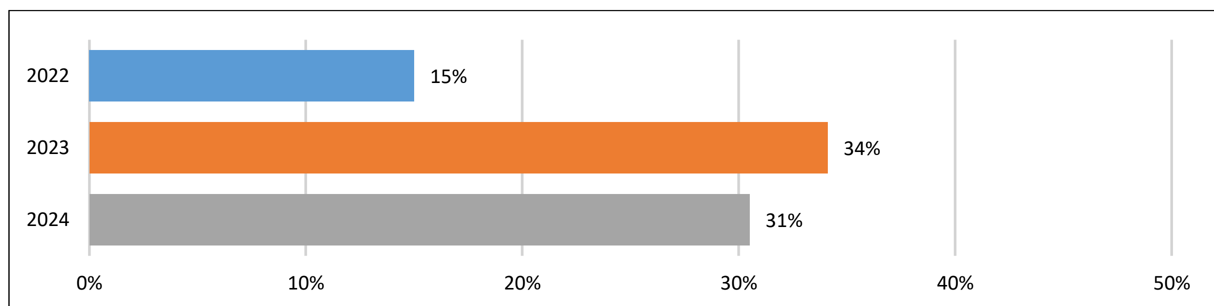
In this chapter, we first document how many Ukrainian refugees lived in other countries before arriving in Norway and describe differences between cohorts and what countries they arrived from. We then explore the different reasons for why the Ukrainian refugees came to Norway.

6.1 Arriving in Norway: directly or after a stay in another country?

How many Ukrainian refugees stayed in other countries before coming to Norway?

Overall, while most Ukrainian refugees (75%) came directly to Norway, one in four stayed (not just transited) in other countries before their arrival in Norway. However, this has become more common for cohorts arriving in 2023 and 2024 than for those that arrived in 2022, shortly after the outbreak of the full-scale invasion, as shown in the Figure 6.1 below.

Figure 6.1: Percentage that stayed in other countries on their way to Norway, separated by year of arrival (N=1547).



*Weighted by gender and age.

The figure shows that the share of those who stayed (and not just in transit) in other countries before arriving in Norway has more than doubled when comparing those who arrived in 2022, with those who arrived in 2023 and 2024. Still, there is a small decline from 2023 and 2024 in the share that came from another transit country.

Of those who stayed in other countries on their way to Norway, the most common country for such an intermittent stay was Poland, reported by almost 40%, followed by Germany, Romania and Lithuania (of around 5-7%). About 10% also answered other non-European country. Very few respondents came from other Nordic countries, below 1% from Sweden, Denmark and Finland respectively.

Those who had stayed in other countries before arriving in Norway were also asked in an open question why they had chosen to move from this/these countries. The responses revealed that there were both push factors (factors in the previous country of residence) that urged the respondents to move, but also pull factors (attraction of Norway) that were the main reasons for moving.

Among the push factors were hardship in finding accommodation or bad housing conditions, lack of work opportunities, low levels of salaries and high living costs in relation to the income: 'Since the cost of housing, for example, is 400-450 euros, and the salary level is about 700 euros' (respondent, survey). Issues with access to education for children were also mentioned by some. Lack of medical care for people, especially children, with special needs was another theme. Others brought up lack of integration measures and language

courses in the country they had first stayed in. Others had experienced poor treatment at work and some mentioned discrimination as a reason for moving onwards.

There were also respondents who did not feel safe in the countries they had first stayed*:* 'I was afraid that Poland would be invaded'. Some respondents mentioned local support for Russia as a contributing factor.

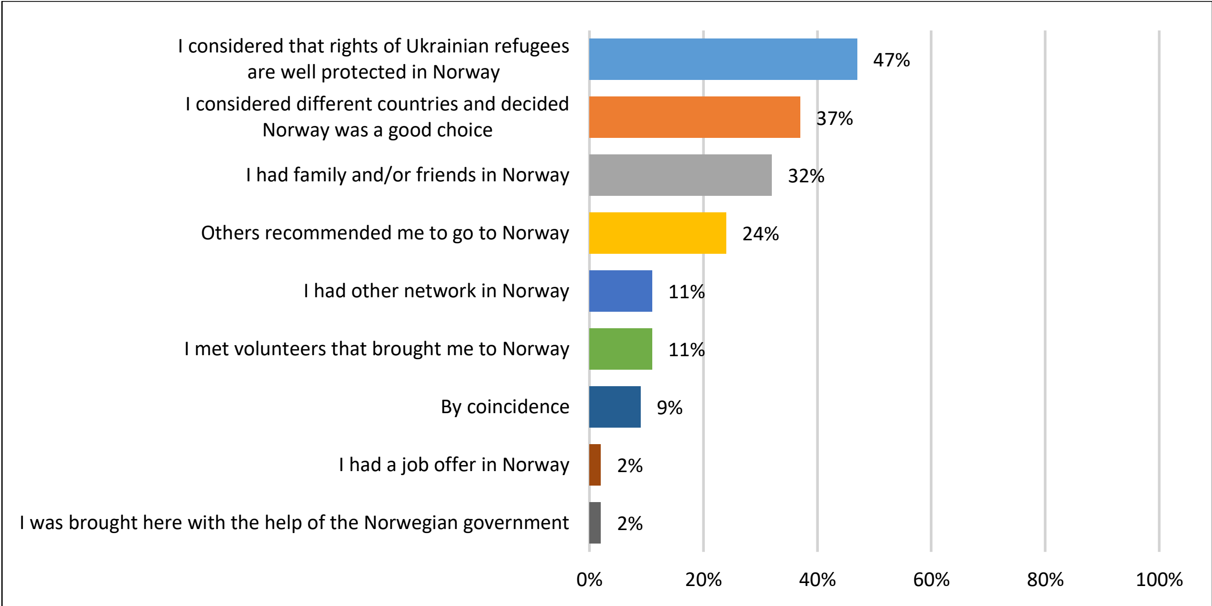
Among the pull factors were family unification, where respondents wanted to reunite with family having settled in Norway: 'My husband went to Norway to be with his eldest daughter, and my daughter and I temporarily lived with my brother's family'. Others had been offered a job in Norway, or they had friends or relatives in the country who could help them. Several mentioned that their stay in other countries was from the outset meant to be temporary, and they had always planned to travel on to Norway: 'It was a transit country for us, but our stay there lasted a bit longer than we had planned.'

A significant number of respondents also mentioned specific aspects of Norway and Norwegian society, including support for Ukrainians and opportunities for a good life for themselves and/or their children. These factors were similar to those mentioned by other respondents as reasons for choosing Norway and are described in the following section.

6.2 Why Norway?

We also asked all the respondents the reasons they had for choosing Norway as a destination country.

Figure 6.2: Reasons reported for coming to Norway (multiple options possible) (N=1592).



*Weighted by gender and age.
**Those who answered, 'I don't know' (1%) and 'Other reason' (8%) are not portrayed in the figure.

Figure 6.2 shows that almost half (47%) of the respondents chose Norway because they considered that refugees' rights are well protected in this country, and just over one-third had considered different countries but decided that Norway would be the best choice. About one third chose Norway because they already had family or friends living here and another 11% mentioned other network as a reason for choosing Norway. About one in ten answered that they came to Norway simply by chance, or because they were brought here by volunteers.

When analysing subgroups, we see that a larger share of men, those below 40 years, and those who arrived in 2023 and 2024 answered that they considered different countries and

decided that Norway was a good choice. Among the 2023 and 2024 cohorts, about two thirds answered that they considered the rights of Ukrainian refugees are well protected in Norway as a reason for choosing Norway, compared to only one-third in the 2022 cohort. While those arriving in 2022 must have made a rather rapid decision to flee, those arriving in 2023 and 2024 had more time to think about conditions in different destination countries.

8% reported 'other reason'. In this group, a variety of reasons were mentioned, such as the safety and well-being of their children ('Maximum safety for children'), the desire for good education and healthcare ('The best inclusive education system in the world'), and the opportunity for family reunification ('Here was my husband's sister, who had received housing. She invited us with the children to stay with her'). Some emphasised Norway's high living standards, democratic society, and the trust they had in the country ('I feel safe in Norway as a woman, and I trust this country a lot'). Others were influenced by their spouses' or their own previous experiences in Norway ('My husband had got a job in Norway'). Specific needs like medical evacuation or treatment were highlighted by a few ('The medical evacuation program that my husband participated in').

Furthermore, long-standing dreams to live in Norway were also mentioned by several respondents. One respondent highlighted that:

> I had a 'fool's dream' – to live in Norway. This country has always been an ideal for me. It has magical nature, pleasant and cultured people, you feel safe, and most importantly, you feel like a HUMAN (male, age 20s).

Additionally, some chose Norway due to its distance from conflict zones: 'We wanted to be further away from Russia'.

For those who answered minimum one of the following options: 1) that they considered the rights in Norway to be good, 2) had considered different countries, and/or 3) was recommended to go to Norway by others, we asked a follow-up question about what were the main things that influenced their decision to go to Norway.

Figure 6.3: Think back to the time before you arrived. What were the main things that influenced your decision to go to Norway? (Multiple options possible) (N= 1018).

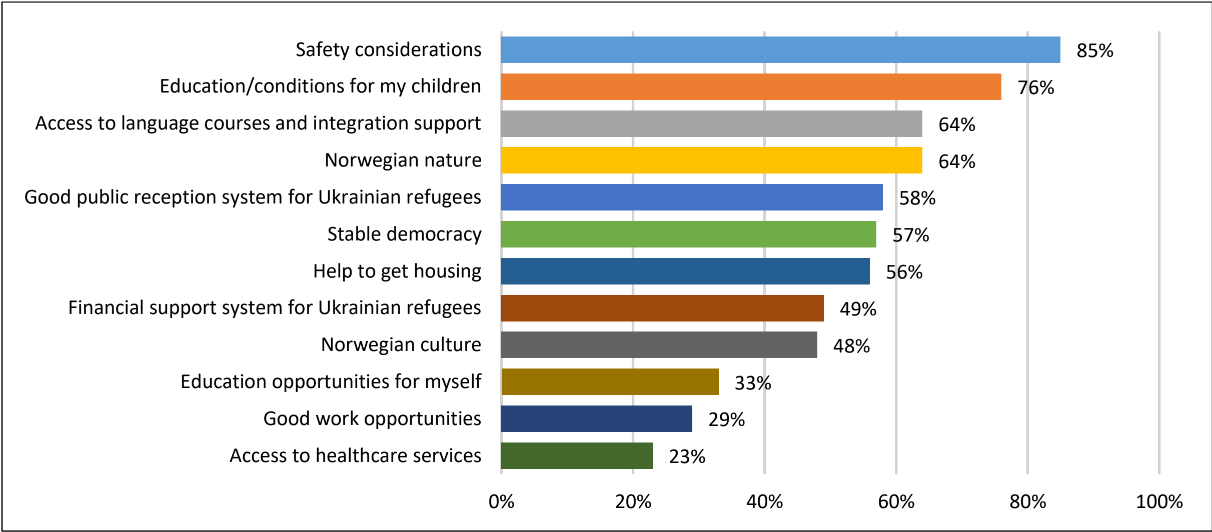


Figure 6.3 shows that safety considerations were the absolute main reason for choosing Norway. For parents, 76% highlighted that education for their children was important[13] Generally, the Norwegian reception and integration system is highlighted by many, either the

[13] This share is calculated based on those who had children in Norway.

access to language course and integration support (64%), good public support system for Ukrainian refugees (58%), help to get housing (56%) and financial support system (56%).

Other important reasons are Norwegian society and country characteristics. Two thirds mentioned Norwegian nature as a reason. Norway being a stable democracy (57%) and the Norwegian culture (48%) were also ticked off by many respondents.

Of the 6% who ticked for 'additional or other reason' we found a great variation, such as experience from earlier visits to Norway, access to good medical support, unparalleled social policies, good conditions for arriving with pets, LGBT+ rights, reflections around children's safety, and bad experiences from transit countries.

There are many similarities between subgroups, but some interesting differences. Men more often answered education or work opportunities than women (about 10 ppt.), and they also highlighted a stable democracy and Norwegian nature more often. Those in cohort 2023 and 2024 have generally ticked off on more options (respectively on average 5.1 and 5.7 items) than those in the 2022 cohort (only 2.5 items on average), which could indicate that those who arrived later may have made more thorough assessments of different countries before travelling.

6.3 Summary

In this chapter, we have investigated whether the Ukrainian refugees came directly to Norway, and their reasons for choosing Norway as a destination country.

Three out of four respondents arrived directly in Norway, while one in four stayed (not just transited) in other countries before their arrival in Norway. Poland was by far the most common country of stay before coming to Norway (with 40%), followed by Germany, Romania and Lithuania. Intermittent stays were less common for those arriving in 2022, but the share having stayed in other countries prior to arrival in Norway has been stable – and actually declined somewhat – from 2023 to 2024.

We also asked the Ukrainian refugees why they chose Norway as a destination country. Network was an important factor for those who had prior networks. Almost half of respondents chose Norway because they considered that refugees' rights were well protected in this country, and this is more prominent among those who arrived after 2023 than for the initial arrivals. This may indicate that while those arriving in 2022 must have made a rather rapid decision to flee, those arriving in 2023 and 2024 had more time to think about conditions in different destination countries. One in four also answered that others had recommended them to come to Norway.

For those who had considered different options or been recommended to come to Norway, we further investigated what were the main factors that influenced their decision to go to Norway. Safety considerations was the absolute main reason for choosing Norway, and most parents also highlighted education and good conditions for their children. Otherwise, the Norwegian reception and integration system is mentioned by many, including access to language courses and integration support, a good public support system for Ukrainian refugees, help to get housing and Norway's financial support system.

Other important reasons mentioned are related to Norwegian society and country characteristics, such as Norwegian nature and culture, and that Norway is a stable democracy.

In the category 'other reasons' and open answers, we also found great variation of reasons, such as experience from earlier visits to Norway, access to medical support, LGBT+ rights, and bad experiences from transit countries.

7 Overall assessment of reception, actors and services

What are the Ukrainian refugees' overall experiences with their reception in Norway? How do they assess specific actors and services, and have their overall impressions changed since 2022 and 2023?

The descriptive analyses of the survey results in this chapter are presented as the average of the Ukrainian refugees' assessments, mostly on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 is a positive assessment. In the analyses of the descriptive statistics, we also calculated the standard deviation, to measure variation in the respondents' responses[14]. We do not portray the standard deviations in the figures, but comment in the text below if there are particularly large standard deviations.

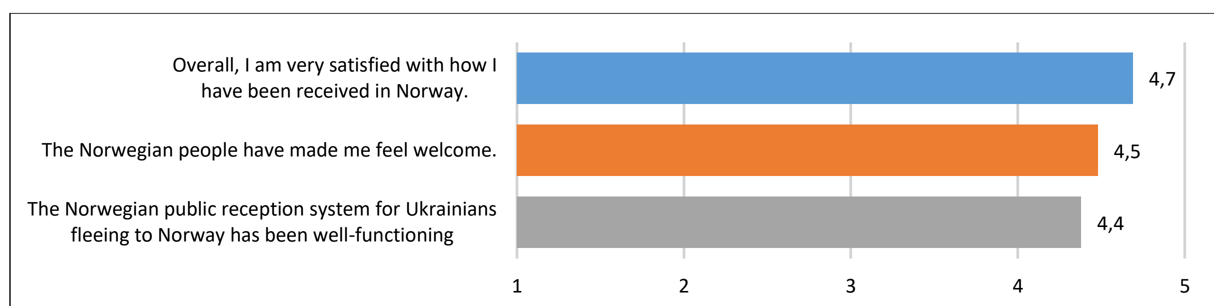
The figures in this chapter present the results from the 2024 survey, but when relevant, we also shortly comment if there have been changes compared to the 2023 survey and if there are subgroup differences.

We first examine the Ukrainians' overall assessment of their reception in Norway, before we examine and compare their assessments of national, local and non-government actors and various types of services. Since the main focus in this study is on settlement and the integration process, the overall assessment of these services is presented in this chapter to compare them with other services, but these topics will be covered in depth in chapters 8–12. However, at the end of this chapter, we present shorter analyses of selected topics that have been explored in the survey and interviews, namely information, healthcare services, economic assistance, and interpreting services.

7.1 Ukrainians are generally very satisfied with their reception in Norway

In the survey, we first asked the respondents to give an overall assessment of their reception in Norway.

Figure 7.1: Assessment of overall experience in Norway (N=1547).



*Means and standard deviations. Scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).
**Weighted by gender and age.

Figure 7.1 shows that the respondents are very satisfied with their overall reception in Norway, with mean scores ranging between 4.4 and 4.7 on a scale from 1 to 5. The scores are almost identical with the 2023 survey, which also showed very positive assessments.

[14] The standard deviations represent the average distance from the mean, and serves as a measure of the spread, or dispersion, of the distribution of answers.

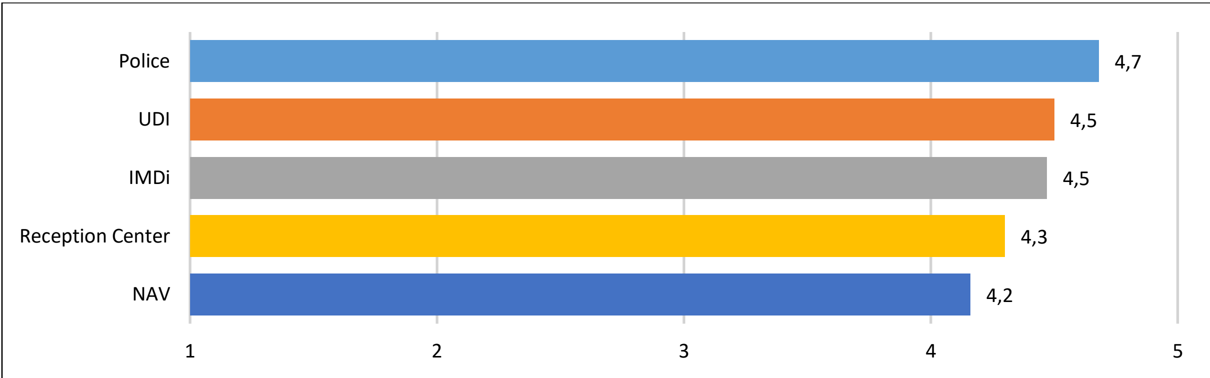
To identify potential differences between subgroups of refugees, we conducted a multiple regression analysis (not shown here).[15] Although such differences are generally moderate, certain categories of refugees are more likely to report satisfaction with their reception than others. One influencing factor is the year of arrival in Norway: refugees who arrived in 2023, and particularly those who arrived in 2024, report higher levels of satisfaction compared to those who arrived in 2022. As expected, unemployed respondents provide less positive assessments than those who are employed or participating in the introduction programme. Older respondents also tend to be more satisfied than those in younger age groups. While proficiency in Norwegian is positively associated with satisfaction, proficiency in English has the opposite effect. This finding suggests that individuals with English skills may have had higher expectations for rapid integration into Norwegian society. No statistically significant differences were found between men and women, respondents with varying levels of education, or between those who had or lacked a network in Norway upon arrival.

We also analysed changes in satisfaction levels among the same respondents who had participated in the surveys also in 2022 and 2023. While a considerable share reported improvements in their assessments of how they had been received between 2022 and 2023, the responses from those who participated in both the 2023 and 2024 surveys indicated a high degree of stability, maintaining an already very high level of satisfaction.

7.2 Positive overall assessment of public and civil society actors

The respondents were asked about different government and non-government actors they may have been in contact with during their stay in Norway.

Figure 7.2: Assessment of public actors (N = 1042-1341[16]).



*Means and standard deviations. Scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied).
**Weighted by gender and age.
***Respondents indicating that they had not been in contact with or did not have any opinion about these actors are excluded from the analyses.

Figure 7.2 illustrates very positive assessments of all actors, with especially high scores for the police, UDI and IMDi, with all over 4.5 out of 5 possible. It should be stressed that reception centres and Nav also receive very good scores. Again, the assessments are almost identical to the 2023 survey.

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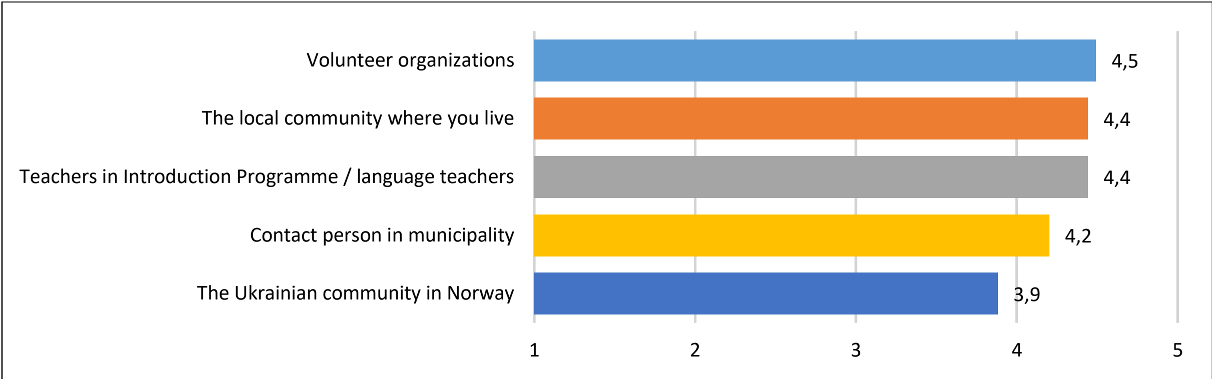
[15] After checking for the internal consistency of the three variables measuring general satisfaction with the reception in Norway, we computed a satisfaction index based on the score on the three satisfaction variables. This index was used as the dependent variable in the regression model.

[16] UDI (N=1167), IMDi (N=1042), Reception centre (N=1337), the police (N=1278), Nav (N=1341)

Figure 7.3: Assessment of local and non-government actors (N = 798-1416[17]).



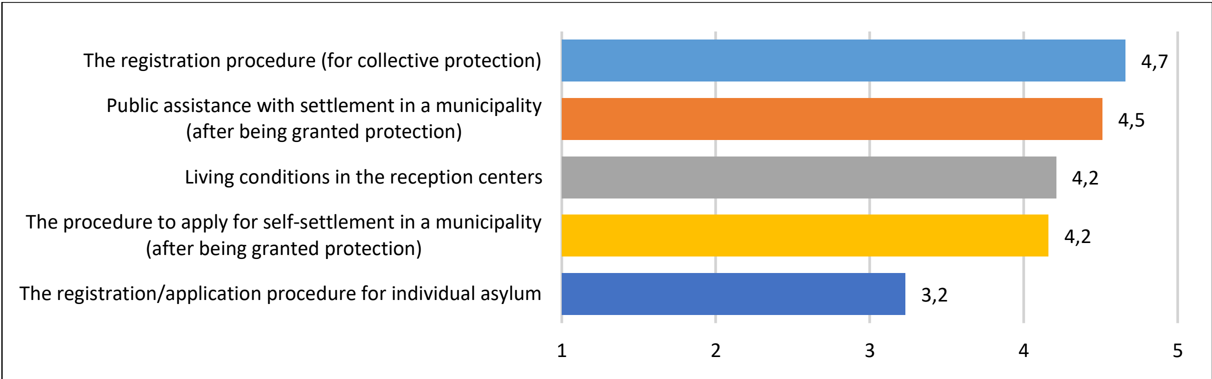
*Means and standard deviations. Scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied).
**Weighted by gender and age.
***Respondents indicating that they had not been in contact with or did not have any opinion about these actors are excluded from the analyses.

Figure 7.3 shows that all local and non-governmental actors get good assessments. There are mostly none or very minor differences (0-0.1) from the 2023 survey, but the Ukrainian community in Norway get a somewhat lower score (3.9) compared to the 2023 survey (4.1) and the 2022 survey (4.4).

7.3 More varying assessments of services and procedures

We further asked survey respondents to assess the services and procedures that they may have been in contact with after their arrival in Norway.

Figure 7.4: Assessment of services and procedures 1 (N = 39-1495[18]).



*Means and standard deviations. Scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied).
**Those answering ‘not relevant’ or ‘don’t know’ are excluded from the figure.
***Weighted by gender and age.

Figure 7.4 shows the respondents’ assessment of services related to the registration, reception and settlement. Overall – and similarly to the 2023 survey – most services get very good assessments, with minimum 4.2 out of 5, including the registration procedure for

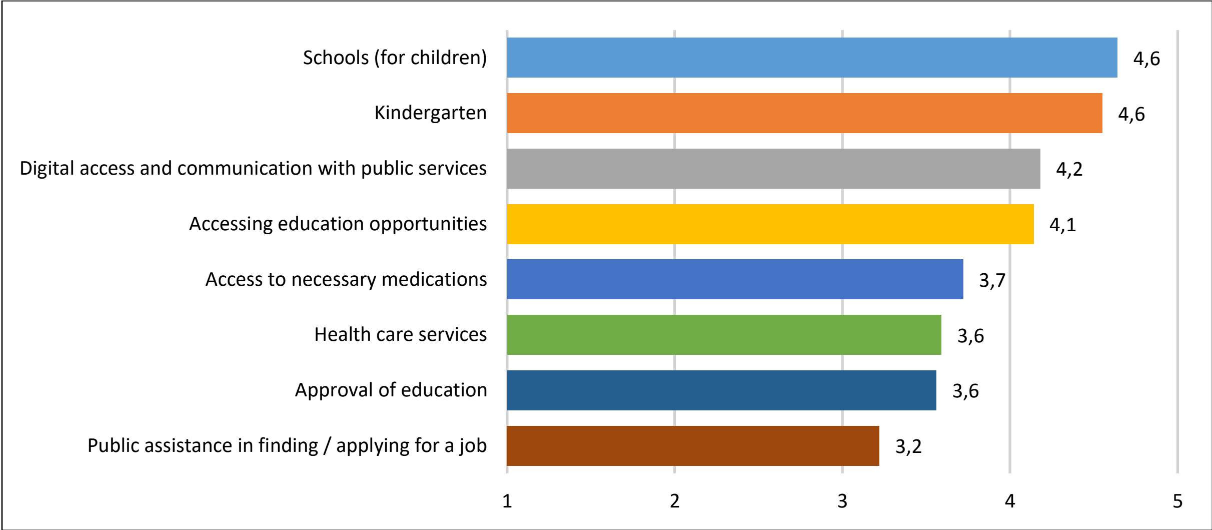
[17] Contact person in municipality (N=1416), volunteer organizations (N=798), the Ukrainian community in Norway (N=954), the local community (N=1194), teachers in introduction programme/language teachers (N=1345)

[18] The registration procedure for collective protection (N=1495), the registration/application procedure for individual asylum (N=39), living conditions in the reception centres (N=1333), public assistance with settlement in a municipality (N=1364), the procedure to apply for self-settlement in a municipality (N=429).

collective protection, public assistance with settlement, living conditions in the municipality and procedure to apply for self-settlement.

However, not all applicants are eligible for collective protection, and some must apply for individual asylum. This group only constitute a small share of the respondents (only 39 respondents in total), but it shows a substantially lower score (3.2) than for the other services.

Figure 7.5: Assessment of services and procedures 2 (N = 360-1401[19]).



*Means and standard deviations. Scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied).
**Those answering 'not relevant' or 'don't know' are excluded from the figure.
***Weighted by gender and age.

Figure 7.5 shows that schools and kindergarten (again) get very high scores of 4.6, with digital access and communication and access to education also ranked above 4 out of 5.

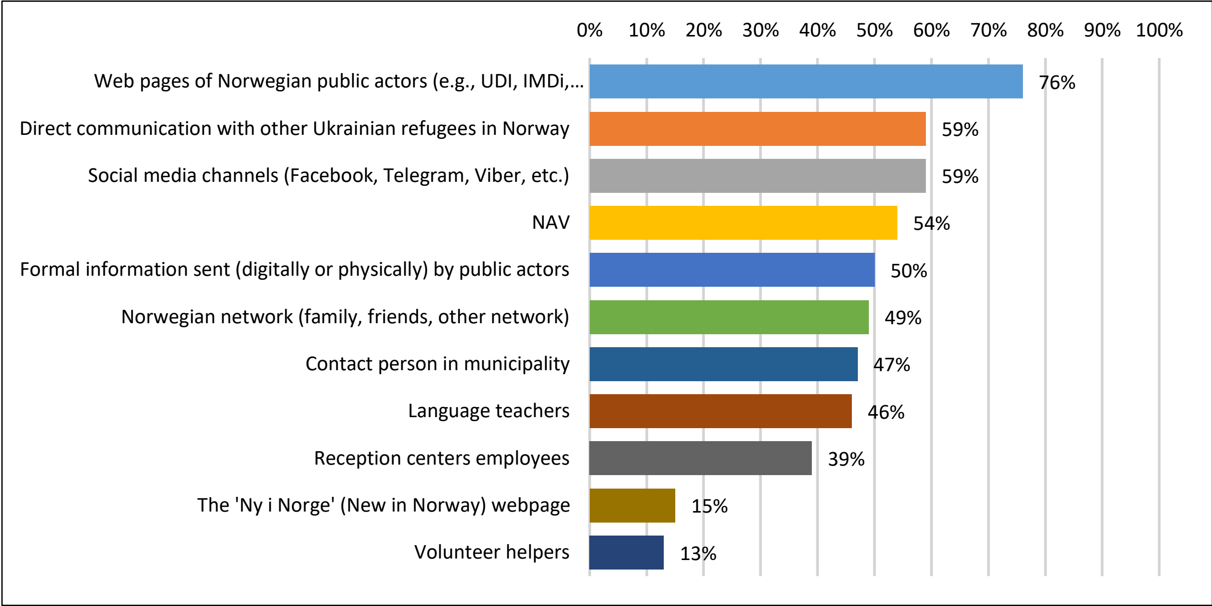
Like in the previous surveys in 2022 and 2023, healthcare services (3,7), access to necessary medication (3.6) and recognition of education (3,6) are rated below the other services on the list. Once again, assistance in finding or applying for a job receives the lowest score just above the middle of the scale.

7.4 Assessment of information provided by the public authorities

In the initial period after the full-scale invasion in February 2022, obtaining information was highlighted as one of the biggest challenges (Hernes, Deineko et al. 2022). However, the 2023 report showed that there had been an overall improvement from 2022 to 2023. What main sources do the Ukrainian refugees use, and how do they assess the information provided to them about different rights and services?

[19] Schools (N=686), accessing education opportunities (N=1073), approval of education (N=863), kindergarten (N=360), health care services (N=1401), access to necessary medications (N=1193), public assistance in finding / applying for a job (N=1152), digital access and communication with public services (N=1272).

Figure 7.6: Use of information sources (multiple options possible) (N=1547).



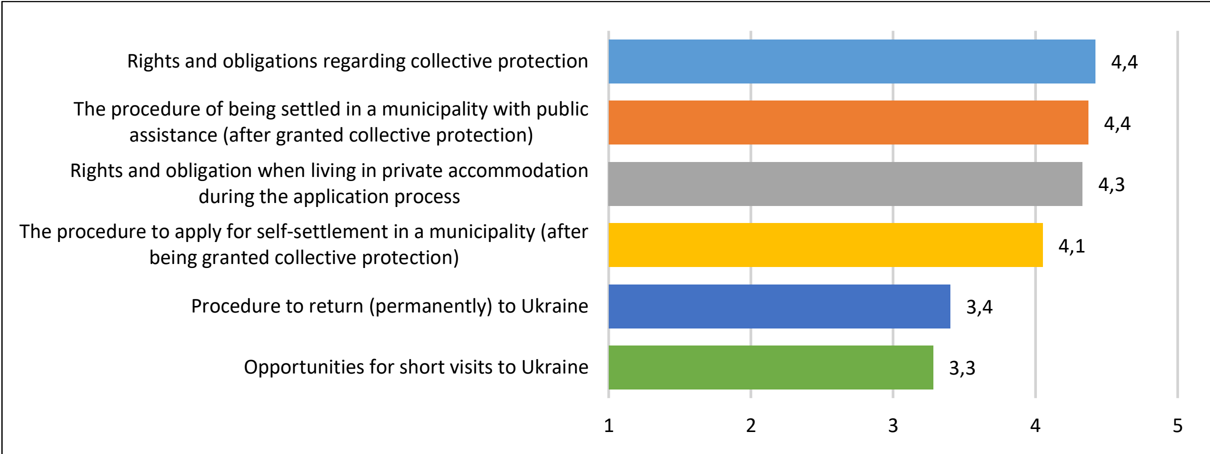
*Weighted by gender and age.

Figure 7.6 shows that Ukrainian refugees use a variety of sources for obtaining the information they need. The large majority (76%) use the websites of Norwegian public actors. Further, almost 60% answer that they get information through other Ukrainian refugees and social media channels. Furthermore, about half answer that they use different contact persons at Nav, in the municipality, language teachers and other formal information they receive from public actors. About 50% also receive information from their Norwegian network.

In June 2023, the new webpage 'New in Norway' (*Ny i Norge*) was launched, a website that combines information from different national actors about where they could find information in Ukrainian and Russian about rights, procedures and services after arrival to Norway. Only 15% answered that they used this as a source to find information. Not surprisingly, the younger age groups use digital sources more frequently than the elderly.

However, how do they assess whether they have received sufficient information about different types of services in Norway?

Figure 7.7: Sufficiency of information about rights and obligations related to permits, reception and settlement (N = 748-1494[20]).



*Means and standard deviations. Scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).
**Weighted by gender and age.
***The figure excludes those who have not been in contact with the respective service or procedure and those responding, 'don't know'.

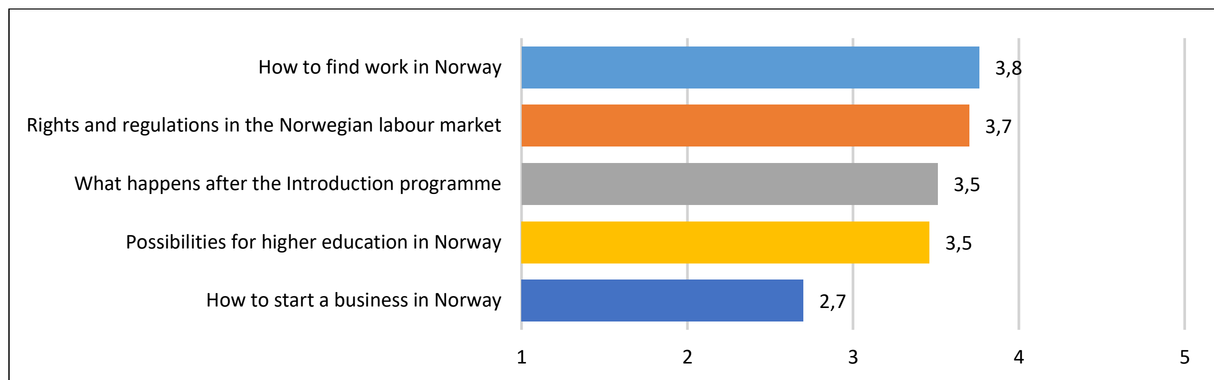
Figure 7.7 shows that most of the respondents confirm having received sufficient information regarding various services and procedures for registration and settlement, with all these services receiving an average score of 4 or higher out of 5. For these subjects, there has been little change from the 2023 and 2024 survey.

Information about the procedure for returning permanently to Ukraine or opportunities for short visits to Ukraine received substantially lower scores (topics not covered in the 2023 survey), and had significantly higher standard deviations, indicating a more diverse assessment of the information provided on these two subjects.

Regarding short visits to Ukraine, several respondents expressed frustration in open-ended questions of the questionnaire, as they would not know, until their return to Norway, whether their visit would be considered 'necessary' by the authorities. As a result, they requested clearer criteria for such visits, which could at least partly explain the lower score on this item.

[20] Rights and obligations regarding collective protection (N=1494), rights and obligation when living in private accommodation (N=1117), the procedure of being settled in a municipality with public assistance (N=1413), the procedure to apply for self-settlement (N=748), procedure to return (permanently) to Ukraine (N=912), opportunities for short visits to Ukraine (N=1182).

Figure 7.8: Sufficiency of information about work and education in Norway (N = 449-1547[21]).



*Means and standard deviations. Scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).
**Weighted by gender and age.
***The figure excludes those who have not been in contact with the respective service or procedure and those responding, 'don't know'.

Finally, respondents were asked whether they had found or received sufficient information about services and procedure about the labour market and education in Norway. Generally, figure 7.8 shows that there are lower scores for these services than for the other services presented above, implying that there is room for improvement. The score for information about how to find work and rights and regulations in the Norwegian labour market is 3.8 and 3.7, while information about what happens after the introduction programme and possibilities for higher education in Norway get somewhat lower scores (3.5). Similarly to the 2023 survey, the respondents ranked information about how to start a business in Norway the lowest, with an average score of 2.7, and with a large standard deviation.

7.5 Healthcare and psychological services

30% of the respondents reported that they themselves, or someone in their close family in Norway, has a severe health issue. From the assessments in chapter 7.3, we see that healthcare services (3.6) and access to medicine (3.7) get a lower score than many of the other services assessed.

Although many of the interviewees were satisfied with the healthcare services provided to them, there is significant variation, and some prevailing challenges continue. Both the 2022 and 2023 reports pointed to a 'culture clash' between the Norwegian and Ukrainian cultures regarding the threshold to see a doctor or a specialist and access to or use of medicine. The findings from the qualitative interviews in 2024 indicate that this culture clash is still apparent. One of the interviewees summarised her experience with the high threshold to accessing medication in Norway and expressed her disappointment with the process:

> If something hurts, you first take paracetamol. And if it still hurts and the paracetamol doesn't help, that's when it becomes a different issue. Then you need to get examined. But the problem is, it is very difficult to achieve. (N6)

Despite having access to general practitioners in Norway, interviewees often felt dissatisfied with the treatment they received. Some noted that their underlying health issues were not thoroughly examined, with general practitioners focusing solely on symptom management rather than investigating root causes. Many reported having to insist on additional tests to address their concerns. To fill this gap, some interviewees sought guidance from Ukrainian doctors or arranged medical tests from Ukraine:

[21] How to find work in Norway (N=1292), rights and regulations in the Norwegian labour market (N=1280), possibilities for higher education (N=960), what happens after the introduction programme (N=1205), how to start a business in Norway (N=817).

> A man reached out to the general practitioner; he received almost no help. We had to send him medication from Ukraine – antibiotics – that he took because he had an infection, but he couldn't even insist on getting any tests done from his general practitioner. Seeing this situation, I didn't seek help at all. (N5)

Some interviewees expressed concern that the prohibition on returning to Ukraine while holding collective protection in Norway (see chapter 3.1 for a description) could significantly impact their ability to access necessary medical treatments. Many were accustomed to consulting with their doctors back home, and some voiced worries about losing this essential support due to the travel restrictions:

> I don't feel comfortable, and this restriction on travel to Ukraine creates even more uncertainty, as I'm often at a loss about how to solve my issues now. In the past, I could at least go back home and receive some help there. For example, every time I went to my general practitioner here for help with my skin irritation, they only prescribed hormonal creams, which didn't help with the symptoms at all. Finally, I contacted my Ukrainian doctor, who suggested it might be a hormonal imbalance and advised a different treatment approach with specific medications. I'm grateful to my general practitioner here for simply transcribing the prescription from my Ukrainian doctor, finding suitable alternatives, and prescribing them for me here, which helped ease some symptoms. But I still haven't been referred for a hormonal check-up, which might address the underlying issue. (N1)

Another issue raised was the long waiting time to see specialists. One interviewee said that she was informed to wait an entire year just to get an appointment with a dermatologist:

> I had issues with a rash on my body. The doctor examined me, prescribed an ointment, and said she'd refer me to a dermatologist. I received the referral... but it's scheduled for May 2025, a year from now. The waiting times to see specialists are disastrous. (N6)

In this and former rounds of interviews, several interviewees have noted that dental services are expensive in Norway and that they have needed extra financial support from Nav to cover dentist bills. In some municipalities, Ukrainians have been offered dental services up to a certain sum, which has been much appreciated. In the interviews this year, some expressed dissatisfaction with the actual dental services provided. Some noted that teeth had been extracted rather than treated: 'Here's an example with dental care: a friend had a tooth that could have been treated, but it was simply extracted instead, and no alternative options were offered' (N1). While the interviewee did not provide any explanation for this treatment, it might be due to financial reasons, as tooth extraction often is the most affordable option for addressing the problem.

One interviewee even mentioned feeling somewhat disconnected from the healthcare system in Norway and tried to resolve health issues on their own, without seeking medical support: 'I don't go to doctors because I've already realised what Norway is like. Here, you have to constantly take care of your health, but not at a medical facility' (N2).

Meanwhile, as noted in the 2023 report, cases involving the treatment of serious illnesses often show a high level of satisfaction, both in terms of medical care and the compassion shown by healthcare professionals. One interviewee, whose mother underwent surgery and was in the ICU, said that she was not only offered a room to stay overnight, but also experienced exceptional care and attention from both doctors and medical staff in Norway:

> At the medical facility, they found a room for me to stay in. My mother was in the ICU, and I stayed in the room next to hers. They did everything they could to help. They brought in translators and provided support – holding her hand and comforting her. The standards of care were very high. (N3)

7.6 Psychological assistance

Many municipalities raise the issue that many of those who arrive from Ukraine are in need of psychological services. This concern is also raised in a report from the Public Health Institute (FHI 2023) that investigated Ukrainian refugees' self-assessed health (both

physically and psychologically). Our study does not have psychological health as an explicit topic (and it is not directly asked about in the interviews). However, in the survey, we asked the respondents about whether they had needed – and if so, received – psychological services in Norway.

Figure 7.9: Have you been in need of psychological services in Norway? (N=1547).

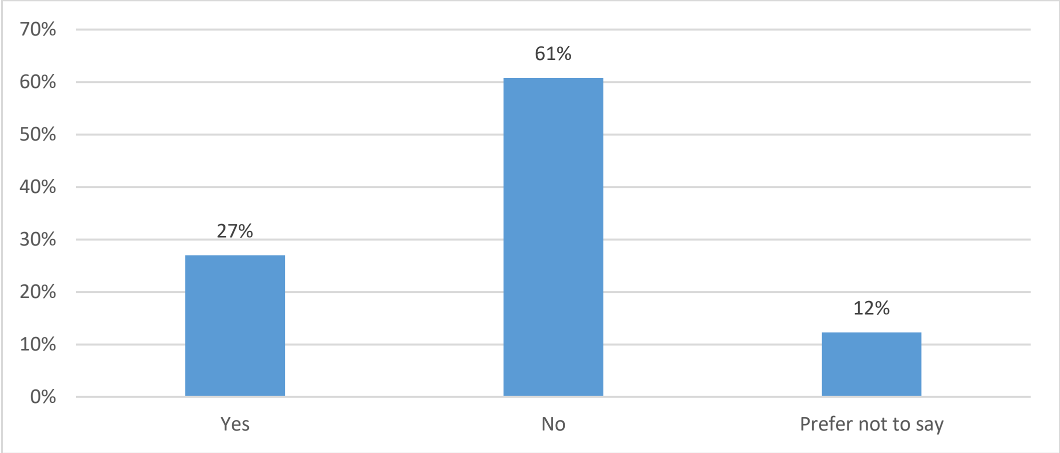


Figure 7.9 shows that about one fourth state that they have needed psychological services in Norway, while about one in ten 'prefer not to say'. A higher share of those in the youngest age groups answer that they have needed psychological services in Norway than the older age groups. Interestingly, there is a higher share of those who arrived in 2022 who say that they have needed psychological services (32%), followed by 2023 (26%) and only 14% of those who arrived in 2024.

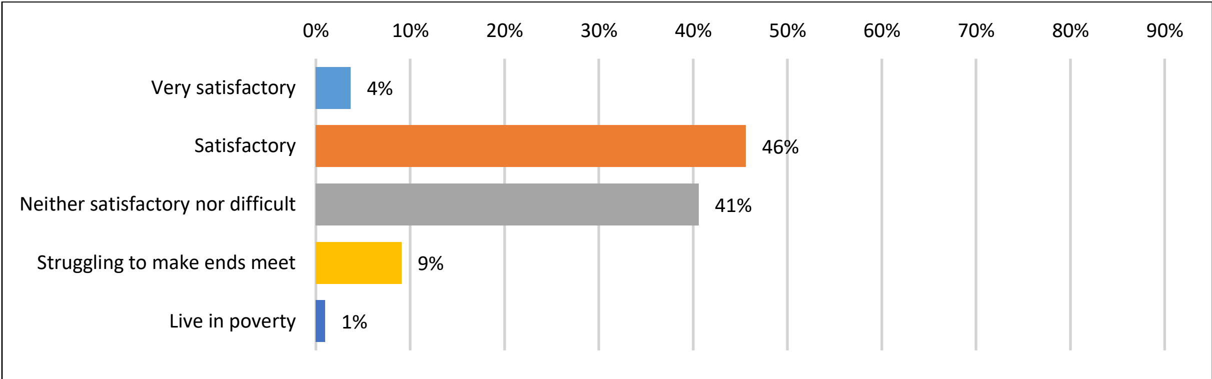
For those who answered that they had needed psychological services, we asked a follow-up question of whether they had received such services. Over half responded that they had not, about 40% said yes, while about 10% preferred not to say. There was no difference between men and women, but those over 60 years answered to a higher degree that they had not received such services. Also, 70% of those who arrived in 2024 had not received psychological help, implying that it may be less frequently available for those who still live in reception centres compared to those who have been settled in municipalities.

7.7 Economic situation

As described in chapter 3.4, Ukrainian refugees are entitled to the same financial assistance as other asylum seekers and refugees in Norway, but there have been some general restrictions the last year. However, it is important to emphasise that many of the new financial restrictions are benefits that only apply to a limited target group and do not affect the majority of Ukrainian refugees in Norway (e.g. targeted restrictions for dental care support for those aged 19-25 years, for couples without children in the introduction programme and benefits related to birth and adoption). So how do the Ukrainian refugees assess their own financial situation in Norway?

In the survey, we first asked about their family's current financial situation in Norway. 30% answered that they were self-sufficient, while the rest received (partial) financial or housing support from the public. Very few – only 1% – received (partial) financial or housing support from family/other network/volunteers. Further, we asked the respondents to assess their family's financial situation in Norway.

Figure 7.10: Assessment of household's current economic situation (N=1547).



*Weighted by gender and age.
**The 2.4% who answered 'hard to say/prefer not to answer' are not included in the figure.

Figure 7.10 shows that half of the respondents report that their household's current economic situation is satisfactory (with only 4% answering 'very satisfactory'), while 41% report that it is neither satisfactory nor difficult. One in ten is struggling to make ends meet, and 1% say that they live in poverty. The numbers are very similar to the 2023 survey, and there are very few differences between gender, age groups or where they live in Norway.

We also did additional analysis to see if there were differences between the financial situation and main status (employed, introduction programme participant, retired etc.). We transformed the variable to a scale ranging from 1 (live in poverty) to 5 (very satisfactory). By comparing the means on the scale, we found that those currently living in reception centres (who are entitled to lower levels of financial assistance) on average had a lower score – just below 3 – than other Ukrainian refugees (3.4). When comparing groups based on their main status, the highest scores were given by retired (3.7) and those who were employed (3.6), the lowest by home workers (3.0), disabled (3.1), unemployed and those with remote work in Ukraine (3.2). Those in the introduction programme gave the average score of 3.4. Whether or not the respondent has children does not seem to affect the subjective assessment of the household's economy much.

The qualitative interviews provide more insight into the differing financial situations of Ukrainian refugees and what they base their assessment on. Some interviewees who received employment scheme benefits (*tiltakspenger*) found that the payments were enough for covering food and necessities, but not to cover unexpected expenses such as dentist. Others reported that they had very expensive housing. What remained after paying for the house was often not enough to sustain the family and/or the sum provided in support was not enough to cover the apartment in addition to other expenses. One mentioned that: 'After paying for the house, half should remain. But you can't live on that. Minus the electricity bill. So, it's unrealistic. You have to apply to Nav again' (C6). Another one pointed out that:

> I always have to write to Nav that I need more money because the benefit doesn't cover everything. I can't pay for my apartment. So, every month, I write to Nav that I need more money. (C2)

A woman living together with a relative noted that it was much easier since they were two people, both receiving employment scheme benefits. If she had lived alone, it would have been more difficult: 'If a person lives alone, they get the minimum and that's it. So, it's much harder for one person' (N1).

As noted also in the 2023 report, several interviewees were very appreciative of the support they get from Husbanken, which is a state institution that may provide a housing allowance: a

means-tested government grant for people with low incomes and high housing expenses.[22] In the Oslo area, people noted that it was very helpful that travels with the travel agency Ruter was still for free for people with asylum seeker status (*asylsøkerbevis*) or a Ukrainian passport. In other municipalities, some interviewees reported that Nav covered the monthly travel pass for Ukrainians who lived far from language training and schools.

People who live together with their elderly parents also said that it helped a lot that Nav covers part of the rent since they are recognised as separate families:

> Nav helps my mom. Because of this, we have enough for everything. At first, we didn't know about this because no one told us it was possible. Some knowledgeable Ukrainians figured it out and shared it with us. But for some time, we lived only on my salary, and it was very tight. Now, because half of the rent is compensated, things are okay. (N7)

In 2024, we see that several of our interviewees had started working or found more permanent work. To what extent people felt more comfortable financially among those who started working varied. Some interviewees stated that this has brought a sense of economic independence they had been seeking here in Norway: 'And this year, I found a full-time job. It's very hard, but now I'm able to cover my own housing and expenses' (N2). Other pointed to that their financial situation had improved significantly:

> We have noticeably more money now. We even bought furniture, which we couldn't do in the last two years. We replaced some furniture. And maybe if we decide to stay in Norway, we will consider the option of moving into a home and paying a mortgage. But for this, we both need to have 100% employment. (N4)

A woman who had found work in accordance with her higher education said their family of three for now lived on her salary only and that they managed well:

> We fully cover all our needs and have nothing to complain about financially. Well, let's say, in Kyiv, I felt better than now, but the short-term prospects here are better. I will quickly catch up with everything I had. (B3)

Several interviewees stressed that they appreciated becoming economically independent from state structures and paying taxes:

> Sometimes I'm amazed at how high the tax percentage [of the salary] is. But I understand that it's also cool because it's the future of schools, roads, and such. And when you see that it doesn't end up in someone's pocket due to corruption schemes or something, but it's being implemented here and now. (…) It's so cool knowing that you're already contributing. (N2)

There were, however, also those who were disappointed with their economic situation after having started working. In one family, both the interviewee and her husband are working, yet they feel that their financial situation is nearly the same as those who receive social support from the government. This leaves them feeling somewhat frustrated and disappointed considering the level of salaries they get, particularly how the pay-off for employment was less than they hoped compared to social benefits:

> Our family feels a lot of disappointment – we're working, but… it turns out to be really hard just to maintain a decent standard. (…) I see people who are on social benefits, as they call it, who feel much freer, whose apartment is fully paid for and who get allowances. And people can find some other benefits because they have time. And I started to think about how fair this is, or whether it is fair.' (N5)

7.8 Interpreting service

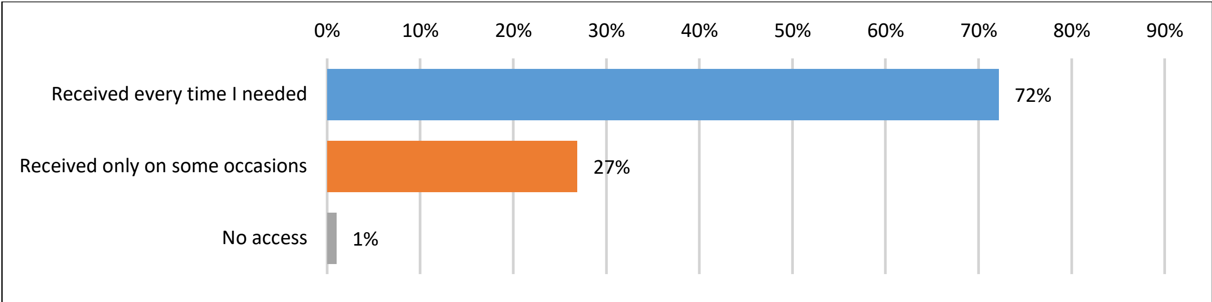
Have Ukrainian refugees received interpreting services when needed in Norway? How do they assess these services, and has this changed over time?

[22] https://www.husbanken.no/english/housing-allowance/

Interpreting services in Ukrainian particularly, but also Russian, was initially an organisational challenge for several public actors in 2022, and measures were introduced to upscale the numbers of interpreters (Hernes, Deineko et al. 2022). The Norwegian Interpreting Act regulates the right to interpreting services and aims to 'safeguard due process and ensure the provision of proper assistance and services to persons who are unable to communicate adequately with public bodies without an interpreter'. It should also ensure that interpreters meet sound professional standards. In May 2022, IMDi issued an online guide for managers and employees in municipalities concerning the provision of interpreting services to refugees from Ukraine. A relevant point for the discussions below is that the guideline emphasises that 'public actors may not emphasise the interpreter's ethnicity when deciding on interpreting assignments. Nor is the ethnicity of the employee/contractor registered with the employer/contractor' (Hernes, Aasland et al 2023a).

Given the rather poor knowledge of English and Norwegian among Ukrainian refugees, interpreting services have been necessary for most Ukrainian refugees, at least in the initial period after arrival. Only 14% of the respondents answered that they had not needed interpreting services, either because they understood the language (Norwegian or English) (12%) or because they got network (friends, family, other) that have helped them interpret when needed (2%).

Figure 7.11: Access to interpreters among those who needed such services (N=1321).

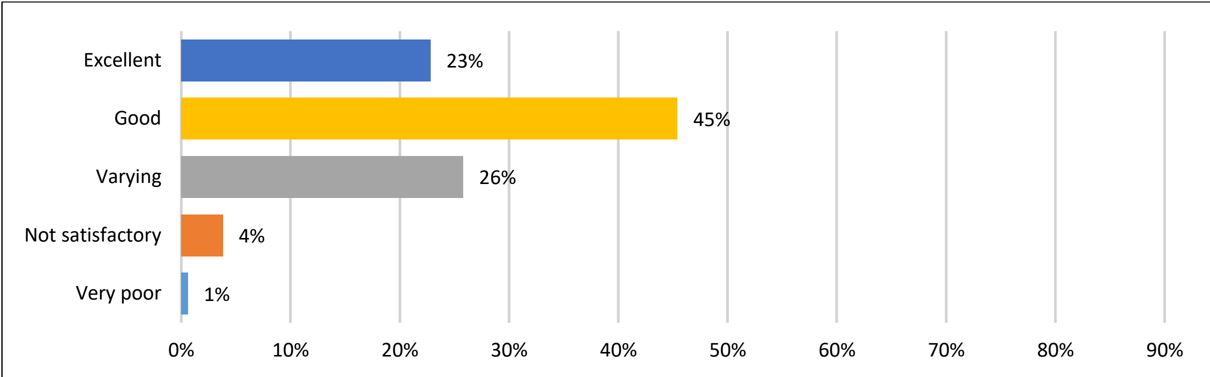


*Weighted by gender and age.

Figure 7.11 shows whether those who answered that they were in need of interpreting services had access to such services. Only 1% answered that they had not had such access. Over 70% received interpreting services every time they needed it, while 27% answered that they had only received it on some occasions. Compared to the 2023 survey, there is a small improvement, with a higher share of respondents having accessed interpreting services every time they needed it. This also correspond with crosstabulations of cohorts, showing that a higher share of those from the 2023 and 2024 cohorts had received interpreting services every time they needed it compared to the 2022 cohort (about 10ppt. difference).

The respondents who had used interpreters were subsequently asked to assess the quality of the interpreting services they had received.

Figure 7.12: Assessment of skills and qualifications of interpreters in Norway (N=1319).



*Weighted by gender and age.
**The 1,6% who answered 'don't know' are not included in the figure.

Figure 7.12 shows that the majority of respondents assessed the services as either excellent (23%) or good (45%). However, a substantial share – one in four – indicates that the skills and qualifications of interpreters vary, and 5% indicate poor or very poor interpreting. The results are almost identical to the 2023 survey. However, those arriving in 2024, generally assess the quality of the interpreting services somewhat higher than those arriving in 2022 and 2023, indicating an improvement in the quality.

We further asked those who had received interpreting services if there had been any challenges or concerns with these services, and 25% answered 'yes'. Women answered this to a higher degree than men, and also the younger age groups to a higher degree than older refugees. In line with the findings above, we also see that those arriving more recently reported challenges or concerns to a lesser degree. While 30% of those arriving in 2022 had experienced challenges or concerns, only 13% of those arriving in 2024 reported this.

Respondents who reported challenges or concerns with interpreting services were invited to elaborate in an open-ended question. A total of 352 respondents shared their experiences and perspectives. Many began their statements by noting that they had generally positive experiences with interpreters but went on to describe specific instances where problems had occurred. Others were more broadly critical of the interpreting services they had received.

Further analysis of the responses reveals three categories of challenges faced by the respondents. These main categories largely resembled the concerns that were raised in the 2023 report.

Poor quality of interpreting services

Many respondents reported poor quality in interpreting services. Sometimes the issue was technical, such as poor call quality or background noise from telephone interpreters. However, more often, the problem stemmed from insufficient knowledge of one or both languages involved in the interpreting situation. Some respondents mentioned difficulties with interpreters' pronunciation: 'Several times it was difficult to understand what the interpreter was saying. Their pronunciation was unclear.'

Poor translation quality was particularly problematic in complex settings such as medical consultations, meetings with Nav, or police interactions. Issues included inaccuracies in translating medical terms, incomplete translations, and oversimplified communication, all of which led to misunderstandings and delays in accessing crucial information: 'Most of them do not know how to translate medical terms (they do not know how to translate the names of human organs, procedures, or examinations).'

Some respondents also reported that interpreters frequently omitted important details: 'I could say three sentences, and he [the interpreter] would translate three words,' which

compromised the quality of communication. Respondents noted that interpreters sometimes took advantage of the fact that the person being interpreted for did not know Norwegian well enough and had no way of verifying the accuracy of the translation. As a result, those who brought this up felt that interpreters provided very approximate translations, distorting the meaning of what was said.

Furthermore, interpreters occasionally failed to grasp the nuances of either Ukrainian or Norwegian, leading to significant miscommunication. Several respondents pointed out that their own basic English or Norwegian skills were necessary to compensate for these shortcomings: 'Therefore, we decided to disconnect the interpreter and continued the conversation in English,' although this added stress and difficulty to an already challenging situation.

Several respondents complained that interpreters were impatient and did not take enough time to interpret accurately. When using telephone interpreting, some reported hearing background noise, suggesting that interpreters were engaged in other activities while interpreting and not fully focused on the task: 'Sometimes there were instances where the interpreter was doing something around the house while translating.' Additionally, some respondents reported hearing other voices during the interpreting sessions, which is not permissible: 'You could hear voices in the background.'

Deliberate errors and interpreter interference

While the aforementioned challenges did not, at least outwardly, involve deliberate attempts to alter the meaning of the interpretation, several respondents reported instances where interpreters were perceived to introduce personal biases or inaccurate translations intentionally. These instances included interpreters rephrasing statements to align with their own interpretation, withholding important information, or adding unsolicited comments (according to the respondents). One respondent noted: 'There was an instance when the interpreter made a judgment about our words or situation when the topic was about our child with autism. It was quite upsetting.'

In several cases, interpreters were accused of being disrespectful, dismissive, or condescending, such as making inappropriate remarks during medical procedures or discouraging refugees from fully expressing themselves. For example, one respondent stated:

> The interpreter was rude and behaved inappropriately. When the doctor described the diagnosis in several sentences, the interpreter explained it to us in just two words, then added, 'Well, you get the gist, right?'. (female, age 30s)

Others felt the interpreters imposed their political opinions, thereby violating ethical standards (and in violation of the Interpreter Act). Such behaviour eroded trust in the interpretation process, causing some refugees to avoid interpreter services altogether, preferring to rely on their limited Norwegian or English language skills.

Interpreters with Russian language and/or origin

As shown in chapter 5.5., 94% of our respondents report to speak Russian fluently. However, a significant concern for several respondents who answered the open-ended question was that they were only offered Russian-speaking interpreters when they had requested Ukrainian-speaking ones. These concerns were most often not related to not getting interpreting services in a language that they understood. However, they expressed frustration at being forced to speak Russian, which they associated with the occupying force, rather than Ukrainian, their national language:

> I communicate in Ukrainian, as it is my native language. When I needed an interpreter and asked for a Ukrainian-speaking one, they would provide a Russian-speaking one instead. This was very frustrating for me, because 90% of the time I was forced to communicate with a

> person of Russian nationality, meaning a representative of the aggressor country. (female, age 40s)

Several respondents explained that, due to the ongoing war and its associated trauma, hearing Russian can provoke discomfort and anxiety. They described emotional distress when they were required to communicate through interpreters who spoke only Russian or came from Russian backgrounds.

According to several survey respondents, such interpreters often display bias, minimise refugees' accounts, or deliberately fail to convey sensitive information accurately. Some noted that disrespectful behaviour, including dismissive attitudes or deliberate omissions, was particularly common among interpreters of Russian origin, reflecting the ongoing war between Ukraine and Russia. For example, several interpreters from Russia allegedly refused to translate accurately when words such as 'war' or 'invasion' were mentioned in the interpreting context:

> There was an interpreter from Russia who provided incorrect translations. For example, when it was said in Norwegian 'the invasion of Russia into Ukraine,' he translated it as 'the situation,' and there were many such instances from him (female, age 30s)

Some respondents found the use of interpreters of Russian origin to be a deeply distressing experience, further adding to the psychological challenges of displacement and resettlement. Respondents therefore called for more Ukrainian-speaking interpreters to address these concerns, believing that doing so would better support refugees' linguistic and emotional needs.

7.9 Summary

This chapter presented Ukrainians' assessments of and experiences with the overall reception in Norway, along with various actors and services at national and local levels.

The respondents expressed very high satisfaction with their overall reception in Norway, with results almost identical to the positive assessments in 2023. Furthermore, survey respondents expressed high satisfaction with most services and procedures related to the registration, reception and settlement. Displaced persons from Ukraine who are not eligible for collective protection – but must apply for individual asylum – are substantially less satisfied.

Like previous years' surveys, schools and kindergarten get very high scores, while healthcare services, access to necessary medication, recognition of education, and assistance in finding or applying for a job get lower scores with more varying assessments.

There are some subgroups differences, and our analysis reveals that the following groups are generally more satisfied: older persons, those who arrived in Norway more recently (particularly in 2024), the employed, those with higher Norwegian language skills, and those living in more urban areas.

In this chapter, we also provided shorter analyses of the respondents' assessment of 1) information about different services, 2) healthcare services and psychological help, 3) their economic situation in Norway and 4) interpreting service.

Information

The most commonly used sources of information are websites of Norwegian public actors, direct communication with other Ukrainian refugees and social media channels. Most respondents confirm having received sufficient information regarding various services and procedures for registration and settlement. However, information about the procedure for to return permanently to Ukraine or opportunities for short visits to Ukraine receive substantially lower scores and much more diverse assessments. Information about services and procedures about the labour market and access to education in Norway also get positive, but

somewhat lower scores, implying that there is room for improvement. Similarly to in the 2023 survey, the respondents rank information about how to start a business in Norway the lowest.

Healthcare service and psychological help

30% of the respondents answered that they, or someone in their close family in Norway, had a severe health issue. The 2022 and 2023 reports pointed to a 'culture clash' between the Norwegian and Ukrainian cultures regarding the threshold to see a doctor or a specialist and access to or use of medicine, and both the survey and qualitative interviews demonstrate that this 'culture crash' is still apparent. However, cases involving the treatment of serious illnesses often show a high level of satisfaction, both in terms of medical care and the compassion shown by healthcare professionals.

Many municipalities – along with a report from FHI (2023) – raise the issue that many Ukrainian refugees may need psychological services, often to tackle traumas related to the war. We asked the respondents about whether they had been in need of – and if so, received – psychological services in Norway. About one fourth state that they have needed psychological services in Norway, while about one in ten 'prefer not to say'. Interestingly, there is a higher share of those who arrived in 2022 who say that they have needed psychological services. Thus, the newest arrivals are not the only ones in need of such services. Among those who answered that they had needed psychological service, over half responded that they had not received such services in Norway.

Economic situation

Among our respondents, 30% said that they were fully self-sufficient, while the rest received (partial) financial or housing support from the public. Half of the respondents report that their household's current economic situation is (minimum) satisfactory, while 41% report that it is neither satisfactory nor difficult. One in ten is struggling to make ends meet, and 1% say that they live in poverty.

More detailed analyses show that those currently living in reception centres assessed their economic situation as worse than those who were settled. Also, those who are employed and retirees are somewhat more satisfied with their economic situation than home workers, persons with disabilities, and those who are unemployed. Those enrolled in the introduction programme aligned with the average score.

As noted also in 2022 and 2023 reports, several interviewees were very appreciative of the support they get from Husbanken. Among those who were employed, most interviewees emphasised that they appreciated becoming economically independent, and that it had improved their financial situation. There were, however, also those who were disappointed that their financial situation had not improved much and was nearly the same as those who received social support from the government.

Interpreting service

The majority of Ukrainian refugees (86%) have needed interpreting services. Overall, the analysis show that the majority has received interpreting services when needed it and they were very generally satisfied with these services. Over 70% reported having received such services every time they needed them, while the remaining said they only got in on some occasions. Access to services has also improved since the more chaotic phase in 2022: a higher share of those arriving in 2023 and 2024 had received interpreting services every time they needed it.

The majority of respondents consider interpreting services to be good or excellent, but a substantial share – one in four – indicates that the skills and qualifications of interpreters vary.

Only 5% gave bad assessments of the interpreting services – saying that the interpreting was poor or very poor. However, many respondents provided examples of challenges and concerns about the interpreting services in the open answers in the survey. Echoing the

concerns raised in the 2023 report, three main concerns were raised: 1) Poor quality of interpreting services, 2) deliberate errors and interpreter interference in the conversations, and 3) concerns related to interpreters with Russian language and/or origin.

8 Housing and settlement after granted protection

How and where in Norway do Ukrainian refugees live after they have been granted protection? And how do they evaluate the settlement process and their dwelling?

As described in chapter 3 on Norwegian settlement policies, the Norwegian settlement model (for those who have been granted protection), builds largely on a publicly managed settlement model, where refugees are assigned to municipalities on the basis of agreements between the state and the municipalities. The model also allows for agreed self-settlement, where refugees may find their own housing and then apply for formal settlement in the respective municipalities to retain their right to financial assistance and introduction programmes (Søholt & Dyb 2021).

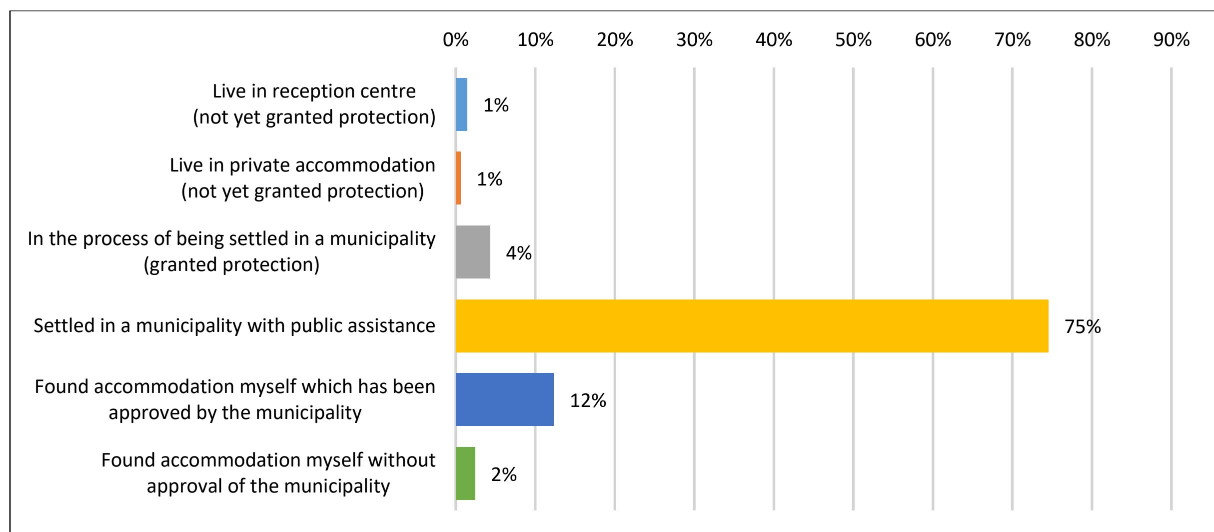
On assignment from IMDi, NIBR currently leads another research project (PRIVATBO[23]) about Ukrainian refugees who lived privately prior to formal settlement in a municipality and how they were followed-up in the municipalities. In the survey, we also asked about the Ukrainian refugees' housing situation during the initial period. Analyses of these data will not be presented here but will be the topic of the report that is planned to be launched in May 2025.

In this chapter, we first present statistics on what stage the respondents are in the settlement process, before describing where in Norway they have settled. We then describe their assessment of their dwellings. Lastly, we present their thoughts about their plans or dilemmas relating to moving to another Norwegian municipality.

8.1 Where do they live?

First of all, it is important to clarify where the respondents are in the settlement process.

Figure 8.1: Current type of accommodation and status (N=1547).



*Weighted by gender and age.

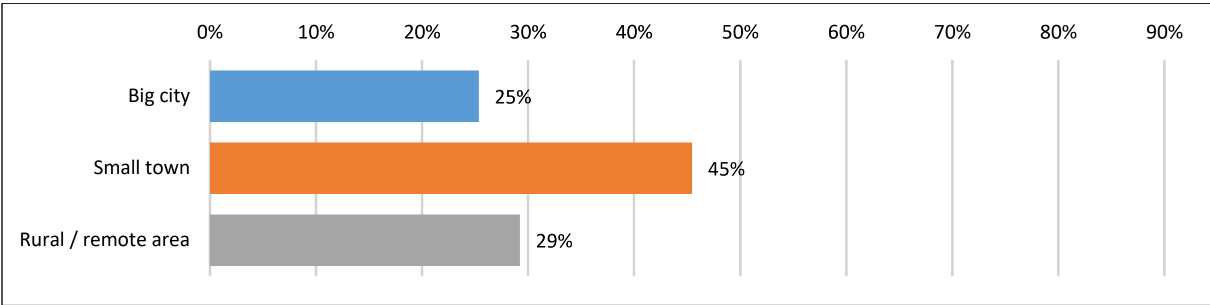
Figure 8.1 describes the status and where the respondents are in the settlement process. Very few – only 2% – of the respondents had not yet been granted protection and lived in

[23] https://www.oslomet.no/forskning/forskningsprosjekter/bosetting-av-personer-utenfor-mottak-under-flyktningestrommen-fra-ukraina-privatbo

either reception centres or privately. 4% had been granted protection, but were in the process of being settled, but the large majority (75%) had been settled with public assistance through IMDi. 15% of those who had settled in a municipality had found their own housing, where 12% of these had later been approved by the municipality, so that they were still entitled to integration programmes and financial assistance.

After February 2022, to ensure enough settlements with the record-high number of arrivals, Norway introduced the 'whole-country' approach, where refugees were settled throughout the country in almost all municipalities, in rural and urban areas alike.

Figure 8.2: Settlement distribution in urban and rural areas (N=1547).

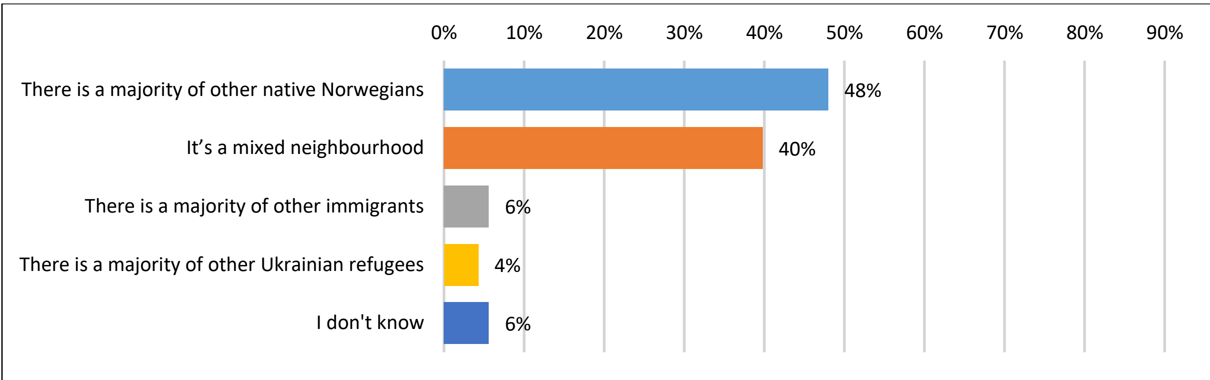


*Weighted by gender and age.

Figure 8.2 shows that 25% reported that they were settled in a big city, while almost half were settled in what they define as a small town. 29% were settled in rural/remote areas.

Further, an important goal of the Norwegian settlement policy for distribution is to avoid concentrated settlement with large populations of immigrants concentrated in some areas.

Figure 8.3: Ukrainian refugees' neighbourhood composition (N=1547).



*Weighted by gender and age.

Figure 8.3 shows, based on the respondents' subjective assessment, that almost half were settled in a neighbourhood with a majority of other native Norwegians, while about 40% were settled in mixed neighbourhoods. Only 10% in total live in areas with predominantly other immigrants (6%) or other Ukrainian refugees (4%).

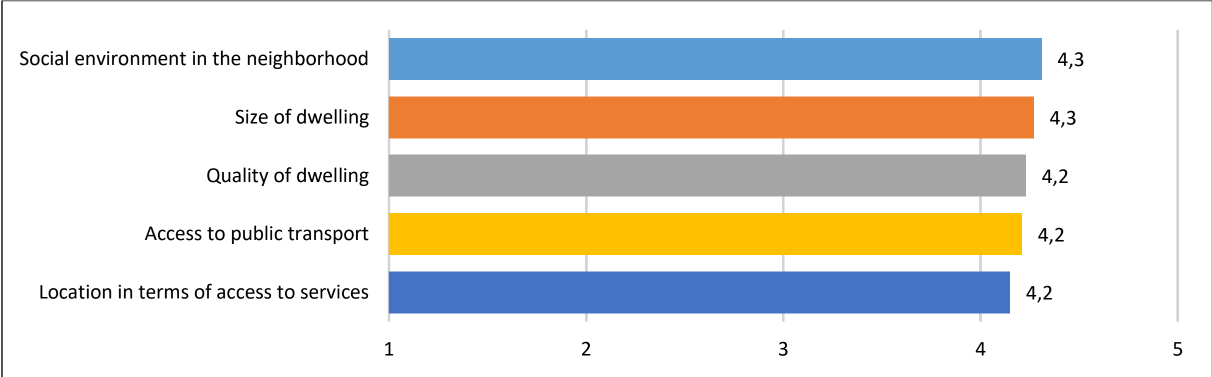
8.2 Assessment of their current housing

In our survey, 80% of the respondents who had settled in a municipality had accommodation organised by the municipality, while about 20% had organised their own accommodation.

Of those who lived in accommodation organised privately, the majority had received help from family, friends or other prior network in Norway (57%), about 30% had found their accommodation on their own, and about 7% through other Ukrainian refugees.

But are they satisfied with their current housing situation and dwelling?

Figure 8.4: Assessment of housing situation (N=1547).



*Weighted by gender and age.

Figure 8.4 shows that the respondents are very satisfied with different aspects of their housing situation, both the social environment, size, and quality. Generally, they are also happy with the access to public transport and location in terms of access to services.

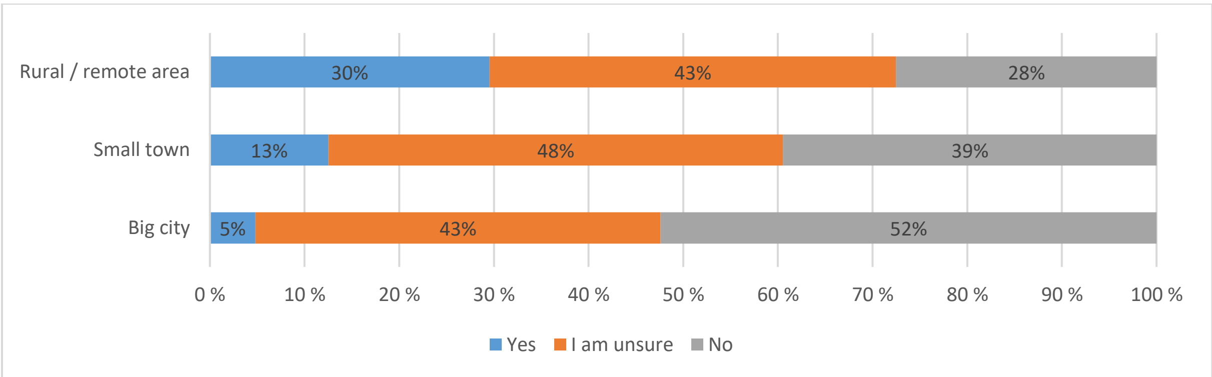
Further analysis nevertheless shows that people in urban and rural areas give somewhat different assessments on some of the items in the above figure. Most importantly, respondents in rural areas rate their housing situation somewhat more negatively than those in big cities and smaller towns when it comes to access to services (mean score 3.3) and public transport (3.4), as well as the social environment in the neighbourhood (3.9).

8.3 Plans to move to another municipality

That refugees move from the municipality where they were initially settled has been a topical question in the political and public debate in the fall of 2024. After Ukrainians have been settled all over the country, how many plan to move to another municipality?

Overall, the majority (45%) are unsure whether they want to move to another municipality or not, while 40% say that they do not plan to move. 15% say that they plan to move to another municipality. However, further analyses show that there are large differences between those who are settled in more urban or rural areas.

Figure 8.5: Plans to move to another municipality separated by centrality (N=1547).



*Weighted by gender and age.

Figure 8.5 shows that a substantially larger share of those settled in rural areas plan to move to another municipality (30%) compared to those settled in big cities (5%). However, there is a relatively similar share across categories that are unsure about whether they want to move.

8.3.1 Dilemmas concerning internal mobility in Norway

Some interviewees also shared their dilemmas concerning whether they wanted to stay in their initial settlement municipality or move.

One interviewee expressed deep dissatisfaction with the municipality he was settled in, because he had no previous network there whereas in two municipalities far away, he had acquaintances that he believed could have helped him find work. He had understood, however, that moving was a big risk because he would lose his right to support:

> Interviewer: What prevents you from changing your place of residence in Norway?
>
> Interviewee: I was told that I can't, that I would immediately lose protection and everything else.(…) The main problem with integration is the lack of... we don't have legal consultations, we don't know our rights. If I knew it was possible, I would go. I would give all the money I have to move to a place where I could work. I'm ready to pay for it – do you understand? I'm not lying to you: God is our witness in this conversation. (…) There are places where people are working, in really good, decent jobs without language, without anything. But I can't [move there], it turns out that I'm a prisoner [in this municipality]. (A2)

His main concern was that if he did move to another municipality to get a job, he would lose his right to public assistance if he did not get a job immediately, or if he got a job – and then lost it. These concerns made him hesitant to move to another municipality even though he thought he would get employment there more easily than in his existing municipality.

For some interviewees, their attachment to the municipality and their children's adaptation at the local level have become key reasons for not relocating to other parts of the country in search of work. For one interviewee, the successful adaptation of her daughter became an important factor to continue searching for a job in the municipality where they were settled:

> My child has settled in well at school. I could switch to a neighbouring municipality where there's work, but my child is happy here – she has friends and hobbies. I don't want to disrupt her adaptation and the safe environment she's found. She's already experienced major changes twice. (D1)

8.4 Summary

In this chapter, we have presented where Ukrainians have settled in Norway, their assessment of their current dwelling, and their thoughts about whether to stay in their current municipality or to move to a different Norwegian municipality.

Refugees from Ukraine have settled in all types of municipalities, from big cities (25%), small towns, (45%) to remote rural districts (29%), in line with the whole-country approach.

Another important goal in the Norwegian settlement model is distribution to avoid concentrated settlement with large populations of immigrants concentrated in some areas. We find that almost half of the Ukrainian refugees lived in a neighbourhood with a majority of other native Norwegians, while about 40% are settled in mixed neighbourhoods. Only 10% in total live in areas with predominantly other immigrants or other Ukrainian refugees.

In our survey, 80% of the respondents who had settled in a municipality had accommodation organised by the municipality, while about 20% had organised their own accommodation. They are on average very satisfied with different aspects of their housing situation, both the social environment, size, and quality. People in rural areas rate their housing situation somewhat more negatively than those in big cities and smaller towns when it comes to access to services and public transport.

In this year's survey, we also asked if the respondents had plans to move to another Norwegian municipality. Overall, the majority (45%) were unsure whether they want to move to another municipality or not, while 40% said that they do not plan to move. 15% planned to

move to another municipality, but this was most prominent for those settled in rural areas, and to some degree small towns.

The qualitative interviews shed light on some of the dilemmas Ukrainian refugees faced regarding internal mobility in Norway. One concern was that – because refugees may lose their rights to public support if they move from the settlement municipality – they were hesitant to move even though they thought that they would get employment more easily in other municipalities. For others, the attachment to the municipality – particularly their children's integration into the local community – became a key reason for not relocating to other parts of the country in search of work.

9 Integration measures after settlement

What are the Ukrainian refugees' experiences with the introduction programme, and the service provided by Nav after the introduction programme? How do they assess the different elements they receive as part of these service, particularly Norwegian language training and work practice?

As described in chapter 3.3 on policy changes, Ukrainian refugees have the right to attend the introduction programme, but the programme has been adapted and includes fewer compulsory elements. After the fall of 2023, there has also been an intensified focus on shorter, more work-oriented introduction programmes for most Ukrainian refugees.

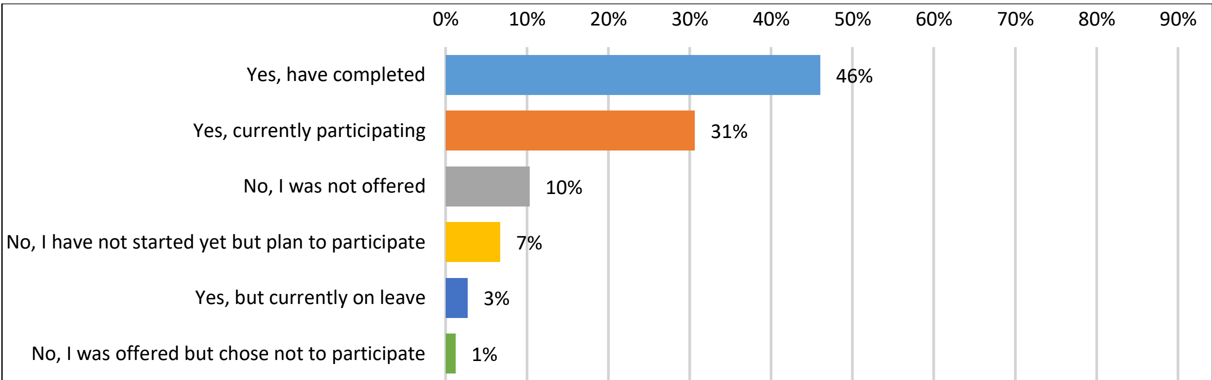
In this chapter, we first present results on the share that participates in the programme, before we describe the elements the participants are offered and their assessment of these elements. We then present their assessments of the programme scope. Second, we move to the employment-related and financial services provided by Nav for those who have completed the introduction programme. Lastly, as Norwegian language training and work practice are two of the most common measures in both the introduction programme and Nav's employment-related services for Ukrainian refugees, we provide more detailed assessments of these two integration measures.

9.1 The introduction programme

Official figures from IMDi show that about 90% of Ukrainian refugees between 18 and 55 years (the group that are entitled to an introduction programme) have participated or currently participate in the programme. For those aged 55–67 years, who are not entitled to introduction programmes but may be offered programmes by the municipality, the percentage was only 16%[24].

How many of the respondents have participated, are currently participating or plan to participate in the introduction programme?

Figure 9.1: Participation in the introduction programme (N=1467).



*Weighted by gender and age.
**Those who have not yet been settled in a municipality or found their own accommodation without public approval are excluded from the analysis.

Figure 9.1 shows that almost half of the respondents have completed the introduction programme, about one third are currently participating (or on leave from the programme). 10% were not offered to attend the programme, but these are mainly those in the 60+ years

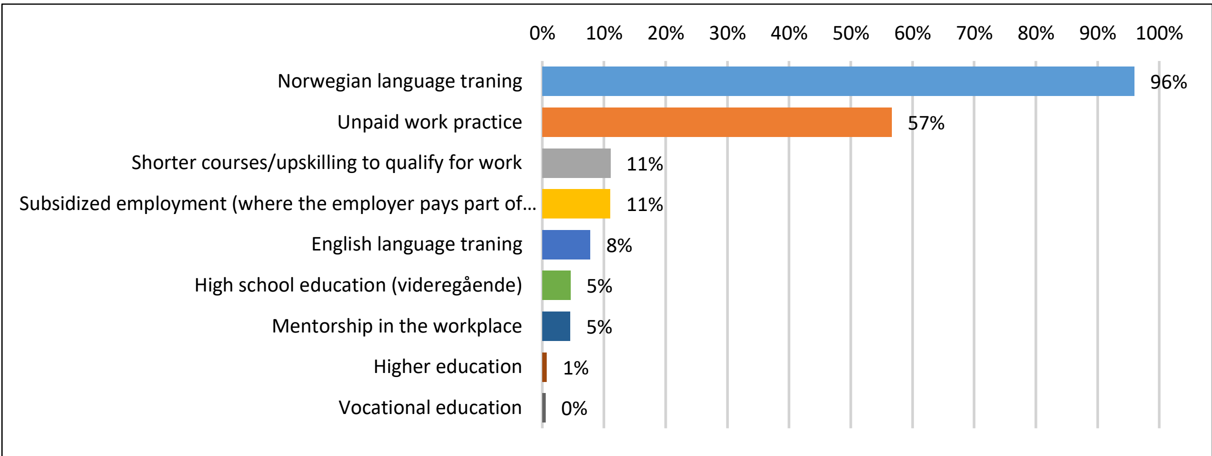
[24] The numbers are received from IMDi and include numbers up until October 2024.

age group. Just over half of those over 60+years were not offered programmes. Only 1% were offered programmes but chose not to participate.

9.1.1 Introduction programme content and assessment

The introduction programme for Ukrainian refugees ought to include language training and elements that are work- or education-oriented. Ukrainians have few other compulsory elements in the introduction programme except for the parental guidance course (*foreldreveiledning)* if they have children. Otherwise, the municipalities have considerable leeway in how they tailor the programme to individual needs and to local conditions. Thus, we asked those who have participated, or who were currently participating in the introduction programme, about the various elements covered in the programme.

Figure 9.2: Integration measures for those who participated in the introduction programme (N=1162).

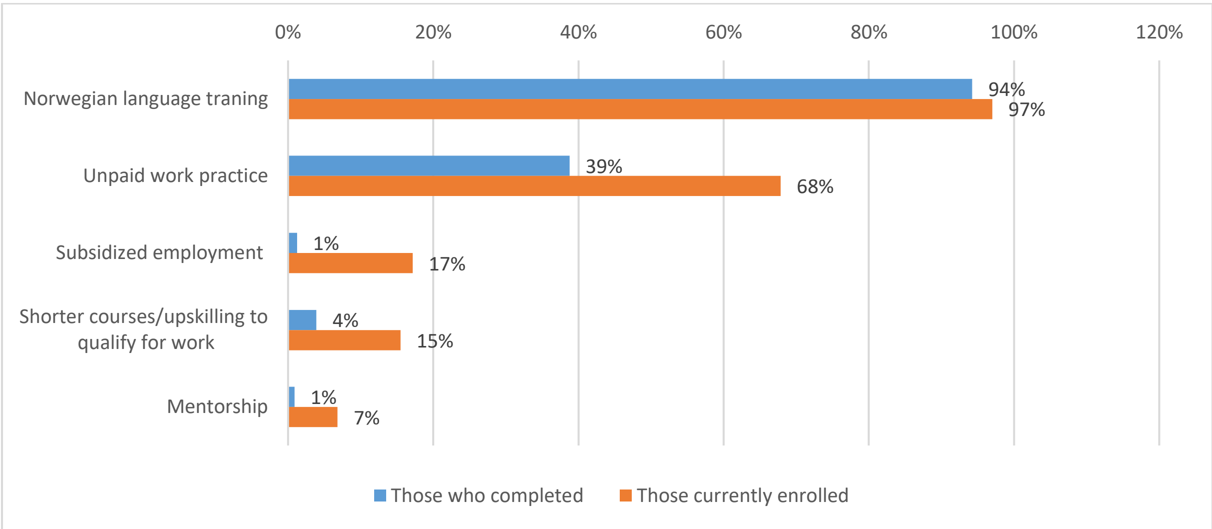


*Weighted by gender and age.
**Those who answered 'None of the above / do not know' are excluded from the table.

Figure 9.2 shows that virtually all respondents have had Norwegian language training as part of their programme. Otherwise, there is clearly a dominance of work-oriented measures. 57% have had work practice. One in ten also answer that they had subsidised employment, and another one in ten that they had shorter courses/upskilling to qualify for work. Like in 2023, only 8% had English language training. A small share had regular education measures as part of their programme, e.g. education at upper secondary levels (5%), or higher education (1%).

As described in chapter 3.3, the government intensified the work-oriented focus of the introduction programme during the fall of 2023. We clearly see a work-oriented turn in the programme content when we compare those who had completed the introduction programme (who most often completed the programme before the new regulations) and those who were currently participating in the programme at the time of the survey (mostly those who arrived in Norway in 2023 and 2024, and most often were subject to the new regulations).

Figure 9.3: Integration measures separated by those who completed and were currently enrolled in the introduction programme (N=1162).

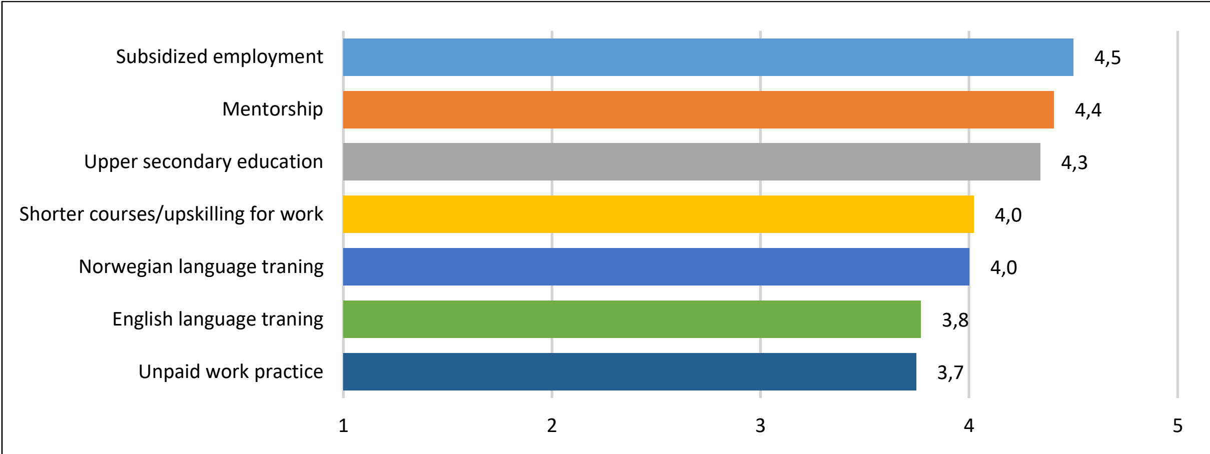


*Weighted by gender and age.
**Those who answered, 'None of the above / do not know', 'Higher education', 'Vocational education' are excluded because of low numbers for both groups.

Figure 9.3 shows that for both groups, Norwegian language training is a component for almost all participants. However, we see large differences in the use of work-oriented measures across the board, where a much larger share of those who are currently enrolled in the programme have had unpaid work practice, subsidised employment, shorter courses/upskilling for work and mentorship (specified in the survey as 'mentorship at the workplace').

Those who reported having participated in the various elements listed in figure 9.2 were followed up with a question on their assessment of these various elements. It is important to emphasise that for some of the elements, the N is very low, as there where very few that had received certain measures. We have not included evaluations of those with very low N, namely vocational education (N=5), and higher education (N=8).

Figure 9.4: Assessment of the quality of the various elements in the introduction programme (N= 48–1099[25]).



*Weighted by gender and age.
**Means and standard deviations. Scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied).
***Only those who have indicated each element has been asked.

Figure 9.4 shows that most of the items scored above 4 on a scale from 1 to 5 (where 5 indicates 'very satisfied' and 1 'very dissatisfied'), with subsidised employment, mentorship and upper secondary education (*videregående)* at the top. We find slightly lower satisfaction levels for two of the items, namely English language training and work practice. For work practice, there is a larger standard deviation, indicating large variation between respondents.

Compared to the 2023 survey, there were no major differences in the respondents' assessments, only a 0.1-0.2 decrease on the scale.

The respondents were further asked to assess whether the introduction programme was useful for finding work in Norway. About half found it useful, and 37% found it a little useful. Only 8% of the respondents did not find the introduction programme useful, (while for 4% the question was not considered relevant). These numbers represent a decline compared to the results in the 2023 survey, where over 70% found it useful, and 20% answered 'a little useful'.

Closer assessments of the two main components of the introduction programme – language training and work practice – are discussed in the following chapters 9.3 and 9.4, but the interviewees also brought up other parts of the introduction programme.

In some municipalities, one day a week has been devoted to informational sessions with invited speakers either from Nav or other Norwegian agencies who have provided information on a certain topic. One interviewee for instance recalled that they had learned about different aspects of Norwegian society:

> Everyone told us about the specifics of living in Norway and taxes – how they are paid, how they are collected, and where the money goes. It was all done in a playful manner. Like with waste disposal and recycling – people came and showed us in a fun way. We were divided into teams to see who could sort the waste faster and correctly. We received some prizes there. It was really interesting (…) Local authorities also came to tell us about the city's prospects, making it clear that we are welcome here. (A2)

One interviewee – who said the introduction programme overall had been useful for him – noted that he felt that the timing was a bit premature for some type of information because it

[25] Norwegian language training (N=1099), English language training (N=87), unpaid work practice (N=639), subsidized employment (N=124), shorter courses/upskilling to qualify for work (N=123), mentorship (N=52), Upper secondary education (N=48).

was difficult to relate to without first-hand experience, for example with the Norwegian tax system:

> On Wednesdays, it was like a lecture: they talked about various rules of life in Norway and different topics. Representatives from the tax office and Husbanken came to us. They explained some nuances. As long as you haven't encountered any issues, you listen to everything in general terms and have no questions. But when I later faced questions about taxes and such, you know, maybe a bit later it might have been very useful to have this information. When you're starting out and you are earning nothing or getting social assistance, what does it matter to you about the tax office and what needs to be entered? But when you encounter things directly, many different questions arise. (C5)

An interviewee stated that they had a course in life skills that s/he found completely impropriate and degrading:

> We were told all day that we need to wash vegetables and brush our teeth. A dentist explained how to brush our teeth. This course was useless. (D3)

Another interviewee did not feel that she was in the target group for the information that was provided through the introduction programme. She similarly found much information redundant while information that would have been useful to her was missing:

> To be honest, maybe 5 per cent of it was useful. Because I understand who this was aimed at, this is a programme that was written once and for all, and it just doesn't work for us. (…) There could be more information about, e.g. opportunities: how you can study, what opportunities you have (…). Where can I find information, where can I go to address such issues, this is very much lacking. Instead, there was a lot of information when we came: we were for instance told about different cultures, about different religions, about homosexuals. I'm not really interested in hearing that – I don't have a problem with it. (N8)

Interviewees with children mentioned participating in parenting courses as a part of the introduction programme. None reported any challenges in this regard. One interviewee emphasised that the courses were particularly useful:

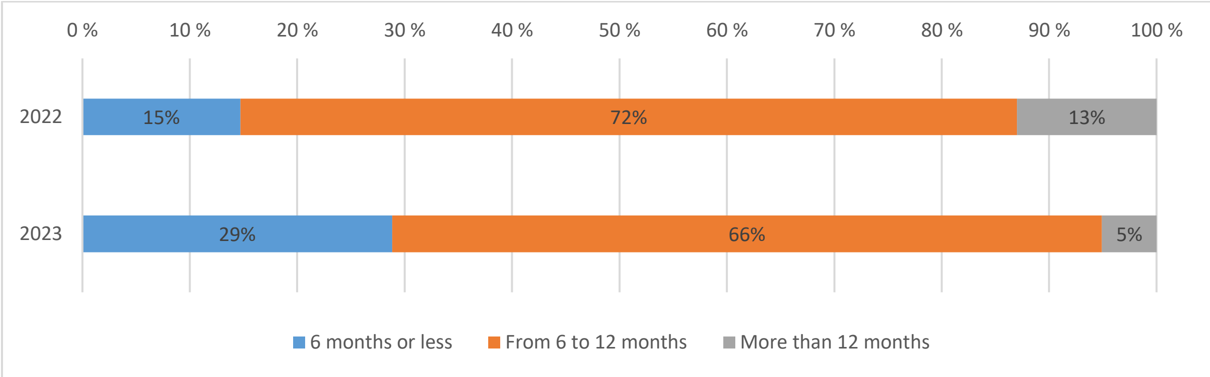
> I have four children, and I attended them in an abbreviated format. It was, in principle, interesting and informative. (B1)

9.1.2 Scope of the introduction programme

Ukrainian refugees had previously the possibility to participate in the programme part-time, but it is not widely used: only 9% had participated part-time. There were twice as many among those who were 60+ years who participated part-time, and a somewhat larger share of those who lived in big cities (17%).

Of those who had already completed the introduction programme, only 16% had attended for six months or less. The vast majority (73%) had attended between six months and one year, while 10% had attended for more than a year. Twice as many men had had shorter programmes compares to women (28% versus 14%). However, there are differences between cohorts.

Figure 9.5: Length of introduction programme for those who have completed separated by cohort (N = 674).



*Weighted by gender and age.

Figure 9.5 shows that while only 15% of those arriving in 2022 had shorter programmes, the corresponding number for those arriving in 2023 was 29%. Also, a lower share had programmes longer than one year in the 2023 than in the 2022 cohort (5% versus 13%).

Combined with the insights from figure 9.3 showing an increase in work-oriented measures for newer cohorts, our survey results indicate that there has been a clear turn towards shorter and more work-intensified introduction programmes, in line with the government's new regulations after the fall of 2023.

The interviews indicate that the scope and content of the introduction programme varies across municipalities and based on time of arrival. In line with the survey results, we also see that the introduction programme in some places has been reduced in scope for later arrivals. This does not only relate to the duration of the programme (as presented in figure 9.5), but also the extent of teaching and content during the week. For example, one respondent informed that while the first arrivals in 2022 had language and other training five days a week, those who arrived in 2023 and were enrolled in the introduction programme when the interviews were conducted in winter/spring 2024, only had 2-2.5 days of training. One person said that:

> It is really unfortunate that I didn't go to the intro program a year ago when Norwegian lessons were 5 days a week. Because now it's 2 days a week, and that's not enough for me. (B1)

An interviewee who stressed that he would have preferred starting working right away without any knowledge of Norwegian, was frustrated that – in a situation when he had to learn the language in order to find work – the course offered was so limited in scope:

> What kind of integration? What are we talking about? How can you integrate into society if someone goes to school for less than three days? Not to mention that the day itself is short. I mean, only until two o'clock. On Wednesday, we study from 12 to two. It's a paradox. (A5)

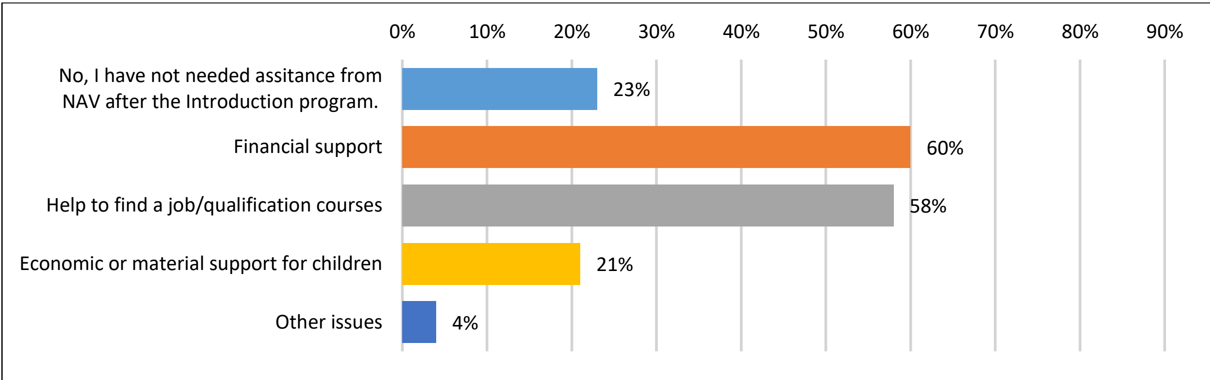
In some municipalities, however, they were continuing with five days of training in the introduction programme also in 2024. However, because of the high number of arrivals, interviewees reported that they had waited for 3-4 months after settlement before they were enrolled in the introduction programme. Although this frustrated the interviewees, it is important to emphasise that according to the Integration Act, the municipalities are supposed to start the introduction programme within three months after settlement.

In last year's round of interviews, several interviewees expressed frustration that they did not know for how long their introduction programme would last. In the interviews this year, this occurred as less of a problem. It might be that municipal actors have become better at expectation management and informing about different outcomes after refugees have completed a 6-month introduction programme.

9.2 Services from Nav after the introduction programme

After the introduction programme, refugees who are not self-sufficient and/or have not found a job, transition to Nav, who are responsible for financial assistance and employment measures for unemployed. During data collection in the 2023 study, very few had finished the introduction programme, and transitioned to get help from Nav. In 2024, a larger share had completed the introduction programme and had got some form of assistance from Nav.

Figure 9.6: Received services from Nav after the introduction programme (multiple options possible) (N = 674).



*Weighted by gender and age.

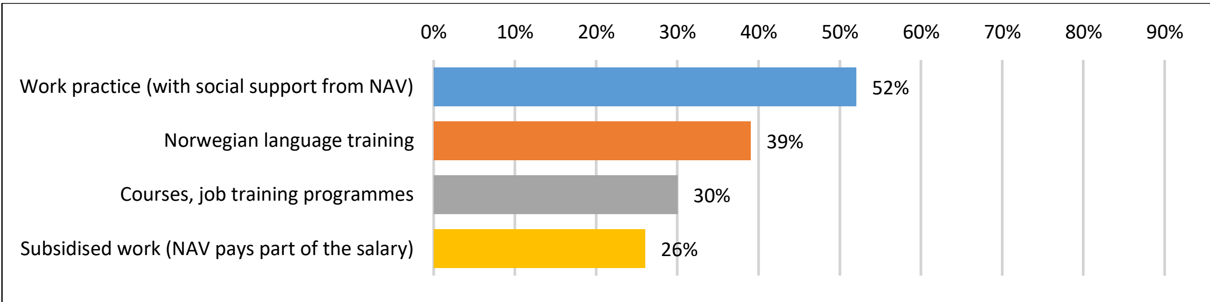
Figure 9.6 shows that only 23% had not needed any type of assistance from Nav after the introduction programme. 60% had got some type of financial support from Nav, and a similar share had got help to find a job. One in five had got assistance related to children.

There are some age differences. A higher share of those aged 18-29 years had *not* needed help (36%), and those in the oldest age groups (50+ years) had needed financial help to a much higher degree than the younger age groups.

9.2.1 Type and assessment of employment services from Nav

We asked those who said that they had received employment services what type of services they had received.

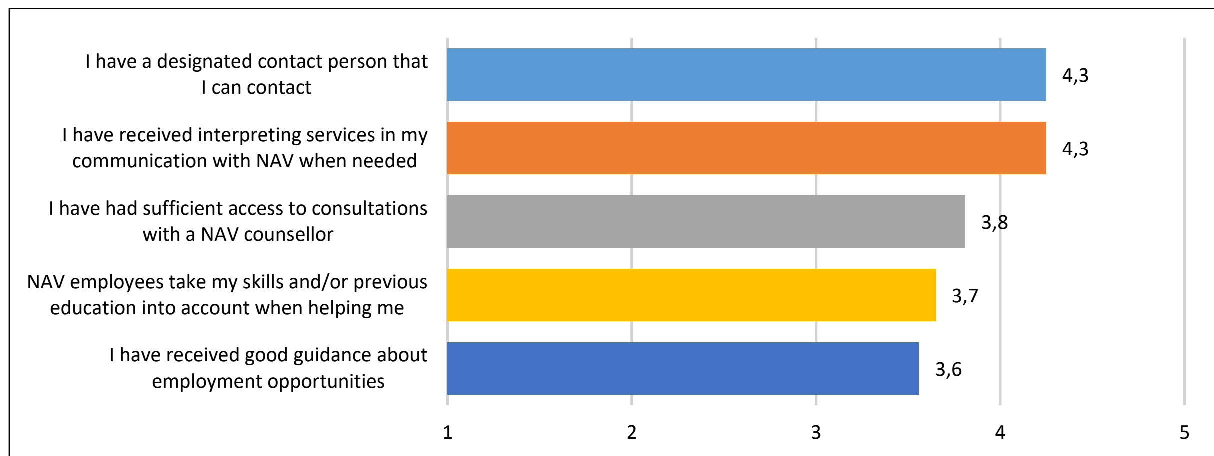
Figure 9.7: Type of employment services received from Nav (multiple options possible) (N = 393).



*Weighted by gender and age.

Figure 9.7 shows that half of the respondents who had finished the introduction programme and had received assistance from Nav, got work practice, while 39% continued language training. 30% got other type of courses or job training programmes, and one in four had got subsidised employment. Compared to the finding about measures in the introduction programme in figure 9.2, we see that subsidised employment is a more commonly used measure after transition to Nav (26%) than in the introduction programme (11%).

Figure 9.8: Assessment of various aspects of Nav's employment services (N = 326-385[26]).

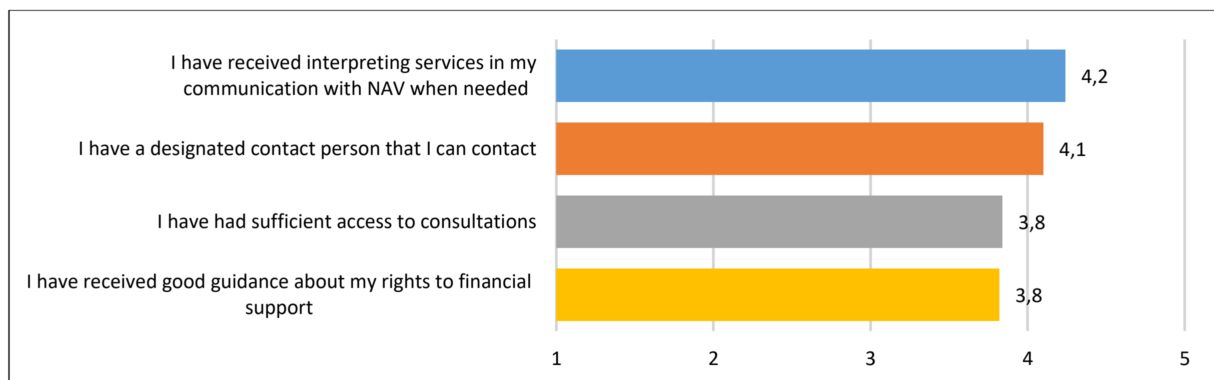


*Weighted by gender and age.
**Means and standard deviations. Scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).
***Those answering 'Hard to say/not relevant' have been excluded.

Figure 9.8 shows that most respondents agree with having a designated contact person in Nav and that they have got interpreting services when needed (4.3). There are more varied assessments of the other statements, with scores between 3.6 and 3.8 out of 5 concerning whether they have received sufficient consultations, whether their skills and/or previous education have been taken into account, and whether they had received good guidance about employment opportunities.

9.2.2 Type and assessment of financial services from Nav

Figure 9.9: Assessment of various aspects of Nav's services with financial assistance (N = 332-398[27]).



*Weighted by gender and age.

Figure 9.9 shows again – as with employment services – that most respondents agreed that they had a designated contact person in Nav and that they had got interpreting services

[26] N for the different statements: I have received good guidance about employment opportunities (N=373). I have had sufficient access to consultations with a NAV counsellor (N=385). I have a designated contact person that I can contact (N=372). NAV employees take my skills and/or previous education into account when helping me (N=372). I have received interpreting services in my communication with NAV when needed (N=326).

[27] N for the different statements: I have received good guidance about my rights to financial support (N=398). I have a designated contact person that I can contact (N=383). I have had sufficient access to consultations (N=390). I face challenges in my digital communication with NAV (N=371). I have received interpreting services in my communication with NAV when needed (N=332).

when needed. Results were somewhat lower, but the majority also generally agreed (3.8 out of 5) with the statements that they had sufficient consultations and received good guidance about their rights to financial services.

9.2.3 Very varied experiences with individual Nav counsellors

In the qualitative interviews, the refugees' assessments of Nav were very much based on their experiences with individual Nav employees, as illustrated in this citation:

> And there were also very different situations among Ukrainian refugees in [municipality], because we all had different Nav advisors. And it depends on which advisor you get. My advisor was a 70-year-old woman, so she wasn't very interested in what I was doing. And she had about 13-17 people like me, who neither spoke English nor Norwegian. (C7)

For this interviewee, it had not been a big problem, because she had good level of English at arrival and had managed quite well to navigate the system without much help from the contact person. Others noted that they had received much support and help from their contact person. It had been very important for them that they had someone to turn to with their questions and worries:

> Everyone has very negative feelings towards Nav. And I don't have such feelings. I am very grateful to my contact person at Nav for how she organised the work, for how she supported me. Her advice helped me feel safer and more stable in many ways. (…) So, if I had any questions, I would write in the Nav chat to my contact person, and they always responded quickly. My contact persons told me that they were interested in supporting me because I had a potential employer. (N1)

Our interviews also show that some contact persons have been very responsive to the needs and situation of some refugees.

> And for the Nav employees, I would like there to be more communication. Because I see that there are not many examples of cooperation like mine [the one I had with my contact person]. My contact person was constantly texting me, sending me SMS messages. We adjusted our work immediately for a week or two. (…) And there was very strong feedback. She really wanted to help me get a job. Not just for me to be on the list somewhere. She genuinely wanted everything to work out. (B3)

This interviewee had stopped going to language classes after one moth because the group she studied with was progressing more slowly that she was – instead she got help from her contact person in Nav to set up a CV and start applying for practices. At the time of the interview, she had succeeded in getting a fulltime job relevant for her education. She noted that she had been lucky with her experience with Nav.

Another interviewee who had spent much time following up a close relative that had undergone several operations said that Nav had shown much understanding for her situation and adjusted her programme accordingly:

> Yes, they are interested in people progressing, but they couldn't rush me because they knew my situation. They knew my situation, so we built a plan together that suits my current pace. (…) If issues aren't resolved through [digital] correspondence, then I schedule a meeting, go there, and they meet me. We sit down together. Me and a Nav employee. A person who records the protocol, an interpreter if needed, and we proceed to solve the issues, they explain everything to me. (N3)

While some experienced that their individual needs and interests were taken into account, others experienced a lack of contact with and information from their contact person. Sometimes there was also a discrepancy when it came to the person's own interests and goals, and what the contact person deemed possible:

> Firstly, I lacked feedback and information on how we could view the situation. This silence, and when people just disappear, it is very frustrating. And from this, when you don't know what will happen next week or tomorrow, or next month, everything just leads to a state of stress.

> The second thing, probably, is when your contact person doesn't care who you were before you came here, what skills you have, and what you can actually work as, how you could be useful to society here and develop yourself, as they all love the word 'trives' (in Norwegian 'feel good'). But then the contact person just says, 'No, you're aiming too high'. (N4)

One interviewee felt that she was being discouraged to search for work by her contact person:

> But when I said that I was trying to somehow get [work at] the [workplace], she said, calm down, do you have some kind of hobby, sit down and do it. Now is not the time. No one will hire you anywhere without you knowing the language. That's what I was told. But I continue to search, I hope that somehow, I will come across something. (C6)

Some had more concrete negative experiences where a contact person had forgotten to follow up on something s/he had promised to follow up on:

> When it comes to the work of contact persons, there is a significant lack of... understanding of situations and responsibility for the consequences of their actions, as the consequences are often negative, like an unpaid bill or something like that. (N8)

Several interviewees told that Nav had assisted them practically and financially in getting treatment at the dentists or that Nav had helped them finance or organise free leisure activities for their children: 'Very good help from Nav. They help us. My daughter got to start at the cultural school – now in football and volleyball' (A6).

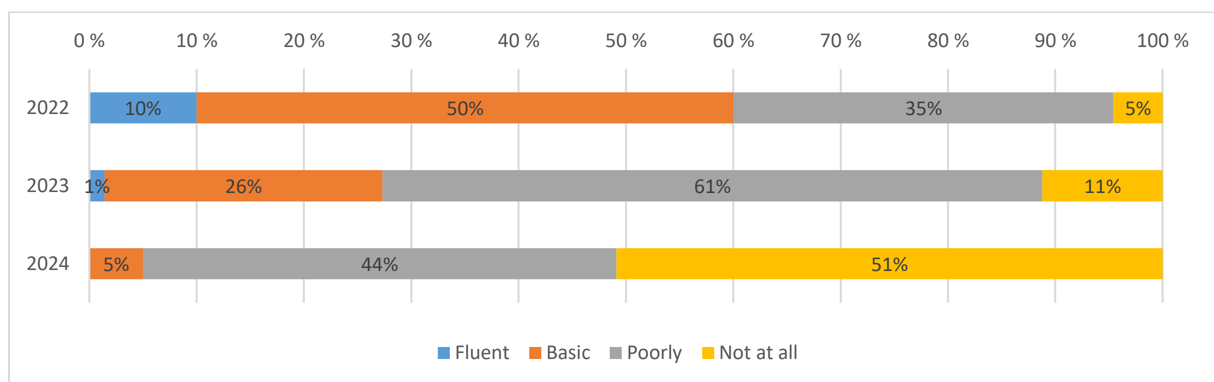
Some had received substantial support for courses that helped them qualify for work. A man who had started working quite shortly after his arrival in Norway was very grateful that he got help from Nav when his driving license turned out not to be valid in Norway:

> I think they helped me with everything. My forklift driver's license from the Czechia wasn't valid here, so the municipality helped me pay for the course. I studied, completed the course, and got a Norwegian license. The municipality helped with that, and it's significant. The training costs 7000 or 8000 kroner. At that time, it was an unmanageable amount for me. They didn't just help me; they paid for it. (C5)

9.3 Language training

Norwegian language training is a measure that almost all Ukrainian refugees participate in during the introduction programme, but what were the Ukrainians' self-assessed Norwegian language skills?

Figure 9.10: Self-assessment of Norwegian language proficiency (N = 1547).



*Weighted by gender and age.

Figure 9.10 shows – not surprisingly – that there are large differences in language fluency by time of arrival in Norway. Among those who arrived in 2022, 10% say that they speak fluent Norwegian, and another 50% assess their Norwegian skills to be basic. To compare, only

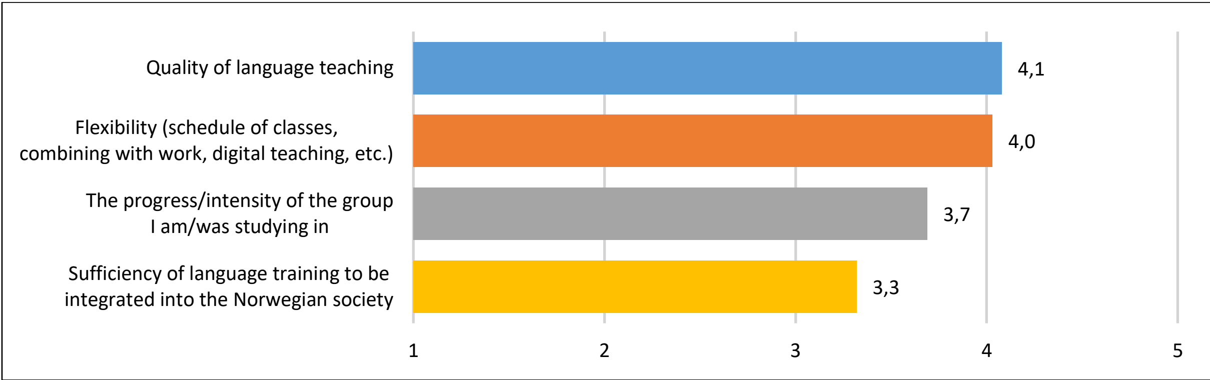
26% of those who arrived in 2023, and 5% of those who arrived in 2024 asses that they have basic Norwegian skills.

In addition to the public language training through the introduction programme or through Nav's services, it is important to emphasise that many respondents (70%) also studied Norwegian through other arenas than those offered by the public. 12% had private Norwegian lessons. 21% participated in Norwegian training offered by organisations or volunteers, but this was more frequent among those who lived in big cities (29%) compared to those who lived in small cities (20%) and rural areas (15%). About two-thirds also report to study Norwegian on their own (which could be in addition to the other forms of studies, or as the only form of Norwegian training).

9.3.1 Assessment of the public Norwegian language training

In the overall assessment of introduction programme measures, the Norwegian language training received a high score of 4 out of a 5 possible (see Figure 9.4 above). Different aspects of the language training offered by the public were assessed in more detail by the survey respondents.

Figure 9.11: Assessment of various aspects of the language training in the introduction programme (N = 1123-1259[28]).



*Weighted by gender and age.
**Means and standard deviations. Scale from 1 'very dissatisfied' to 5 'very satisfied'.
***Those answering 'Hard to say/not relevant' have been excluded.

Figure 9.11 shows that although there is considerable variation, respondents are on average satisfied with the quality and flexibility of the Norwegian language training, with a score of over 4 out of 5. The assessment of the progress of the language training receives somewhat lower scores with 3.7 out of 5. Respondents also disagree more often with the statement that the language training they receive is sufficient to become integrated into Norwegian society.

9.3.2 Language training during the introduction programme

Language is still emphasised by many interviewees as the major barrier to find work and something that limits the possibilities for what types of jobs people may get. 'If I knew the language, I think many more doors would open' (N1). Some interviewees also noted that they were being told by teachers in the introduction programme that good knowledge of Norwegian is a prerequisite for finding work in Norway. A man, who had arrived in 2023

[28] N for the different statements: Sufficiency of language training to be integrated into the Norwegian society (N=1248). Quality of language teaching: (N=1259). The progress/intensity of the group I am/was studying in (N=1235). Flexibility (N=1123).

thinking that he would start working immediately in the construction industry, was frustrated that he was not yet employed.

> Interviewee: They tell us here that as long as your language level is not at B1, you won't find a job.
>
> Interviewer: Who tells you this?
>
> Interviewee: Practically all the teachers. (C5)

To learn the language is seen as the main purpose of the introduction programme, and many interviewees were satisfied with the training, in accordance with the findings in the survey.

Some interviewees had independently started learning the language while at a reception center or while waiting for the introduction programme, which in some cases gave very good results:

> When I was in [reception center location], there was nothing to do, so I sat and learned Norwegian. Once I started the courses, my Norwegian improved very quickly. And after three months, I began my language practice. (A7)

Similarly to last year's report, several interviewees stressed the importance of good teachers and well-structured programmes. Differentiation of groups was also highlighted as important, so that refugees who learn the language more quickly and/or have greater motivation to study, have the possibility to develop faster.

> For me, the teachers I was lucky to work with are amazing. I really liked our teacher in the daytime courses as well as the one in the evening courses. However, in our group, if we talk about the introductory period, only about 30% made it to the end. The others dropped out because it was too difficult, and they moved to a group with a slower pace. (N7)

Interviewees who had language learning only two or three times a week would have wanted more intensive language training during the introduction programme:

> Of course it is too little, and in a year – to speak so well? I don't know who you need to be, but for me, someone who studied in school and even in university, it's still difficult. (A6)

In general, interviewees expressed a lot of appreciation of the possibility to learn language in the courses offered to them. A woman who had been enrolled at the introduction programme for 6 months at the time of the interview said:

> I understand that I still have the right to another year of language study. So, a total of one and a half years of language study. And I will, of course, take advantage of this because when you study the language yourself, it's one thing, but when it is given to you in a structured way, it's completely different. My progress increased significantly after I started the courses, and they presented the grammar as needed. (B1)

9.3.3 Continued language learning after the introduction programme

After the introduction programme, it varies across municipalities whether interviewees had been offered more language training or not. Some interviewees confirmed that they have not been offered language training after finishing the introduction programme even though their introduction programme lasted less than one year. A woman who attended the introduction programme for 10 months (including holidays) said that she very much would have liked to continue with the language learning though:

> You know, I really want to ask them [Nav/refugee services] about this because I feel that I need more, that I still lack something. I would still attend. I would go to work and take evening courses. (…) But I think they probably won't agree. I haven't approached them yet, I just thought I needed a tutor for this, but that also costs money. (N3)

Another interviewee in a different municipality said that she was offered six months additional language training after completing the introduction programme. However, the level of the group she was placed in was so much lower than hers, so she found it useless to go there.

She had asked if there were possibilities for creating a class for those aiming to pass B1 or B2, but 'we had not heard back at the moment.' (N5). Instead, she had bought an online course with a Ukrainian tutor.

Some of our youngest interviewees – people in their early 20s – were offered additional long-term courses after the introduction programme while on employment scheme benefits. In agreement with their contact person in the municipality, they had deemed that necessary for finding a job or in order to proceed with further qualification in Norway. A young woman who had completed her MA studies at a university in Ukraine after her arrival in Norway (while enrolled at the introduction programme) was currently taking a fulltime course with Hero Kompetanse (a private provider of job-oriented Norwegian language training):

> I got a place in April. I asked about the possibility, and they told me that I could continue since my contact person, and I couldn't find anything suitable [any suitable job] for me. He said I could still attend courses from Hero Kompetanse [...] The courses there are much stronger, not like the evening ones. Now I go there every day, so I'm constantly involved in it... participating, talking, a lot of that. (N6)

Before starting the course, she had undergone an interview and a test for the organisers to place her at the right level. The course was a full day course from 9 to 15 and set for 6 months to begin with. However, she was told that it could be prolonged if needed. She was very happy with the individual approach of the course:

> When you come to the courses, they ask what you would like, where you would like to find a job. That is, they focus on the person's wishes. They look at what you are capable of and what you want. And they somehow guide you in this. They tell you real things, like that you shouldn't expect too much. But the courses are very well-structured. (N6)

Another woman in her early twenties was similarly enrolled in a 11-month course with job-oriented language learning offered by a regional private actor from which Nav purchased job-oriented measures. She and her contact person had discussed that she needed more language training, and she was suggested to join the course. She stressed that it had been easier to learn Norwegian at that course than in the introduction programme because the study environment was more international with Norwegian as the lingua franca:

> Yes, it is more Norwegian. When I was in the introduction program, there were more Ukrainian people during the breaks. We spoke more in Ukrainian and Russian. But when I attended that course, there were many different people from Poland, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq – from many countries. (C2)

In the case of this interviewee, the language learning was combined with work practice that she got as part of the course and that she was very happy with:

> I love the teachers there. (…) The teacher who worked last year is also very nice to everyone. He tries... he found me the work practice. (…) They do a lot for people to help them find jobs. (C2)

At the time of the interview, with help from teachers at the course, she had applied for several upper secondary schools hoping to enrol in a vocational education programme in the autumn:

> [I applied] not only for the one subject [I told you about], but I also applied for others [other subjects]. It was healthcare work because Norway needs a lot of healthcare workers, nurses. And I sent applications to industry (the programme for industrial workers). (C2)

9.4 Assessment of work practice

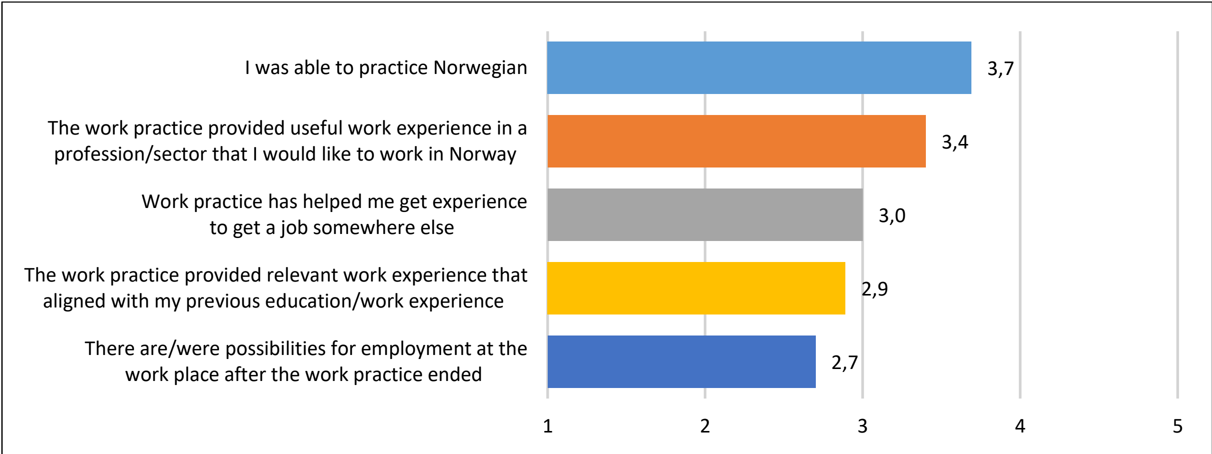
As shown in chapter 9.1, a larger share of the newer arrivals received work practice – in line with the new regulations introduced by the government. In the overall assessment of the elements in the introduction programme, work/language practice received 3.7 out of 5, and

the respondents' assessments varied widely. The interviews also show very varied assessments.

Whether the refugees had to find work practice themselves, or the municipalities found it for them, varied. 70% of those who had work practice had got it through the municipality, while 17% found it themselves and 7% got help from their personal network. In this regard, there are geographical differences. Those who live in big cities have twice as often found work practice themselves (24%) compared to those in rural areas (12%), with those in small towns in between. A larger share of those living in big cities have also found work practice trough their network.

Different aspects of the work practice were assessed in more detail by the survey respondents.

Figure 9.12: Assessment of various aspects of the work practice (N = 499-661[29]).



*Weighted by gender and age.
**Means and standard deviations. Scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)
***Those answering 'Hard to say/not relevant' have been excluded.

Figure 9.12 shows that work practice gets more negative assessments than many other services assessed in this report – all below 4 out of 5. There are generally large standard deviations, indicating great variation in the responses. When comparing different cohorts, we see an improvement for those having arrived more recently. The 2024 agreed more with the statements that they were able to learn Norwegian at their work practice and that the work practice helped them to get experience to get a job somewhere else.

Many interviewees who had completed the introduction programme reported having had some type of language or work practice during the programme. However, there were also those who had no practice at all. Among those who had experience with language or work practice, it differed at what time during the introduction programme they had started their practice and for how long it had lasted.

Whether contact persons or others in the municipality had helped them find the practice or if interviewees had found it themselves also differed. Some noted that because there were currently so many Ukrainian refugees in their municipality, the refugee services did not have the capacity to assist them in finding work practice and they had to find it themselves. One

[29] N for the different statements: I was able to practice Norwegian (N=661). There are/were possibilities for employment at the workplace after the work practice ended (N=560). Work practice has helped me get experience to get a job somewhere else (N=499). The work practice provided useful work experience in a profession/sector that I would like to work in Norway (N=614). The work practice provided relevant work experience that aligned with my previous education/work experience (N=591). It is my impression that my employer (at the work practice) exploits the arrangements to get free labour (N=607).

interviewee told that she started work practice in a grocery store after almost one year of the introduction programme:

> Interviewee: In principle, many people go [to language/work practice] after some 3-6 months. It is different for everyone, it is individual. For me, it happened towards the end of my program. I started in December. I would not say that I was practicing the language there. I mostly did what everyone else was doing.'
>
> Interviewer: And what were you doing?
>
> Interviewee: Well, I was listing products, checking deadlines. Well, I basically conducted similar work in Ukraine, so I knew what to do. (A6)

To what extent work practice was deemed useful for the interviewees depended largely on the possibility to use Norwegian, the tasks they were given and the working environment. Some interviewees experienced having several different practices with different outcome and impressions. One interviewee noted about her first practice that: 'I used the language a bit there, but they didn't really want to talk to me. Mostly, I had a lot of physical work' (N5).

In her second practice, however, she had a different and more positive experience where she even made use of her skills and felt included and useful in the working environment:

> And my language skills improved there. I'm grateful for this, because I communicated in Norwegian, and I was also involved in processing people's documents. If someone had a difficult situation, I could quickly translate in my level [of the language], but it still made things easier. Or if someone needed additional clarification of the rules, if they didn't understand. I even start to smile now… because I felt very needed. My speech improved. And I am grateful to the team, the people. (N5)

One of the main criticisms of work practice was indeed related to the fact that many were unable to practice Norwegian much at their practice. An interviewee who was currently enrolled in the introduction programme but had not yet been offered any language or work practice, had the same impression from others:

> Those who have been studying here since August, some were sent to language practice. One person said that his practice consisted of being taken to a large hangar in the morning and being told, here are the logs, you split them and stack them here. (A5)

When such work practice that did not allow for practicing Norwegian continued after the introduction programme, one interviewee opined, it could lead to people forgetting the Norwegian they had picked up so far:

> Those who work in stores, they work in storage rooms or, at most, stock items on shelves. And that's it. They come back from work practice with even worse knowledge [of Norwegian] than they had before they attended the intro courses and knew at least something. They went to work practice and forgot everything because they don't practice [Norwegian] there. (N6)

Several interviewees experienced going to work practice after the introduction programme while receiving support from Nav. In some cases, people felt they were using their competence and performing what they evaluated as full-fledged work. Because they did not get paid for the job, they felt that the employer was taking advantage of their situation. One interviewee explained that she had different expectations to a 'practice' than to paid work:

> But this is not work practice, we are actually doing work. And if it is work, because we know what to do, how to create it. (…) That is, if it's practice, then you should be teaching me something and not demanding anything from me. But if it's not practice, but work, then... (N5).

Some interviewees observed that some workplaces practiced a circulation of Ukrainians: new Ukrainians replaced those who finished their work practice, while there was no hope for anyone to get a job offer there. Several interviewees noted that they perceived this as exploitation. One interviewee shared the experience of her husband:

> He is in work practice at [name of firm], but it is not certain that he will get to continue [working there]. (…) No one has said anything about whether my husband has a chance to continue

> working there. Many are being misled. Employers are exploiting the situation. They want free labour. (A6)

Another interviewee, who also had a husband in work practice, was puzzled that the practice period was so long. She opined that it gave a wrong impression of Ukrainians since they are counted as unemployed when at work practice while actually working fulltime:

> Interviewee: A lot of people have very long-lasting work practice.
>
> Interviewer: How long has he been in practice?
>
> Interviewee: Half a year and it continues for three more months. (…) But according to statistics, the person is not employed. And it gives the impression that some lazy people are sitting there, but in fact, people are working full-time (B3)

Based on these findings from the interviews, we also asked the respondents in the survey whether they thought that employers exploit work practice to get free labour. The respondents were divided on this issue. While just below half of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, 41% agreed or strongly agreed with it (while the rest (12%) answered 'neither agree nor disagree').

While some are critical to work practice and feel that they (or people they know) are being exploited, others highlighted work practice as a real stepping stone to employment:

> And since I learned the language very quickly, afterwards they engaged me in a language practice at the school, and then work practice and now I have a permanent position. (A7)

In some cases, the work practice did not directly transform into a permanent position but it expanded people's networks, and in that way, it helped them find paid work. One interviewee told how people at the firm where she had practice were honest about there not being any possibility to be hired there, but they put her in contact with another firm where she first worked as a volunteer and later got a position that to begin with was supported by Nav (*lønnstilskudd*):

> Then a contract was initially signed with Nav for this practice, I received payments from Nav, and then we signed a contract in which Nav compensated 40%. And the last month, [the firm] paid my salary themselves. (N1)

In one of the municipalities where we conducted several interviews, they had different 'introduction programs' for different target groups. One woman said that she had been enrolled in a programme called 'Fast employment' (*Rask jobb*):

> Rask Jobb is some kind of program from Nav. I'm not sure if I have the correct information, but other people said that primarily Ukrainians are enrolled in this program, specifically those who either have higher education or good work experience. These consultants from '*Rask jobb*' find places for practice not in kindergartens or nursing homes, but according to work experience or education to integrate them into the Norwegian labour market.' (B1)

At the time of the interview, she had work practice in a firm where she could use her competence and former work experience.

There were some examples of interviewees combining the introduction programme with paid work either parttime work during daytime or in the evening. In those cases, they were exempted from work practice.

9.5 Summary

This chapter explored how refugees experience the introduction programme, and the services provided by Nav after completing the programme.

Introduction programme

At the time of the survey, almost half of the respondents had completed the introduction programme, while about one-third were participating (or on leave from the programme). Ten percent were not offered the programme, primarily those in the 60+ age group.

While only 15% of those arriving in 2022 had shorter programmes, the corresponding number for those arriving in 2023 is 29%. Virtually all respondents received Norwegian language training as part of their programme, while 57% participated in work practice. One in ten reported having subsidised employment, and another one in ten attended shorter courses/upskilling to qualify for work. Compared to those who had finished the programme, a significantly larger share of those currently enrolled at the time of the survey had unpaid work practice, subsidised employment, shorter courses/upskilling for work, and mentorship at the workplace. These findings indicate that there has been a clear turn towards shorter and more work-intensified introduction programmes, in line with the government's new regulations after the fall of 2023.

About half of the respondents found the introduction programme useful, 37% found it a little useful, and only 8% did not find it useful. These figures represent a decline compared to the 2023 survey results, where over 70% found it useful, and 20% found it a little useful.

Nav services

In 2024, a larger share of the respondents had completed the introduction programme and had got some form of assistance from Nav. Only 23% had not needed any type of assistance from Nav after the introduction programme, 60% had got some sort of financial support from Nav, and a similar share had got help to find a job. One in five had got assistance related to children. A higher share of those aged 18-29 years had not needed help (36%), and those in the oldest age groups (50+ years) had needed financial help to a much higher degree than the younger age groups.

Among those who had finished the introduction programme, about half got work practice while 39% continued with language learning. 30% got other types of courses or job training programmes, and one in four had got subsidised employment. Subsidised employment is a more commonly used measure after transition to Nav (26%) than in the introduction programme (11%).

Most respondents report having a designated contact person in Nav concerning employment services and that they have got interpreting services when needed. Assessments are more varied when it comes to whether they got sufficient consultations or whether their skills and/or previous education have been taken into account. When it comes to financial services from Nav the majority generally agree (3.8 out of 5) with the statements that they have had sufficient consultations and received good guidance about their rights to financial services. In the qualitative interviews, the refugee's assessment of Nav was very much based on their experiences with individual Nav employees, and interviewees have varied experiences.

Norwegian language training

When it comes to respondent's command of Norwegian, there are large differences depending on the time of their arrival in Norway. Among those who arrived in 2022, 10% say that they speak fluent Norwegian, and another 50% assess their Norwegian skills to be basic. To compare, only 26% of those who arrived in 2023, and 5% of those who arrived in 2024 asses that they have basic Norwegian skills.

In the overall assessment of introduction programme measures, the Norwegian language training received a high score of 4 out of a 5 possible. Respondents are on average satisfied with the quality and flexibility of the Norwegian language training, with a score of over 4 out of 5. The assessment of the progress of the language training receives somewhat lower scores. Respondents also more often tend to disagree with the statement that the language training they receive is sufficient to become integrated into Norwegian society.

After the introduction programme, it varies across municipalities whether interviewees had been offered more language training or not. In addition to the public language training through the introduction programme or through Nav's services many respondents (70%) also studied Norwegian through other arenas than those offered by the public. 12% had private Norwegian lessons and 21% participated in Norwegian training offered by organisations or volunteers.

Work practice

In line with the new regulations introduced by the government, a larger share of recent arrivals had received work practice. Respondents' assessments of work practice varied widely in both the survey and the interviews. When comparing different cohorts, we see an improvement for those arriving more recently. The main criticism of work practice is related to inability to practice Norwegian. The 2024 cohort, however, agreed more with the statements that they were able to learn Norwegian during their work practice and that the work practice helped them gain experience for employment elsewhere.

More detailed analyses show that respondents are very divided on the statement that employers exploit work practice to obtain free labour. While just under half of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree with the statement, 41% agree or strongly agree (with the remaining 12% answering 'neither agree nor disagree'). In the interviews, several interviewees perceived work practice as a way for employers to exploit free labour, particularly when the work practice was long-term and when Ukrainians replaced one another at a workplace without there being any real employment opportunities.

10 Employment in Norway: experiences and challenges

How many Ukrainian refugees in Norway are employed, and are there differences between subgroups? How do they search for jobs, and how have those who are employed found their jobs? Further, what type of employment have they found? Does it match their previous education and work experience, and do they have plans for further upskilling in Norway? Lastly, what is their experience with jobs in the informal job market and with exploitation?

With the arrival of record-high numbers of protection seekers over the last three years, the Norwegian government has intensified the focus of getting Ukrainian refugees into employment. At the same time, many Norwegian municipalities are in need of labour force, but it is not necessarily a match between the newcomers' prior qualifications and local labour-market needs. At the same time, as the majority of Ukrainians have higher education, there is also a question of what type of job they should aim for.

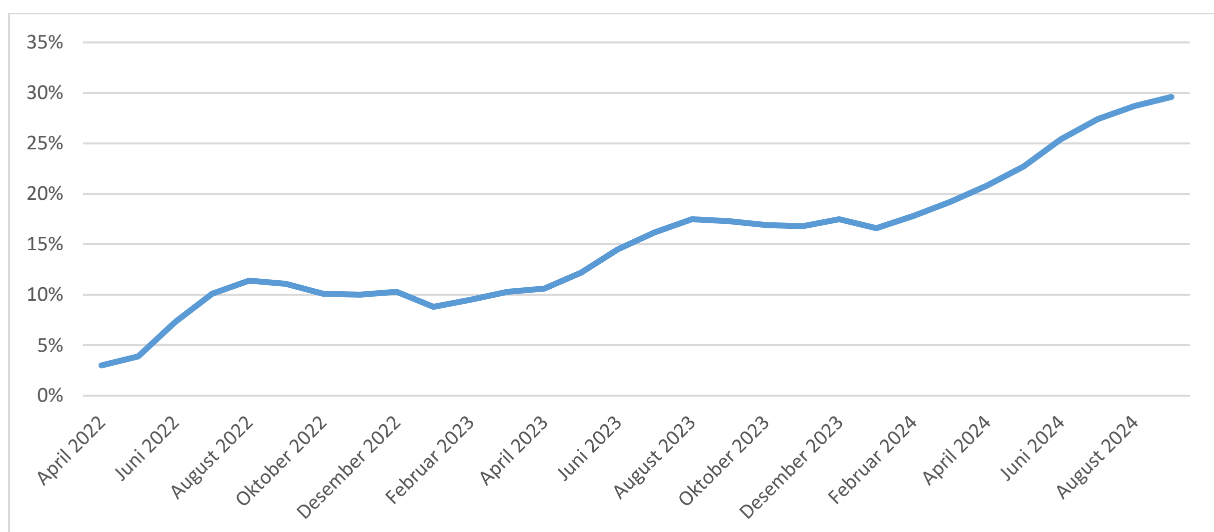
In this chapter, we first present SSB statistics of the share of Ukrainian refugees that are employed. We continue by analysing if there are subgroup differences relating to those who are employed and not (based on the survey). We continue with analyses of those who are employed, describing their job characteristics, including scope, sector and match with prior education and experience. We then present which aspects of their jobs they are satisfied and dissatisfied with. Finally, we look at the barriers Ukrainian refugees encounter when seeking (more relevant) employment in Norway, and whether Ukrainian refugees have experience with jobs in the informal job market and exploitation in the Norwegian labour market.

10.1 Employment outcomes for Ukrainian refugees in Norway

How many Ukrainian refugees in Norway are employed in the Norwegian labour market?

Based on register data, SSB provide updated statistics on the share of Ukrainians who are employed. The statistics are based on Ukrainians between 20 and 66 years old who immigrated to Norway after the invasion in February 2022 and who have been granted protection and settled in a municipality (SSB 2024).

Figure 10.1: Share of Ukrainian refugees who were employed (after settlement), aged 20–66, April 2022 – September 2024.

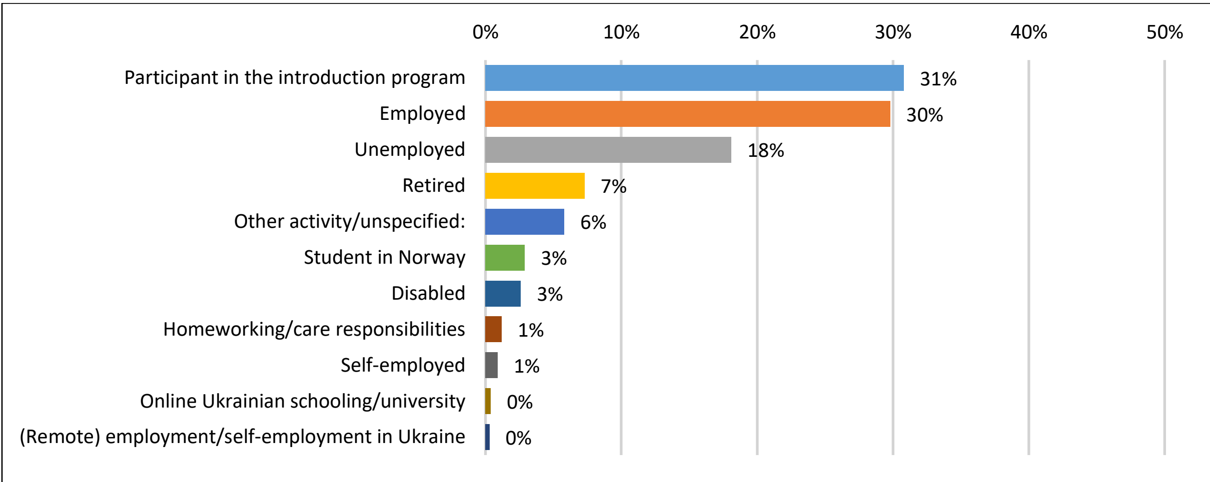


*Data: SSB (2024).

Figure 10.1 shows that the share of Ukrainian refugees that was employed was very small in the months immediately after February 2022. From July 2022 and the following year, it stayed at around 10% but gradually rose to around 15-20% the following year. From April 2024, it has steadily risen and was at 30% in September (SSB 2024).

In our survey, we asked about the respondents' main status (they could only choose one). The results shows that the survey sample is very representative for the share that is employed (both at 30%), but also provides information about the main status of those who were not employed.

Figure 10.2: Current main activity in Norway (N=1467).



*Weighted by gender and age.
**Those who have not been granted a residence permit were not asked this question.

Figure 10.2 shows that about one third were participants in the introduction programme, and one third were employed. 18% report that they were unemployed. 7% were retired, and about 3% were students or reported that they were disabled. Very few (1% or lower) reported to be homeworking, self-employed, participating in online education or continuing their job in Ukraine.

In the qualitative interviews with people we had interviewed last year, we started by asking an open question about the main changes in their lives since we last met. For those who had become employed, the main change that they emphasised was precisely this aspect: that they now had a job. As mentioned in the chapter on their economic situation (see chapter 7.7), many interviewees (although not all) highlighted how their employment had ensured a better financial situation, and the positive experience of becoming self-sufficient in Norway.

10.1.1 Determinants of employment

Which categories of respondents are most likely to have found a job in Norway? To answer this, we conducted a logistic regression analysis with employment status (having or not having a job) as the dependent variable. The analysis included only those that we expected actively to seek work, namely respondents who had already settled in a municipality or found their own accommodation, and excluding those still living in reception centres. We also excluded respondents over the age of 65, those currently enrolled in the introduction programme[30], and those who identified as students, retirees, home/care workers, or disabled. This left a sample of 762 respondents, 59% of whom reported being employed.

[30]We also excluded people currently enrolled in the introduction programme since most of them are not working, although some of them might be working part time.

Table 10.1: Binary logistic regression. Dependent variable: Having a job (vs. not working) (N=762).

		Coeff (B)	Std. err.	Odds ratio / Exp(B)
Background factors	Female sex (vs. male)	0.14	0.25	1.15
	Age (in years)	-0.03**	0.01	0.97
	Has children 18 yrs of age (vs. none)	2.07**	0.67	7.93
	Having children * sex (interaction term)	-0.81*	0.38	0.44
Qualifications	Education 11 yrs or less (vs. higher)	-0.40	0.36	0.67
	Education vocational (vs. higher)	0.72*	0.28	2.06
	Fluency in English (4pt. scale)	0.13	0.11	1.14
	Fluency in Norwegian (4pt. scale)	0.73**	0.15	2.07
Prior network	Norwegian network prior to arrival	0.49	0.30	1.62
	Ukrainian network prior to 2022	-0.03	0.23	0.97
	Ukrainian network of refugees	-0.14	0.20	0.87
Cohort	Arrived 2023 (vs. 2022)	-0.45*	0.20	0.64
	Arrived 2024 (vs. 2022)	-1.57**	0.60	0.21
Centrality	Big city (vs. rural)	-0.30	0.23	0.74
	Small town (vs. rural)	0.42*	0.20	1.52
Health condition	Health condition (5pt scale)	0.23*	0.10	1.26
Constant		-2.04*	0.82	0.13

*Significant at 0.05 level, **Significant at 0.01 level

****Weighted for gender and age

The regression analysis in table 10.1 reveals that proficiency in Norwegian is a crucial factor for securing employment. Respondents with limited Norwegian skills were far less likely to be employed compared to those with good language proficiency. In contrast, English proficiency showed only a minor and statistically insignificant effect on employment. Interestingly, respondents with children had significantly higher odds of being employed than those without children. To explore potential interaction effects, we included an interaction term (gender × having children) in the model, which shows that having children has a somewhat greater positive impact on men's employment than on women's.

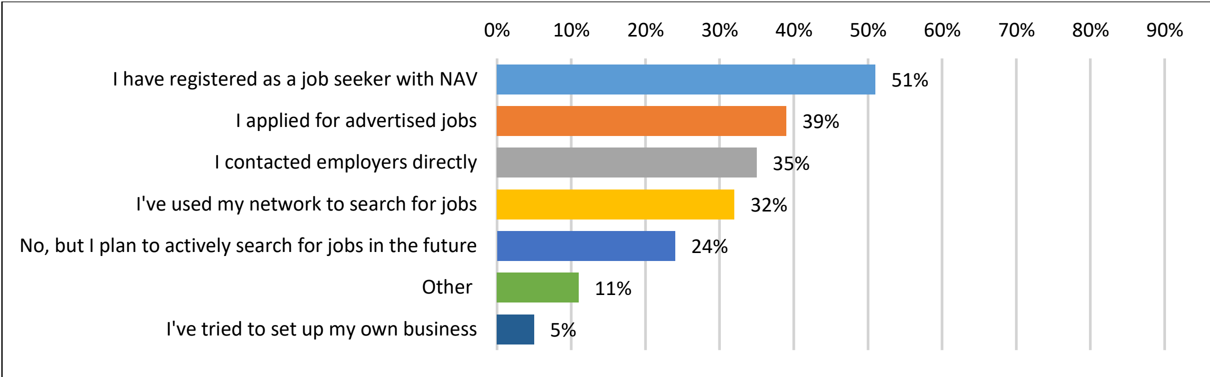
As expected, the year of arrival in Norway plays a significant role: the likelihood of employment increases with the length of time spent in the country. Gender, however, does not seem to influence employment prospects, as men and women have roughly equal chances of finding work. Age, on the other hand, has a significant effect: older respondents were more likely to be employed. Higher education does not appear to be essential for finding work; in fact, respondents with vocational education were the most likely to be employed, possibly reflecting the demands of the Norwegian labour market. It could also be caused by a mismatch between the type of higher education and opportunities for using it in Norway, due to for example higher language requirements for obtaining positions that require higher education.

We expected that better self-reported health would increase the likelihood of employment compared to having poorer health. This was also the case, but with a moderate effect. Smaller towns on average appear to offer slightly better opportunities for employment than rural areas, with large cities occupying an intermediate position. Rather surprisingly, having a pre-existing Norwegian network prior to arrival does not significantly affect employment prospects. Neither does knowing other Ukrainians in Norway prior to arrival enhance the likelihood of being employed.

10.2 Where have they searched for and found jobs?

In the survey, we asked those who had been granted protection if they had tried to find a job in Norway, and if so, how?

Figure 10.3: How respondents found their jobs in Norway (multiple options possible) (N=1467).



*Weighted by gender and age.

Figure 10.3 shows that half of the respondents had registered with Nav as a jobseeker, and about one third answered that they had applied for advertised jobs, contacted employers directly and/or used their network to search for jobs. One fourth answered that they had not yet searched for jobs but planned to do so in the future.

One interviewee – who had not yet found a job – shared her experiences in seeking potential employment. Driven by a strong desire to work in her field of education and previous job experience, she actively monitored job vacancies on social media, Finn.no, and through Nav. She mentioned that she planned to send her CV to all potential employers in the municipality and intended to visit them to speak with their staff directly. While there's no guarantee of success in her search, this example illustrates the proactive job search strategies that some Ukrainian refugees employ as they navigate the job market in Norway.

Figure 10.3 shows that only 5% had tried to start their own business. Some interviewees shared that while searching for jobs, they tried to create the workplaces for themselves. One approach was to initiate and implement local social projects. One interviewee mentioned that she developed a course for elderly Ukrainian refugees to help them learn how to use the digital services they need in Norway. She was inspired by her own elderly mother and friends over 65 who struggle with tools like Google Maps, Helse Norge, Skatteetaten, online ticket purchasing, and other digital services. She was planning to teach this course and was searching for opportunities to proceed with it on a more permanent basis:

> There was no such course available. I would like to propose that I teach this subject at the school twice a week. I want to negotiate with the school principal to take on this role and educate Ukrainians on how to use digital services in Norway. (N3)

In Ukraine, working as an individual entrepreneur or running a small family business is a popular form of employment, supported by a favourable legal and tax system for new

entrepreneurs. According to statistics[31], there are over 2 million registered individual entrepreneurs (*enkeltpersonforetak*) in Ukraine. 20% reported to be self-employed before arriving in Norway (see figure 5.1). It's no surprise that some of our interviewees with entrepreneurial experience from Ukraine expressed an interest in continuing their businesses in Norway and were eager to learn how to establish a business here: 'A course that explains how the tax system works here, what you need to do to start your own business, and how to pay taxes would be really helpful' (C6).

In certain municipalities, interviewees could attend courses provided by the local government on how to set up a business in Norway. One interviewee even stated that she had successfully started the process of establishing her own business and had taken relevant courses as part of her work practice, without pressure from the municipality to seek other employment. She had opened her own individual entrepreneurship in Norway and elaborated a traction plan while searching grant opportunities for further steps:

> Now I can apply to Innovation Norway. I gave a presentation to the former manager, and he said this is an absolutely fantastic idea. So, I do hope I will get some funding for market research. And then, yeah, and simultaneously I'm working on my application for investments. (C1)

She stated that the bureaucratic process was straightforward and easy for her, with no barriers or misunderstandings. Being fluent in English, she was able to communicate easily with various authorities and appreciated the proactive approach of Norway's tax authorities, as they addressed her concerns about avoiding mistakes with taxes right from the start:

> I remember they said, we are here not to punish you, but to help you not to make mistakes. And they said, of course, we understand if you start the business, you might make mistakes. And if we say like you made a mistake, don't do it anymore, and we see that it was not on purpose, then everything is fine. (C1)

Without facing bureaucratic challenges, her primary concern centred on securing investment opportunities. Despite having a promising business idea, she stated that it is extremely challenging to obtain grants in Norway without a strong network. Consequently, she was currently focused on building connections, and she was actively involved in various NGO-led projects that support business initiatives for refugees.

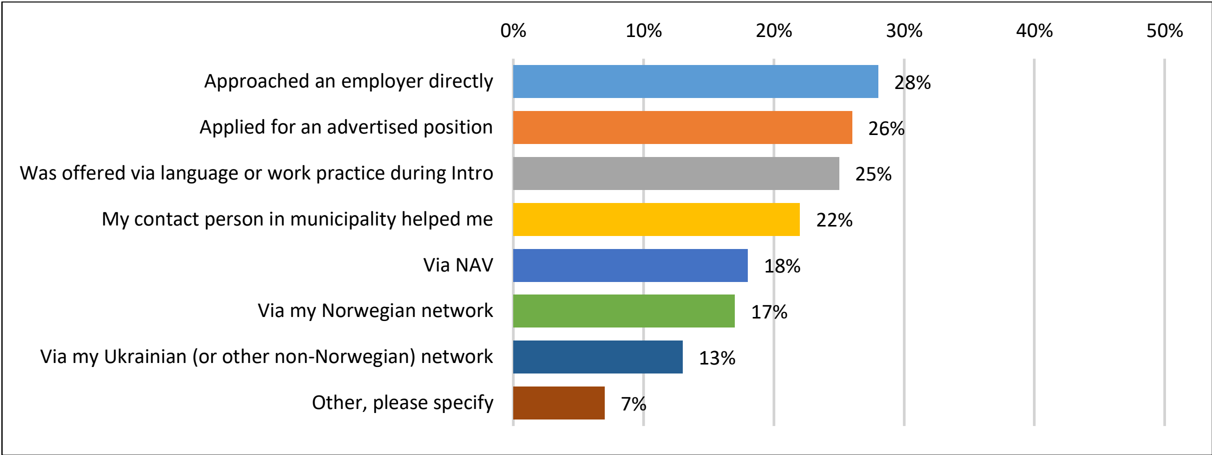
Another example from our interviews highlights that, despite the initial optimism Ukrainian refugees felt about their opportunities to start their own businesses in Norway, some came to realise that maintaining these processes is much more challenging than it was in Ukraine, leading them to abandon the idea altogether. Figure 10.2 also shows that although 5% have tried to start their own business in Norway, only 0.9% report to be self-employed. According to one interviewee, those who attended a course in entrepreneurship offered in their municipality ended up giving up on their initial business idea:

> In my class, there are probably five people taking this entrepreneur course, but two of them are thinking about work in the cafes. Two others have already admitted that they will not be able to open anything here and [they] are already looking for other jobs. (B8)

Among those who were employed, how did they find their jobs?

[31] https://forbes.ua/news/kilkist-fopiv-v-ukraini-perevishchila-2-mln-pririst-malikh-ta-serednikh-biznesiv-be-dovoenni-rekordi-04092023-15783

Figure 10.4: How respondents found their jobs in Norway (multiple options possible) (N=450).



*Weighted by gender and age.

Figure 10.4 shows that there are many ways of entering the Norwegian labour market. The most common ways are to approach an employer directly or apply for an advertised position. These alternatives have become more common compared to the 2023 survey, implying that the Ukrainian refugees in 2024 are more actively searching for jobs on their own.

One fourth found their job through their work practice. Others got help from the contact person in the municipality or Nav.

Although table 10.1 shows that prior network in Norway was not positively correlated with being employed in Norway, network was highlighted as an important way into the Norwegian job marked: 17% answer that they got help from their Norwegian network, and 13% through their non-Norwegian network. However, the alternatives in figure 10.4 do not separate between prior network and network gained after arrival to Norway, which may be one explanation for this difference.

We see that there are some differences between those settled in rural and urban communities. Those living in rural areas more often answer that they found their job through their contact person in the municipality and their Norwegian network, while those in the big cities more often applied for advertised positions.

The interviews with Ukrainian refugees exemplified a wide range of the different pathways to employment presented in figure 12.4, for example actively searching for jobs or approaching employers, securing work through language or work practice or thorough their Ukrainian network or by creating their own workplace.

First, some interviewees attempted to find a job on their own by sending out their CVs. The overall impression is that those who were socially active from the start and made an effort to connect with local organisations had better chances of finding employment. One interviewee said that she visited the local crisis center to learn about their work and introduced herself briefly. After some time, she suggested that she could work there with Ukrainians, and this led to her receiving her first work contract in Norway:

> At the crisis center, they mentioned they were looking for a psychologist to work with them, and my role was just to organise the Ukrainians. I then said, 'I apologise for being forward, but I'm also a psychologist; here are my credentials.' I'm grateful to myself for having the courage to speak up. They reviewed my documents and said, 'Okay.' As a result, I began working with groups of Ukrainians. (N5)

Second, language and work practice during the introduction programme remain important channels for Ukrainian refugees in Norway to secure future employment, either directly at their work practice, or by providing important network and recommendations that later secured employment elsewhere.

First, for some, the work practice played a significant role in helping them become cherished colleagues at the workplace. One interviewee mentioned that she completed work practice in one of the departments of a big store, and after some time, her colleagues approached the manager to recommend her for a permanent position. They were very pleased with her ability to work effectively and communicate well with the team:

> They went to the HR department themselves – people from my department – and asked them to offer me a position, saying that I was great. Around March, they told me, 'We went on your behalf, we asked, and we found you a spot for the summer. Hopefully, after the summer, you'll be able to stay here with us. (N4)

Another example highlights how new colleagues in the workplace encouraged some interviewees to apply for a permanent position while they were on temporary contracts. One interviewee noted that a colleague informed her about a job opening and encouraged her to apply. This was crucial for understanding how the system works overall, because the interviewee though that she would be offered a job. The right advice from the colleague helped to clarify the situation.

While some interviewees continued working at the locations where they had completed language or work practice, others emphasised how the work practice had helped them develop a Norwegian network, as described in the section on work practice above (chapter 9.4).

Others highlighted that even if they didn't get a job at their work practice afterwards, they were still able to reach out to the relevant person for recommendations if needed. This support helped some interviewees secure jobs elsewhere, backed by strong recommendations from their language or work practice. As one of the interviewees summed up: 'The boss from the work practice called the employer. It made a difference' (D1).

Third, the experiences of interviewees from 2024 shed light on how the Ukrainian network serves as a pathway to employment. Several interviewees noted that they learned about job openings through their Ukrainian friends who had been living in Norway for some time:

> She has lived here for many years and has taught these courses in Ukrainian for all the Ukrainians living in our part of the city. She called me and said that I participated very well in all the discussions we had during the course, and she thinks I would be a great fit for this project. (N4)

Ukrainian refugees who had succeed in finding a job also functioned as a network and door-opener for other Ukrainians searching for jobs. One of the interviewees recruited her teenage daughter to work at the same place as herself in her free time since she was eager to earn her own pocket money.

Lastly, some of the Ukrainian refugees arrived with strong experience in grant writing and project management. One interviewee described how she created her own workplace in the municipality by developing a charitable social project aimed at youth integration. She piloted this project in the municipality and then applied for a grant to expand and implement it more broadly. As she summed up in this regard: 'I successfully became involved in the process of obtaining three grants. In other words, this is essentially a workplace that I created for myself.' (N7).

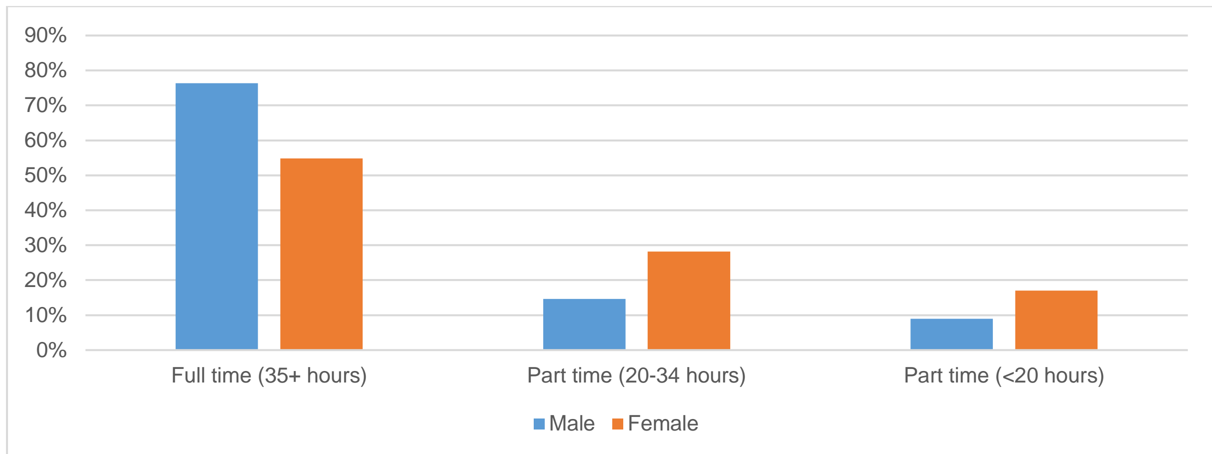
10.3 The employed – where and what?

30% of the Ukrainian refugees were employed as of September 2024, but what type of work have they found, and to what extent are they able to use their previous education and work experience? And were they satisfied with their employment?

10.3.1 Scope and type of work

Of those reporting work as their main activity (either employed or self-employed), 62% said that they worked full time (35 or more hours per week), 24% worked part time 20-34 hours per week, and the remaining 15% worked less than 20 hours per week. However, there were large differences between men and women.

Figure 10.5: Hours per week separated by gender (N=450).

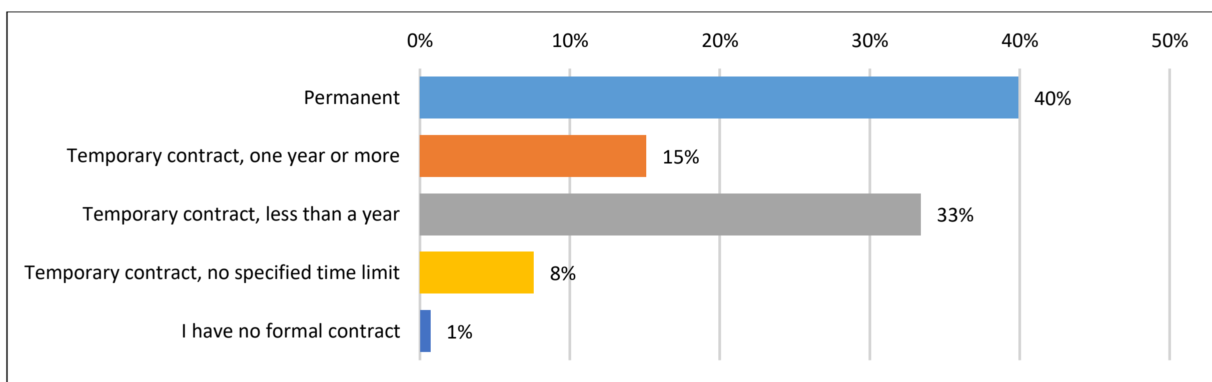


*Weighted by age.

Figure 10.5 shows that while more than three out of four men worked full-time, this was the case for just over half of the women, while a larger share of the women worked part-time, either 20-34 hours (28%) or less than 20 hours (17%).

In the 2022 cohort, there was a larger share that worked full-time than in the 2023 cohort (65% versus 53%), which indicates that the share of full-time positions increased with residence time.

Figure 10.6: Sector of employment (N=450).



*Weighted by gender and age.

Figure 10.6 shows that almost 40% had permanent contracts. Of the remaining 60%, 15% had temporary contracts for more than one year, while one third had temporary contracts for less than one year. 8% had temporary contracts with no specific time limit. Only 0.7% worked without a formal contract.

A larger share of the men (52%) had permanent contracts compared to women (34%), and there was a similar difference between persons living in big cities (50% permanent) and small towns or rural areas (37% permanent).

Many of our interviewees were very eager to work and gain self-sufficiency, and they tried their best to apply for jobs. Several of our interviewees stated that they worked part-time or had temporary positions, and some reported that they combine several jobs in order to achieve economic independence:

> Well, first of all, I found temporary work... I have two jobs now. The first one is project-based work: I'm translating a parenting course for Ukrainian refugees. It's a series of tasks that will keep me busy for two months. And I also found a summer job at IKEA. (N4)

Another interviewee, who had a job in her field of expertise, noted that she didn't have work for the summer. Instead, she found a position as a waitress and agreed to take care of cats at a cat hotel (N1).

The general impression is that interviewees in part time positions were eager to work more, but those with temporary positions (*vikariat*) often found it difficult to secure additional opportunities. This created confusion about how to plan their daily lives and manage their employment. One informant told about a friend:

> She signed a contract for a temporary position, but she hasn't been called to work for a month now. She only worked a couple of days, and then she was gone [did not work] for the entire month. It's unclear when they will call her again or when she will even be needed. (N6)

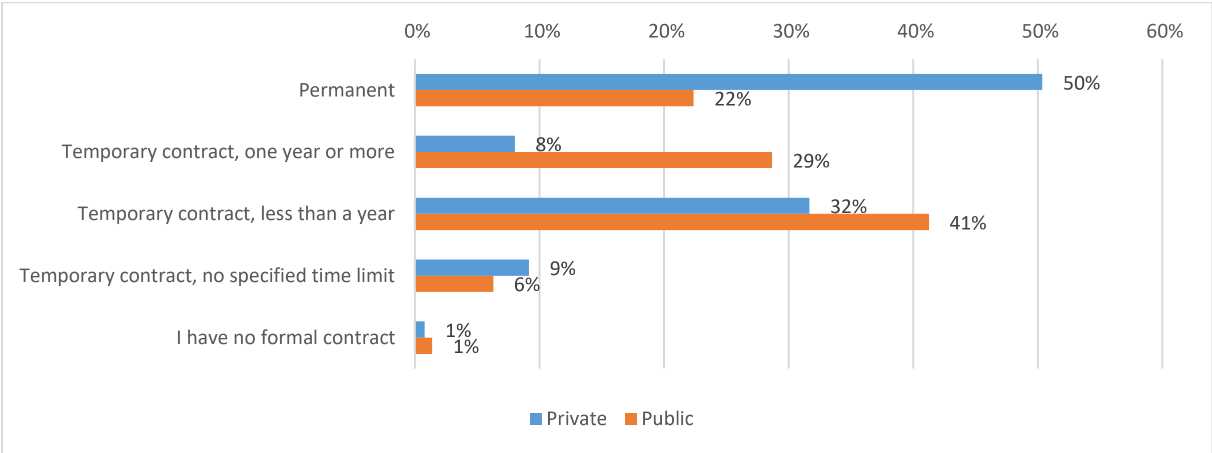
The interviews indicate that securing a job does not necessarily equate to maintaining long-term employment. Many positions are temporary or seasonal, leaving interviewees in a continuous cycle of job searching. It brings additional uncertainty in everyday life and the feeling of tiredness. One interviewee who took care of her child alone stated that she was tired of constant searching and had a serious feeling of fatigue. She had been experiencing symptoms like sleep disturbances and memory issues because of the insecure temporary position (N7). Among interviewees with temporary positions, several noted that they continued searching for more permanent positions.

10.3.2 What sector do they work in?

61% have found jobs in the private sector, and 33% in the public sector (6% were unsure). A larger share of men works in the private sector compared to women (77% versus 53%). Those who live in big cities and particularly small towns more frequently work in the private sector compared to those who live in rural areas (about 10 percentage points).

Like in the 2023 report, we find that there are large differences between the private and public sector regarding types of contracts for Ukrainian refugees.

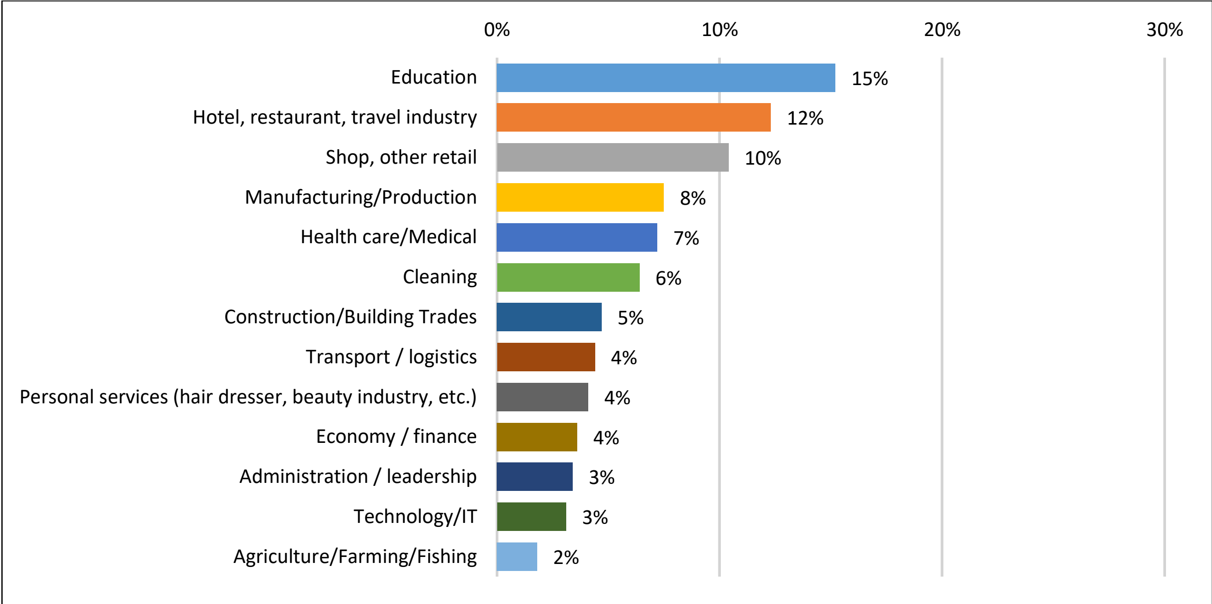
Figure 10.7: Types of contracts in public/private sectors of the economy (N=156).



*Weighted by gender and age.

Figure 10.7 shows the types of employment Ukrainian refugees have found and compares the private and public sector. Overall, about twice as many of those who work in the private sector have permanent positions (50%) compared to those employed in the public sector (22%). Contrary, for those on temporary contracts, a larger share of those who work in the public sector have a temporary contract for one year or more (29%) compared to those in the private sector (8%).

Figure 10.8: Sector of employment (N=450).



*Weighted by gender and age
**The categories 'I don't know' and 'other' is not portrayed in the table.

Figure 10.8 shows that 15% work in the education sector, followed by the service industry (12%) and retail (10%). 6-8% work in manufacturing, healthcare or cleaning, while 4-5% work in either construction or transport/logistics.

There are large differences between men and women concerning what sectors they work in. Men more frequently work in construction, manufacturing and transport/logistics, while women more often work in education, retail, cleaning and personal services (such as hairdresser, beauty industry, etc.).

The interview data exemplify the variety of where Ukrainian refugees have found employment: in the service and construction sectors, working as cleaners, waiters, hotel receptionists, restaurant and café staff, drivers, massage therapists, cashiers, electricians, builders, and caregivers in elderly homes. Because many have had temporary employment, some have also worked in multiple sectors:

> I worked at a hotel, as a cleaner, at a gas station, and as a cashier. I also helped people with assembling furniture. I worked in the municipality, assisting as a translator. Currently, I'm working in a warehouse. (N8)

Another common area of employment is positions that have emerged directly due to the arrival of Ukrainian refugees in Norway. Some of the interviewees also expressed a strong desire to work in the social sector with refugees, such as contact persons in Nav or Flyktningstjenesten, and similar positions, alongside their interest in pursuing jobs that align with their qualifications. These roles were for example teachers in welcome classes, kindergarten assistants, translators, and social workers in municipalities and reception centres. Additionally, there are project management positions in the private sector aimed at supporting Ukrainian refugees, primarily in the areas of integration and psychological support. One interviewee noted that, in some cases, employers find it beneficial to hire Ukrainians to attract new customers or clients:

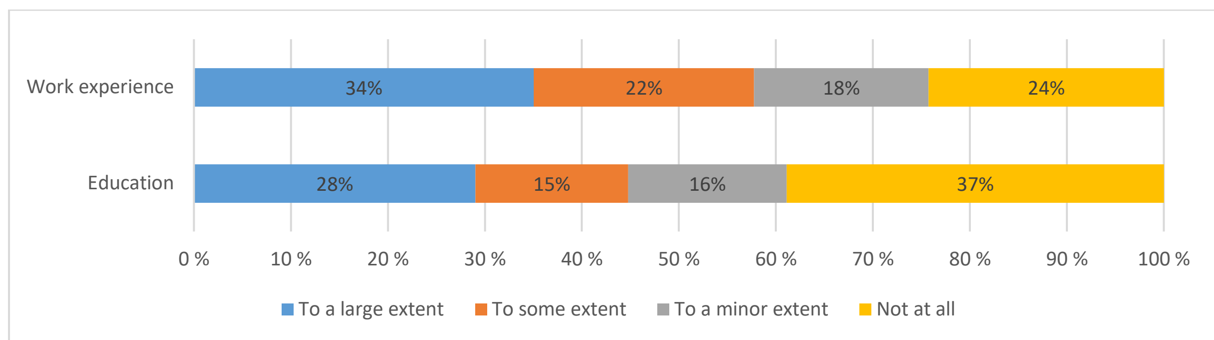
‘She's just as much a refugee as we are, but they hired her on a contract. And 70% of Ukrainians go to that bank because <*her name*> works there’ (B8).

Some entered their positions directly after work practice, while others followed a multi-stage path, starting in the service industry and later transitioning to roles more closely related to their qualifications. Although physically demanding work proved challenging for some, as one interviewee shared, ‘I've never worked physically before. It was difficult. I’ve worked in the kitchen and as a cleaner’ (1). Several mentioned that this initial phase was crucial for gaining valuable recommendations and obtaining their first work experience in Norway.

10.3.3 Use of previous education and work experience

Are Ukrainian refugees in Norway able to use their previous (often higher) education and work experience in their current job? First, it needs to be stressed that not all respondents had used their education and qualifications while working in Ukraine. According to our survey data, about one-third of those who had worked in Ukraine had *not* used their education in their previous jobs there.

Figure 10.9: Use of previous education and work experience in current job (N=430-439).



*Weighted by gender and age.
**Those answering, ‘Not relevant/I don’t know’ (3-5%) have been excluded.

Figure 10.9 shows that the extent to which respondents use their previous education and work experience in their current jobs in Norway varies widely. Just over half (56%) were able to use their previous work experience to a large or some extent in their current job, while just under half stated to a minor extent or not at all.

A lower share was able to use their previous education in their current Norwegian job, but there was still 43% that answer to a large or some extent. However, 37% reported that they were not able to use their education at all.

There are relevant subgroup differences. About twice as many of those who live in big cities used their education or previous work experience than those who lived in rural areas (with those who live in smaller towns in between). Those with longer residence time in Norway also used their education more frequently (30% in the 2022 cohort versus 21% in the 2023 cohort). Women used their education more often than men do but had similar shares to those of men when it comes to using previous work experience. Those with vocational and completed higher education answered that they used their prior education somewhat more than the other education categories.

Some of our interviewees had successfully secured highly qualified jobs in line with their education and previous work experience, working as IT specialists, engineers, and social workers, using either fluent English or Norwegian as their working language.

However, we encountered large variations in the Ukrainian refugees’ job aspirations. Many expressed a strong desire to find work that aligns with their education and prior experiences, but their levels of aspiration varied significantly. For instance, one interviewee with a temporary

position in the municipality indicated that she would be willing to 'work at a shop' if her contract weren't renewed (N7). Another interviewee from 2023, who previously worked as a top manager in Ukraine and initially resisted taking a job outside her field, eventually accepted a position in a store and was now quite satisfied with it. In contrast, others held higher expectations for their employment opportunities, despite lacking job experience in Norway:

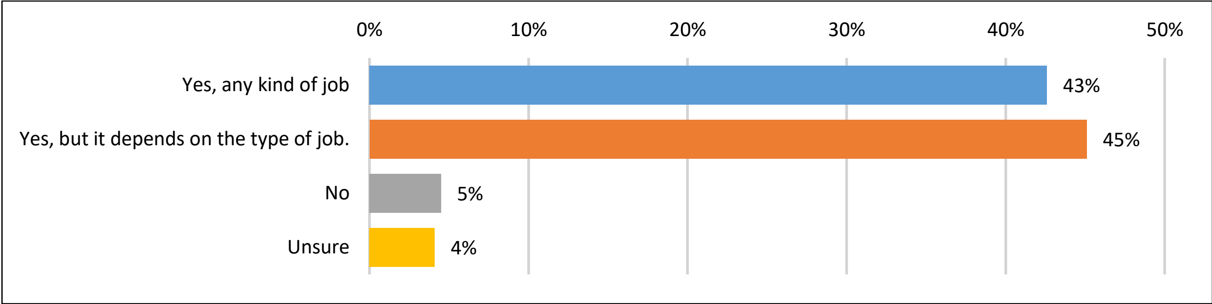
> It's clear that I won't just take any job at a store or somewhere else because I simply won't allow myself to do that. I need to maintain the same level I had back in Kyiv, and I know my experience and what I can do. I know that in Ukraine, if I were looking for a job, there would be a line of people wanting to hire me, you know? So, I am 100% confident in my specialisation; I just need a bit of time to adapt and to improve my language skills here. (N3)

For some of the interviewees, the desire to utilise their skills from Ukraine is so strong that they express a willingness to leave Norway if they cannot find work related to their education or previous job experiences: 'If I realise that I don't have a chance to succeed here, it will be... the end of my story with Norway. So right now, I can only see myself working in my profession' (N5).

Meanwhile, others were not afraid of a 'drop in status' and were willing to take on any kind of job to start their employment in Norway. Among our interviewees, there was a dermatologist from Ukraine who stated that she is ready to 'wash floors' if necessary. She was extremely satisfied with her work practice as a health assistant (*helsemedarbeider*) at the local hospital.

In the survey, we also asked whether the Ukrainian refugees were open to finding work that did not correspond with their previous education and work experience.

Figure 10.10: Willingness to work outside previous education and qualifications (N=1547).



*Weighted by gender and age.
**Those answering 'It is not relevant for me to take a job in Norway' (4%) have been excluded.

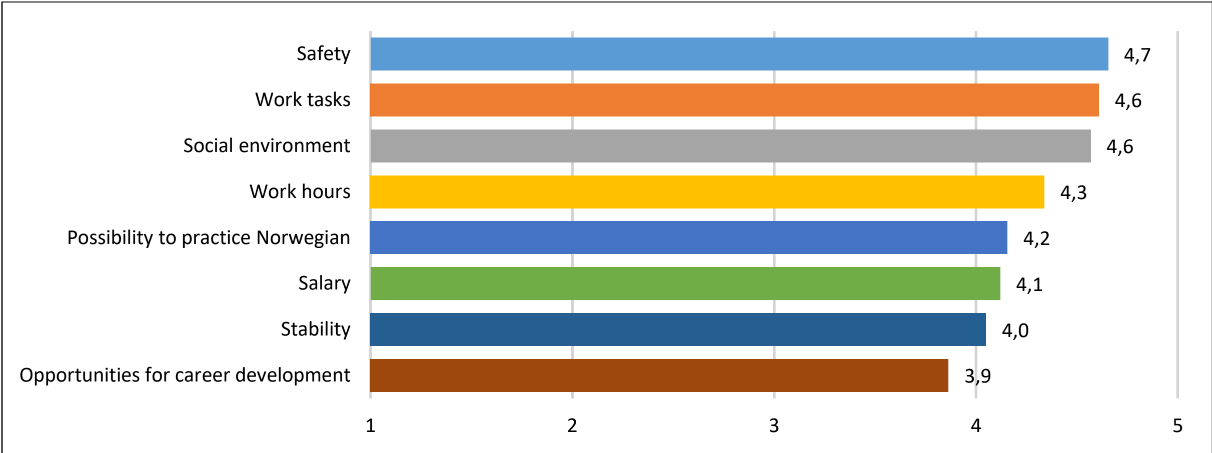
Figure 10.10 indicates that Ukrainian refugees generally are motivated to find a job in Norway even if it does not exactly fit with their previous education or experience. Only 5% were categorically against taking such a job, while 4% were unsure. 43% said that they would take any kind of job, while 45% stated that they would be willing to take a job not related to their previous education and qualification, but that it would depend on the type of job.

A higher share of the men, those living in small towns and rural areas, and those under 40 years were more inclined to take any kind of job.

10.3.4 Satisfaction with different aspects of the job

How do the Ukrainian refugees assess their new job in Norway?

Figure 10.11: Satisfaction with different aspects of the job (N = 450).



*Weighted by gender and age.
**Means and standard deviations. Responses on a scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied).
***Those answering 'Hard to say' (2–21%) have been excluded.

Figure 10.11 shows that the majority were very satisfied with most aspects of their work conditions, with scores higher than 4 for almost all aspects. Three aspects have larger standard deviations (implying more dispersed responses on the scale), namely the possibility to practice Norwegian, stability, and opportunities for career development. Although opportunities for career development have the lowest score, it has experienced an increase compared to the 2023 survey, where this aspect got a score of 3.5 compared to 3.9 in 2024.

The interviews in 2024 provide a more nuanced view of Ukrainian refugees' job satisfaction. Experiences vary significantly, ranging from those who describe their jobs as 'dream jobs' to others who express low motivation, working merely to get by. The overall impression is that those who work are still quite often satisfied with different aspects of work – working hours, salary, working environment and so on.

The overall impression from the interviews is that Ukrainian refugees are quite satisfied with their social environment at the workplaces. Those who work share that they meet friendly attitudes, support and inclusion at the workplaces that come both from the colleagues and the administration and leadership. As one of the interviewees summarises:

> I can honestly say I've never encountered a better employer, even in Ukraine. I've never experienced such a conscious, loyal, and accepting attitude from an employer before. (N1).

Another interviewee expressed that she enjoys coming to work because she values the colleagues around her. Other interviewees noted that they are invited to participate in social events at the workplace, such as birthday celebrations, Christmas parties, and Easter festivities. They were positively impressed by the attention and kindness they experienced from the colleagues at their workplaces:

> There were moments when I was pleasantly surprised by the support and trust they offered. This is very important because it makes me feel more valued and equal. When I suggest something, like 'Maybe we could do it this way,' I feel heard, and included. (N5)

However, this inclusion effort from colleagues often doesn't enable refugees to fully participate in conversations. Our interviewees described that it is challenging for them to engage in discussions:

> The topics they usually discuss at lunch are either unclear to me, or I don't have the same experiences, so I have nothing to add. I often feel a bit out of place because people are talking about which cabin they're going to next. These are social activities that I'm physically invited to join, but I can't truly be a part of them since I don't share the same context or culture. But this doesn't bother me – I understand that this is how it is, and it is likely that it is always going to be this way. (N7)

The only challenge mentioned by some interviewees is that they often work alone and don't collaborate much with their colleagues, lacking a team-oriented environment. One interviewee who worked in the municipality pointed out that she found it difficult to recruit Norwegian youth to participate in her integration project and needed assistance from her Norwegian colleagues. However, since they are very busy, she often had to handle it on her own. Another interviewee who worked with Ukrainians noted that she didn't practice her Norwegian at all, as her interaction with other Norwegian colleagues was very limited since everyone was focused on separate projects.

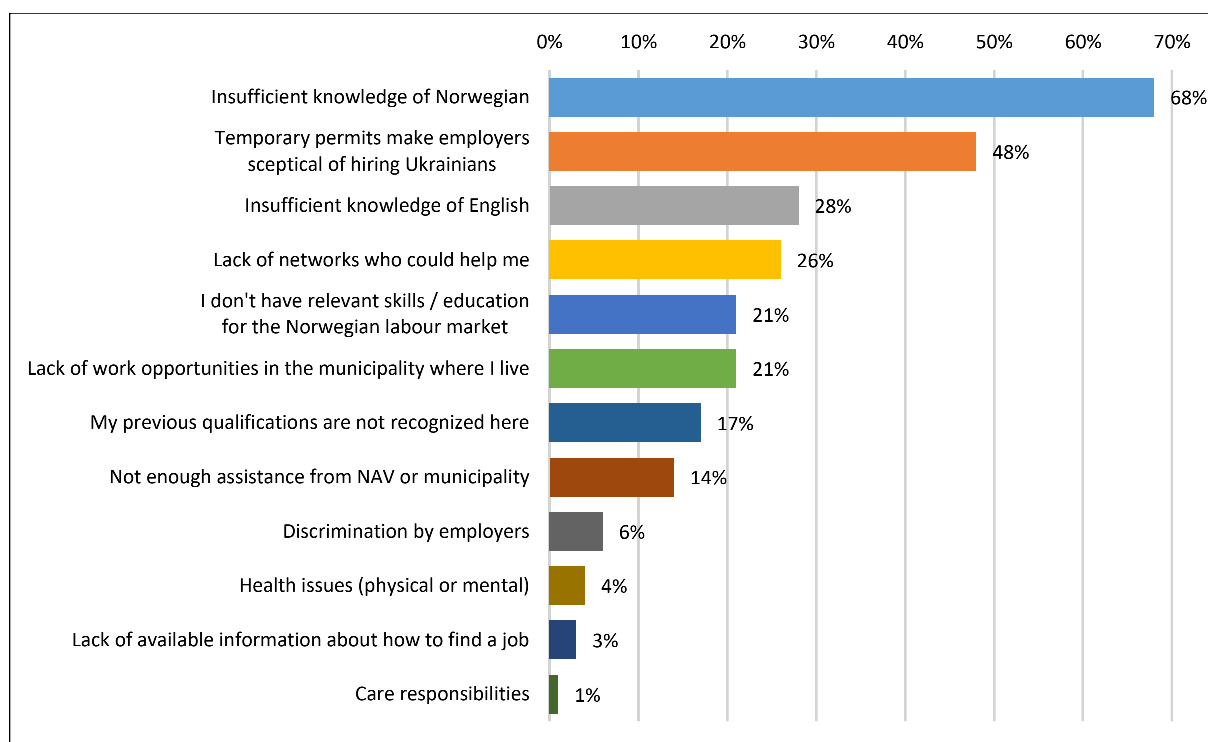
The picture is also more nuanced when it comes to the jobs that are not related to people's education or previous job experiences. The pressure for rapid integration has pushed many Ukrainian refugees to accept any job available, leading to a wide range of experiences. Some of those employed in fields unrelated to their expertise often struggled with a lack of interest and motivation, performing tasks simply because they need to be done:

> There are people who grow and develop in a specific field because they find it interesting. That's not the case for me. My background is in a completely different area. I've only been at this current job for about a month, and in the past year alone, I think I've changed jobs at least four times, each in a different field. (N9)

10.4 Barriers for finding a (more relevant) job in Norway

For those who were employed and answered that that they do not get to use their previous education or work experience in Norway (at all or to a minor extent), we followed up by asking if they had plans to try to get a job in line with their education in Norway in the future. 47% responded yes, while 28% said no and 25% were unsure. Further, we asked about what obstacles they encountered when searching for a job in Norway (more) in line with their previous education and/or work experience.

Figure 10.12: Hinders to get a (more) relevant job among those who are employed (multiple options possible) (N=264).



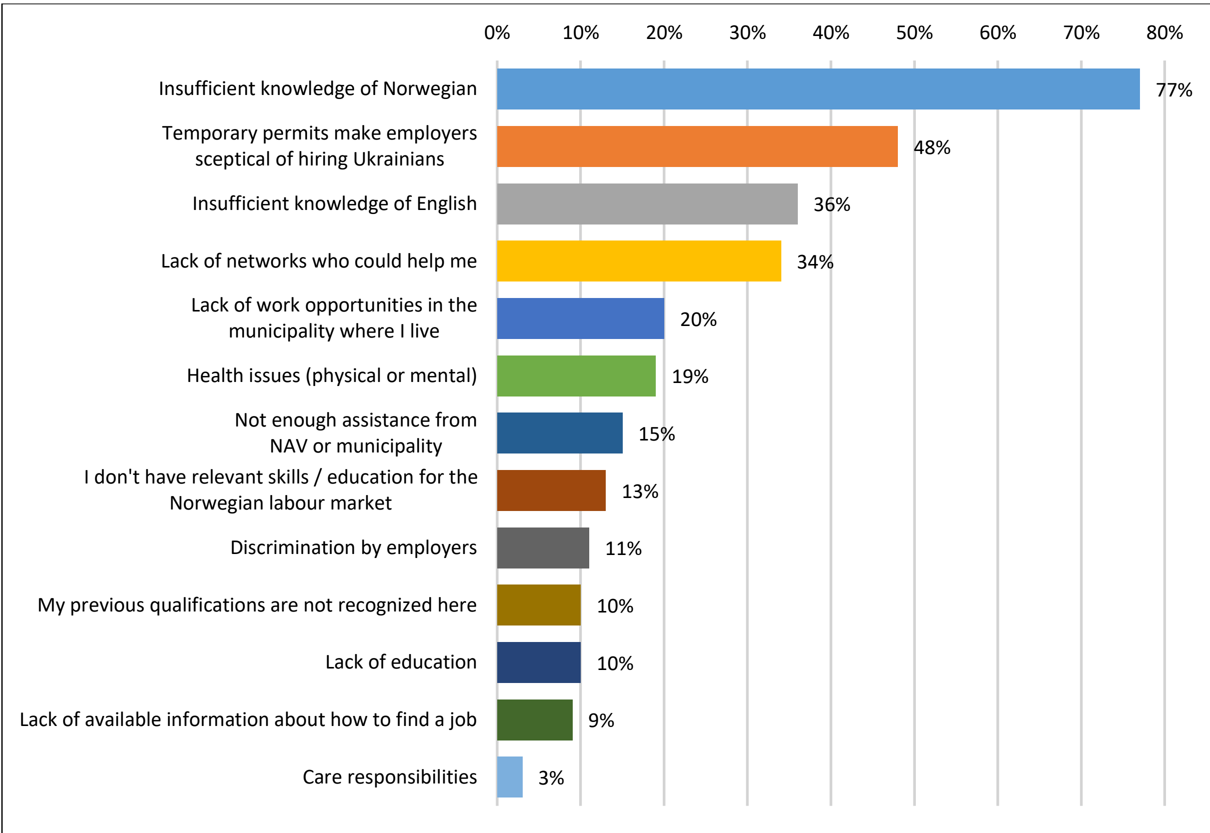
*Weighted by gender and age.
**Those answering, 'Not relevant/I have a relevant job' and 'other' are excluded from the figure.

Not surprisingly, figure 10.12 shows that insufficient Norwegian (68%) and English (28%) skills are the main barriers to get a more relevant job in Norway. However, almost half of the respondents also highlighted that the temporary permits make employers sceptical of hiring Ukrainians. One fourth said that lack of networks is a hinder to getting a (more) relevant job in Norway.

About one fifth also reported that they didn't have relevant skills for the Norwegian job market, or that their previous skills were not recognised. About 20% reported lack of opportunities in the municipality they live as a hinder, and this was particularly relevant among those who lived in rural areas.

For those who were *not* employed, we posed the same question about hinders to get a job in Norway.

Figure 10.13: Hinders to get a job in Norway among persons not employed (multiple options possible) (N=1017).



*Weighted by gender and age.
**Those answering 'Not relevant/I'm not going to work in Norway' (5%) and 'other' (5%) are excluded from the figure.

The vast majority mentioned insufficient Norwegian (77%) and English (36%) skills as the main barriers to get a job in Norway. However, almost half of the respondents also highlighted that the temporary permits make employers sceptical of hiring Ukrainians. One third said that lack of networks was a hinder to getting a job in Norway. One fifth said there were lack of opportunities in their municipality (the latter more prominent for those who live in rural areas). About 20% also listed health issues (physical or mental) as a hinder to getting a job in Norway.

As to other hinders, about one tenth list discrimination by employers, that previous qualifications are not recognised, not having relevant skills for the Norwegian job market and lack of education.

For the most part, most of the same barriers are mentioned as hinders for getting a *more relevant* job (by those who were employed) as for getting a job (by those who were not employed). However, there are some relevant differences. By those who were unemployed, health issues and discrimination are mentioned twice as often compared to those who were employed. Those who were employed listed more often that they don't have relevant skills for the Norwegian job market and that their qualifications were not recognised.

The interviewees' perceptions vary significantly when it comes to how difficult it is to find a job in Norway. Some believe it is 'impossible' (B8), while others argue that 'for those who want to work, there are plenty of opportunities' (N3). The reasons behind these perceptions are often a combination of factors, including personal experiences, stories from friends, the type of municipality, the nature of the work, language skills, and more.

In line with the survey results, the language barrier came up in nearly all our interviews, as fluency in Norwegian significantly improves both job prospects and the likelihood of moving from temporary to permanent positions. Limited proficiency in Norwegian was cited as a major reason for why it was challenging for Ukrainian refugees to find employment aligned with their education or previous work experience. Such positions typically require not only strong spoken Norwegian but also advanced writing skills, which can be particularly difficult to attain:

> I also had an interview for a more office-based administrative position that was closer to my experience in Ukraine. Language is probably the biggest hurdle because they were ready to hire me for that office job. There was just one requirement: I needed to take minutes at meetings, and that was something I couldn't manage. If I had the language skills, I think many more doors would have opened for me. (N1)

Some of the interviewees pointed out a mismatch between the demand for labour in Norwegian municipalities and the high language requirements for jobs that don't necessarily require advanced language skills:

> On one hand, there's a strong demand for workers here, especially after the pandemic, when many people returned to their home countries, leaving open positions. Now, these jobs are becoming available again. On the other hand, when I look at job listings, even for roles that are physical, like a mover, employers still require high-level language proficiency. (N2)

For some of the interviewees, their limited proficiency in Norwegian and English became a real barrier, preventing them from even attempting to find a job. However, a few mentioned that their limited language skills didn't pose as much of a barrier, as they had secured both temporary and permanent positions with limited Norwegian language skills.

Some informants mentioned feeling unable to 'compete' with Norwegians in the job market due to language barriers and the need to adapt to local expectations, when they – despite of these disadvantages – had to compete for the same jobs. While certain professions are in high demand in Norway, these positions are often out of reach for newcomers. Some interviewees suggested that private-sector companies could consider easing certain requirements, which might open more opportunities for candidates with refugee backgrounds.

> They say they have a staffing shortage, but then tell you, 'You're not a fit for us.' The issue is with the requirements – they're just so strict. If they eased up a bit, made things a little more flexible and lowered the bar just a little. I mean, if they actually need people… (N6)

Another challenge in entering the job market is the type of municipality where people live. As noted in the 2023 report, Ukrainian refugees in small, rural, and remote municipalities face a shortage of job opportunities, which contrasts sharply with the large influx of new arrivals. This situation has created a structural barrier to employment for many and becomes even more tangible in 2024:

> There are no jobs here. It's no surprise they can't find work for such a huge number of people. There's just nothing to do. We need to be spread out to other municipalities. But those other municipalities also have refugees. (N5)

To tackle this challenge, many Ukrainian refugees are seeking employment in different municipalities. They are purchasing used cars to increase their mobility, which does help in finding work. However, the necessity to travel between their home municipality and workplace also presents difficulties, impacting both their financial situation and overall job satisfaction:

> At my current job, I can't say I'm earning more, even though my income has increased significantly. What I'm bringing in is almost the same due to the high travel costs and time spent commuting. I'm spending nearly three hours in the car every day. It's a long drive. (N9)

As shown in the survey, almost half of the respondents are concerned about the temporary nature of collective protection and its impact on employers' willingness to hire Ukrainians. While these concerns were not widespread among our interviewees, a few mentioned that many employers are hesitant to hire Ukrainians because 'they don't know how long we will be staying here' (A1).

10.5 Cultural differences

Interviews with Ukrainian refugees indicate that newcomers encounter various cultural differences when applying for jobs or during their work processes. The first issue that emerged in this regard was the lengthy wait for a response from potential employers, with interviewees often not receiving any feedback long after submitting their applications:

> In Ukraine, I would submit an application and receive a response within a week, maybe a maximum of one week. Here, you apply and then wait... You wait a month, two months, three months, six months, or even a year. Yes, I would certainly prefer a faster process. (N6)

Another topic raised during the interviews was networking – specifically, how and when refugees can use it in their job searches. One interviewee stated that she still had practical questions about how networking could help her find a job in Norway:

> It's not just about the formal aspects, like writing a CV, but about how the job market is informally structured and how people search for jobs in an informal way. It's about how this network is built, how connections help, and which specific contacts can be beneficial. In Ukraine, I understood whom to approach and how to reach out. Here, it's not clear. Do job search websites work? For which types of jobs do these sites function, and for which ones do you need to go elsewhere? Which positions and organisations should I be looking for contacts to recommend me? I really lack this kind of experience here. (N1)

Some interviewees found it challenging to receive realistic feedback from potential employers or colleagues. Several mentioned that they only received positive comments, even when the hiring decision was ultimately negative. They expressed a desire to understand their weaknesses and areas for improvement, but no one seemed willing to provide clarification:

> There's no honest feedback here. All I hear is 'You're doing great,' but I never know how I'm truly being evaluated – what my mistakes are, what my actual worth is, or how people genuinely see me. In Ukraine, you could pick up on this, even from someone's posture, expressions, or the way they reacted. Here, they say only good things, and then suddenly it's 'no.' (N1)

One challenge mentioned was the distinction between unpaid work and volunteering. One interviewee noted that all her attempts to find a job in the municipality related to providing mental support for Ukrainian refugees could only be accepted on a volunteer basis, with no formal agreements or communication via Nav:

> And all the organisations say the same thing: 'This is great! Why don't you come in, and let's form some groups?' When I provided the contact information for the Nav coordinator to help formalise things, everyone immediately responded that it would be on a volunteer basis. I understand that to get a job, you might have to work for free, but where is the line? (N1)

Otherwise, many positive cultural differences were also mentioned related to job tasks and work routines in Norway. They frequently mention the sense of humanity, trust, and mutual

support in the workplace, and they feel less stressed and under fewer demands from employers compared to their experiences in Ukraine:

> Here, the atmosphere is much more relaxed, with no excessive expectations. Everything is noticeably calmer. We tend to have higher standards and expectations for ourselves than the employer does – at least in the public sector. I'm not sure about businesses, though. In business, it's probably the same intense grind as back home. (N7)

Informants who previously worked in public services in Ukraine noted that handling 'crisis situations' in Norway feels much easier than it did back home, highlighting their ability to find solutions more readily:

> Many tasks that are considered challenging in Norway are actually routine for us. My husband currently works at a reception center, where there are many high-stress situations, but he enjoys it and loves his job. (N5)

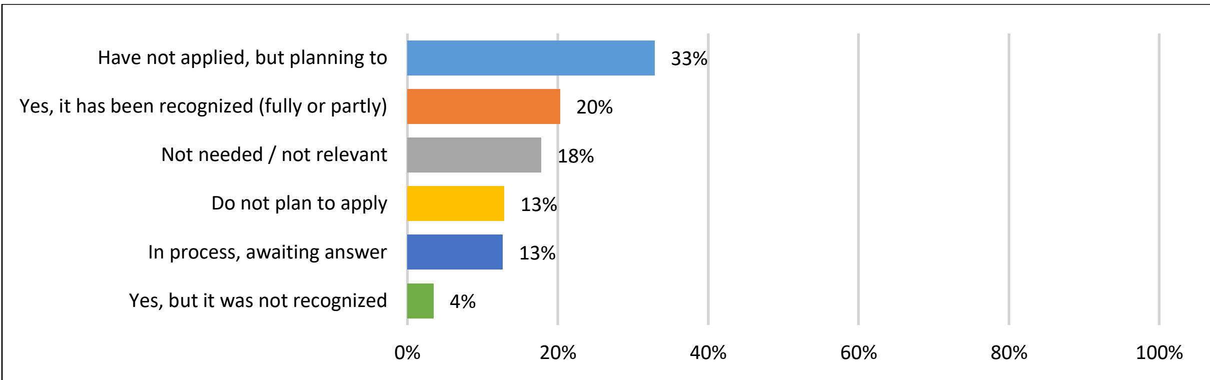
10.6 Plans for advancement and upskilling

We further asked the respondents whether they had plans on pursuing further education or other upskilling while in Norway. 13% said no and another 24% were unsure, but the majority of respondents had plans for upskilling or for further education of different forms.

10.6.1 Formal recognition of education from Ukraine

To have educational qualifications recognised in Norway, one can apply to HK-dir. Degrees or educational programmes are then evaluated against the Norwegian degree structure (HK-dir 2023c). HK-dir also offers automatic recognition of some qualifications from selected countries.[32] In the overall assessment of services presented in Figure 6.5, recognition of education was among the services with the lowest score, at 3.6.

Figure 10.14: Current status of recognition of formal education from Ukraine (N=1558).



*Weighted by gender and age.

Figure10.14 shows about one third plan to apply to get their prior education recognised but have not applied yet. 20% have got their education partly or fully recognised. Not surprisingly, there is a larger share from the 2022 cohort that have had their education recognised, (34%), followed by those arriving in 2023 (11%) while almost none (2%) in the 2024 cohort have got their education approved yet. For about one third, it is not relevant

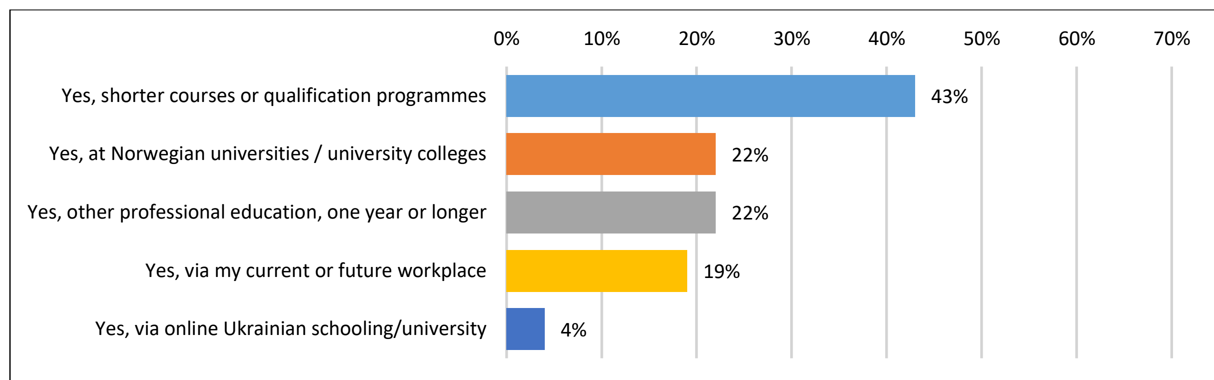
[32] Automatic recognition is a standardised statement describing the Norwegian degree to which a foreign degree may be equated. The document can be used without having to apply for recognition or upload documents for assessment. It is not, however, a recognition procedure and involves no assessment of your ID and academic qualifications (NOKUT 2023 https://www.nokut.no/en/news/recognition-of-education-and-qualifications-from-ukraine/).

(18%) or they do not plan to apply (13%). Another 13% are awaiting an answer on their application. So far, only 4% have applied but did not get it recognised.

10.6.2 Plans for further education or upskilling in Norway

We also asked whether they have thought of enhancing their education in order to qualify for a new profession in Norway, and two out of three were positive to this statement. Thus, there is a strong willingness to upskill their qualifications to better match the Norwegian labour market needs among the Ukrainian refugees.

Figure 10.15: Plans for further education or upskilling in Norway (multiple options possible) (N=1547).



*Weighted by gender and age.
**Those answering 'Other' are excluded from the figure.

Figure 10.15 shows that just below half plan for shorter courses or qualification programmes, but about one fifth want to start Norwegian university and a similar share plan for other longer professional education programmes. Another fifth also plan for upskilling through their current or future workplace.

As a lot of Ukrainian refugees have part-time or seasonable jobs, some interviewees shared that they wanted to invest time and effort in order to improve their cultural and social capital in Norway. Some of our adult interviewees had applied to upper secondary education (*videregående*), where they had a chance to improve their English and Norwegian language skills. They hoped that it would help them to continue language learning and increase their chances to find a job in the future:

> This [education] will be English-Norwegian. I would like to study and improve both languages. After all, it will be useful; it will help me organise my thoughts and allow me to learn the language at a moderate pace. (N1)

Although 22% reported in the survey that they want to attend Norwegian universities or university colleagues, the opportunity for Ukrainian refugees to pursue higher education in Norway appears to be quite challenging, as collective protection is temporary and any student loans must be repaid. One interviewee stated that she would not be in a position to repay her student loans after returning to Ukraine:

> People are paying it off over a long period of time. But with collective protection, you can't be sure what tomorrow will bring. I can't get a work visa because I'm not working in my field of study. So how will I be able to pay back these loans later? (N6)

As did 19% in the survey, several interviewees mentioned that they participated in short-term training courses at their workplaces, which helped them perform their job tasks more effectively. These courses were funded by the employers but initiated by the employees themselves. This created a win-win situation: employers received 'prepared workers,' while employees gained the qualifications necessary for their roles. Employers recognised that while

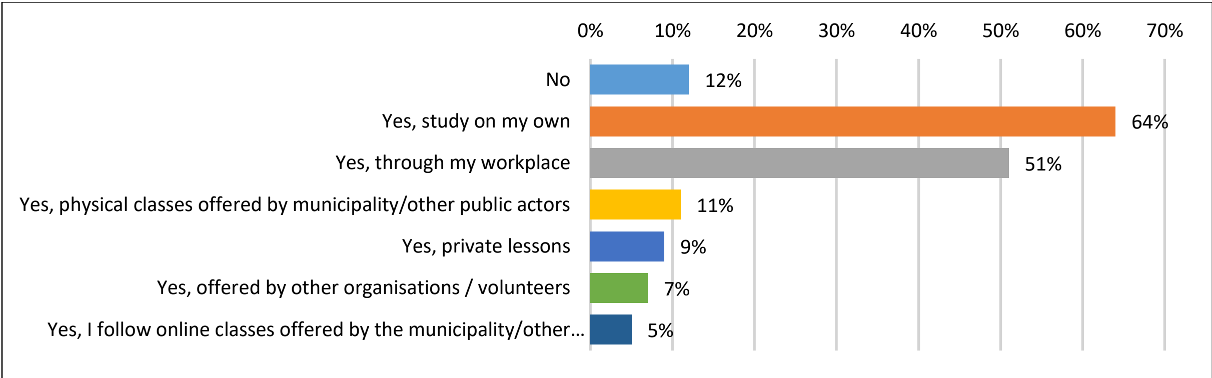
workers could perform their jobs, they needed some adaptation and additional training, so they were willing to invest in their learning:

> At work, I told them that I would be studying for three days, and they paid me for those three days, so basically, they paid for my studying. They were also thrilled that I received Norwegian certifications. (C5)

These examples highlight the role of employers in supporting the professional development of refugees through continuing coursing and/or language training to match the employers' qualification needs.

Related to continued upskilling after getting employed, we also asked those who were employed whether they continued Norwegian language training, and if so, where and how?

Figure 10.16: Combining work with continued language studies (multiple options possible) (N=450).



*Weighted by gender and age.

Figure 10.16 shows that the vast majority continue language studies while working, with only 12% answering 'no'. Two-thirds continue with studies on their own, and half continue with language training through their workplace. However, only 11% continue with physical language training offered by the municipality or other public actors, and only 5% follow online classes offered by the public. A few also take private lessons (9%) or follow language training offered by other organisations or volunteers.

Not surprisingly, those from the 2023 cohort follows language training offered by the public (physical or online) more often than the 2022 cohort, as the right to public language training only lasts from up to a year and a half after the start of the introduction programme. Still, from the 2023 cohort, only 26% follow physical training and 13% follow online training offered by the public. Those who live in big cities also have a larger share that attend physical classes and training offered by organisations and volunteers, indicating that there may be more offers in these urban areas.

The interviewees who were employed emphasised that interacting with colleagues at work played an important role in improving language skills. Overall, interviewees felt they made progress in language proficiency through their job tasks. Even in roles with limited communication requirements, they reported using Norwegian regularly and noticed their skills improving:

> I'm already understanding better by ear. Work has this effect where your intuition kicks in – you might not [be able to] translate each word, but you quickly grasp the meaning of the whole sentence. (N2)

Despite making progress, some interviewees mentioned that continuing language learning after work was challenging due to fatigue and difficulty focusing. While some tried to keep studying, they acknowledged that it's not always successful:

> My Norwegian language learning currently consists of driving in the car while listening to the news. I get home, pick up a book, and fall asleep with it. (N9)

Some interviewees expressed a desire to find a different job eventually. They recognised that achieving this would require a higher level of Norwegian proficiency, which kept them motivated to continue learning the language. However, their ability to reach this goal was often limited by the exhaustion they felt after a physically demanding workday:

> If only I could pass the B1 level, then I could qualify for a different job… It's really hard. After an eight-hour workday, you just can't take in any more information. (N2)

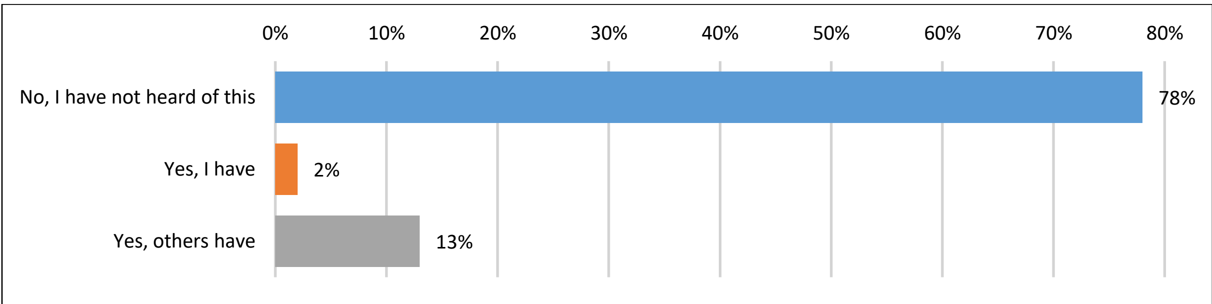
10.7 Work in the informal economy and exploitation

In the interviews and survey, we also asked questions about the informal job sector. Such questions could, of course, be perceived as sensitive, and the respondents were assured that the responses would be treated anonymously and confidentially and would not lead to any negative consequences for them. Nevertheless, there is a potential for underreporting on such matters, particularly when respondents are asked to share details about their own involvement in such activities.

First, the respondents were asked whether they had ever been *offered* to work in the informal/unregistered sector of the economy in Norway (e.g. without a contract or without paying taxes). Only 5% answered 'yes'. Although there were generally low shares overall, a larger share of men than women had been offered such work, a larger share of the younger age groups compared to the older age groups, and it was also more common among those who lived in the big cities compared to small towns and rural areas.

The respondents were then asked whether they or any Ukrainian refugees they knew have had paid work in Norway's informal/unregistered economy, such as working without a contract or without paying taxes.

Figure 10.17: Work in the informal job marked (N=1547).



*Weighted by gender and age.
**Those who answered, 'Don't know / don't want to answer' (11%) are excluded from the figure.

Figure 10.17 shows that the large majority answered that they had not heard of this. Only 2% report that they themselves had worked in the informal economy, while 13% knew of other Ukrainian refugees who had done so. The share that reports to have worked in the informal economy themselves has not changed since the 2023 survey, however, the share that has heard of other Ukrainian refugees who work there have risen from 9% to 13%. A somewhat larger share of men and those living in the big cities knew others who had worked in the informal economy.

Overall, the qualitative data supports the survey results indicating that informal work is not common among Ukrainian refugees in Norway. However, one interviewee noted that she began to work and reported on working hours while her job contract was not signed:

> However, after working in the restaurant for a month, I still haven't signed a contract. Yes, there is a payroll record showing my hours worked, but it doesn't feel like I'm going to be compensated properly. Despite this, the whole situation feels strange... I know for sure that this wouldn't happen with Norwegians in my workplace. (N1)

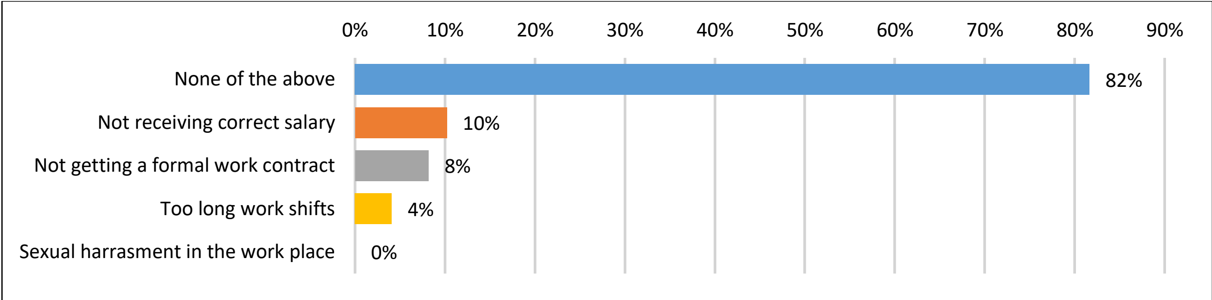
Another interviewee shared some concerns surfaced about potential risks of informal work in specific cases. The first scenario involved worries about cleaning services. While it's unclear if these concerns were based on rumours or facts, there was at least some apprehension surrounding these cases: 'They found a job in cleaning, and to be honest, it's half off-the-books and half official. They're called in when there's work available.' (B8)

Another concern involved the 'beauty industry,' where some Ukrainian refugees provide services like manicures, massages, or hairdressing within their community, without paying taxes. The informant described it as follows: 'The beauty industry services brought from Ukraine operate entirely on a private basis. All work is done tax-free' (B8).

The interviewee wasn't entirely sure if these services were also offered to locals, but noted that, at minimum, this practice seemed to involve Ukrainians serving one another. Aside from these cases, work in the informal or irregular sector does not appear to be widespread among Ukrainian refugees in Norway – at least according to our informants' perceptions.

We further asked whether the respondents in their current or former jobs in Norway had experienced any of the following forms of exploitation or discrimination.

Figure 10.18: Experience of exploitation in current or former jobs in Norway (multiple options possible) (N=758).



*Weighted by gender and age.
**Those who answered, 'I have not had a job in Norway' (51% of the sample) are excluded.

Figure 10.18 shows that 82% reported that they had not experienced any types of exploitation in their jobs in Norway. 10% had experienced not receiving correct salary, and 8% not getting a formal work contract. 4% reported having too extensive work hours. However, no one reported experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace.

In the survey, the respondents were divided about whether they had got sufficient information about the rights and regulations in the Norwegian labour market, with a total score of 3.7 out of 5 (see figure 7.4). Some interviewees mentioned that they lacked information and knowledge about their work-related rights in Norway, and worried that employers could exploit this vulnerability. When asked whether she had a job contract in the interview, one woman did not know whether the job position was temporary or permanent. She reflected that she had a feeling that 'we [Ukrainians] do not know our rights'. Another issue that came up during the interviews was the topic of pension contributions and whether these are provided by employers. One interviewee noted that she discovered there were no pension contributions at one of her workplaces, and no one had informed her about this or explained why. She mentioned that it was difficult to get information about this from the municipality and felt some pressure from them to accept any job as quickly as possible, without much regard for whether her work rights were protected.

One interviewee described that she faced social dumping practices while working for the municipality. Ukrainian refugees with relevant experience were invited to take on temporary tasks for the municipality. However, they were offered lower payments than other employees for the same scope of work and responsibilities:

> We'll have both Norwegian and Ukrainian specialists working with us – Norwegians who will lead various activities and Ukrainians with unique, specialised skills that we need. These Ukrainian professionals have specific expertise, relevant certifications, and are very well-suited for the work. However, they're paid significantly less simply because they're Ukrainian. It's not a salary; it's more of an honorarium, which can vary in amount. So, it's the municipality that decides how much to pay for each job. And Ukrainians are not on the same level as Norwegians in terms of pay. (N7)

Another topic that was raised by some interviewees was descriptions of a 'special attitude' towards refugees. Most of them related to low expectations from the locals considering the refugees' skills and knowledge. One informant stated that she 'was presented' to the politicians when they came to the shop where she worked. They were very surprised to hear that she used to work as a top manager in Ukraine and lead a company: 'I think they were expecting me to say that I was unemployed, or that I only had a few years of schooling, couldn't read, or didn't know that the Earth is round' (N4).

Another interviewee shared other experiences of 'low expectations and partial social exclusion she felt during her work practice as she was not proficient in language:

> There were situations where I felt discriminated against because of my refugee status and Eastern European background. (…) Not knowing the language led many to assume I didn't understand anything. They would explain to me every day, 'This is a coffee machine; this is a dishwasher.' After two months, when my language skills improved, I found ways to explain that, yes, I also have a coffee machine and a dishwasher at home. (N5)

This informant also noted that some men in her work environment viewed her through the lens of being an 'Eastern European woman,' which she found belittling and dismissive:

> I found myself a few times in situations where men would start talking to me about personal topics right away, thinking it was normal. They were a bit under the influence of alcohol, but still, I knew they wouldn't talk this way with others. They'd ask about my relationship status, how quickly I wanted to find a partner here, and assumed that I should be looking. It felt belittling. When I asked why they thought it was okay to talk to me like that, and mentioned I was interested in different topics, the conversation would just end, and they would walk away as if I didn't even exist. (N5)

10.8 Summary

In this chapter, we have presented the Ukrainian refugees' experiences and challenges with getting employment in Norway.

SSB statistics show that – at the time of the survey – 30% of Ukrainian were employed, which aligns well with our 2024 survey sample. Among those who were not employed, about one third were participants in the introduction programme, 18% were unemployed, 7% were retired, and about 3% were students or report that they are disabled.

In the interviews, those who had become employed highlighted this as the most influential change in their lives in Norway. Many emphasised how their employment had ensured a better financial situation, and the positive experience of becoming self-sufficient. Our regression analysis shows that the following factors had a positive correlation with being employed: proficiency in Norwegian, having children, residence time in Norway, age (higher probability for older age groups), good health, and living in small towns compared to rural areas (with big cities in the middle). Factors that (surprisingly) did not correlate with the employment chances were gender, English skills, higher education and having prior network in Norway.

Where did they find their jobs?

Ukrainian refugees had searched for jobs via a variety of channels. Half of the respondents had registered with Nav as a jobseeker, many had actively applied for advertised jobs, contacted employers directly and/or used their network to search for jobs.

Although 20% of the Ukrainian refugees were self-employed in Ukraine, only 5% of the respondents had tried to set up their own business in Norway (and only 1% reported to be self-employed). The interviews provided examples of persons who had succeeded with starting their own business where they had received good guidance from public actors. However, the interviews also illustrated that despite initial optimism to start their own businesses in Norway, some came to realise that succeeding was much more challenging than it was in Ukraine, leading them to abandon the idea altogether.

For those who were employed, we asked how they had found their job. The most common ways were to approach an employer directly or apply for an advertised position. These alternatives had become more common compared to the 2023 survey, implying that the Ukrainian refugees in 2024 are more actively searching for jobs on their own. One fourth found their job through their work practice. Others got help from the contact person in the municipality or Nav.

Scope of employment, type of contracts and sector

Of those who were employed, 62% say that they work full time, while the rest work part time (24% work 20-34 hours per week and remaining 15% work less than 20 hours per week). A higher share of men worked full-time than women.

A majority worked on different types of temporary contracts (60%), and temporary contracts were much more common in the public than in the private sector. In the interviews, many stressed that they strived for permanent and full-time work, and that the insecurity of temporary positions was a source of additional uncertainty and concern.

About two third had found jobs in the private sector, and one third in the public sector. The Ukrainian refugees work in a variety of branches, with the top three branches being education, the service industry, and retail. The interviews exemplify the variety of where Ukrainian refugees have found employment, and some had also worked in multiple sectors during their time in Norway.

Job satisfaction and use of previous education and skills

Just over half were able to use their previous *work experience* to a large or some extent in their current job, while just under half stated to a minor extent or not at all. A lower share was able to use their previous *education* in their current Norwegian job, but there were still 43% who answered to a large or some extent. However, 37% reported that they were not able to use their education at all. About twice as many of those who lived in big cities used their education or previous work experience than those who lived in rural areas (with those who lived in small cities in between). Residence time in Norway also increased the share who used their education in their current job.

The interviewees were very divided when it came to job aspirations, particularly related to the importance of finding work that aligned with their education and prior experiences. While some would consider moving from Norway if they did not find employment where they could use their skills, others stressed that they would take any kind of job.

Irrespectively, the majority were very satisfied with most aspects of their work conditions, with scores higher than 4 out of 5 for almost all aspects. There were more varied assessments of the statements about the possibility to practice Norwegian in the workplace, stability, and opportunities for career development. The interviews provide a more nuanced view of Ukrainian refugees' job satisfaction. Experiences varied significantly, ranging from those who described their jobs as ‘dream jobs’ to others who expressed low motivation, working merely to get by. However, several interviewees highlighted positive cultural differences from Ukraine, praising the sense of humanity, trust, and mutual support in the workplace, and feeling less stressed compared to their experiences in Ukraine.

In the survey, the respondents were generally motivated to find a job in Norway even if it did not exactly fit with their previous education or experience. Only 5% were categorically

against taking such a job, while 4% were unsure. 43% said that they would take any kind of job, while 45% stated that they would be willing to take a job not related to their previous education and qualification, but that it would depend on the type of job.

Barriers for employment and plans for upskilling

Insufficient Norwegian (and English) were identified as the main barriers to getting a job (or a more relevant job for those who were employed). However, almost half of the respondents also highlighted that the temporary permits made employers sceptical of hiring Ukrainians. Other reasons mentioned were lack of network or relevant skills for the Norwegian job market. About 20% also reported lack of opportunities in the municipality they lived as a hinder, and this was particularly relevant among those who lived in rural areas.

The interviewees' perceptions varied significantly when it came to how difficult it was to find a job in Norway. Some deemed it ‘impossible’, while others argued that ‘for those who want to work, there are plenty of opportunities’. The reasons behind these opposite perceptions were often a combination of factors, including personal experiences, stories from friends, the type of municipality, the nature of the work, language skills, and more.

Ukrainian refugees were generally eager to upskill their qualifications to better match the Norwegian labour market. Two thirds said that they had thought of enhancing their education or take other courses in order to qualify for a new profession in Norway.

Among those who were employed, only 12% did not continue their Norwegian language training in some form, but only a very small percentage continue to study through public offers – it was more common to continue the language training at the workplace or on their own. Many of the interviewees emphasised that they practiced their Norwegian in the workplace, but some also stressed that it was too demanding to continue Norwegian studies during the evening after a full day of work.

Work in the informal sector

When asked about experience with work in the informal economy, only 2% reported that they themselves had worked in such jobs, while 13% knew of other Ukrainian refugees who had worked in the informal economy. A somewhat larger share of men and those living in the big cities knew others that had worked in the informal economy. Overall, the qualitative data supports the survey results indicating that informal work is not common among Ukrainian refugees in Norway.

Further, 82% report that they have not experienced any types of exploitation in their jobs in Norway, but there were also examples of different types of exploitation: 10% had experienced not receiving correct salary, and 8% not getting a formal work contract. 4% reported having too extensive work hours. No one reported experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace. Some interviewees mentioned that they lacked information and knowledge about their work-related rights in Norway, and worried that employers could exploit this vulnerability.

11 Children's social integration and schooling

How do Ukrainian parents assess Norwegian kindergartens and schools, and do their children also follow Ukrainian online schooling? And how do they assess their children's social integration in Norway: have their children made Norwegian friends, and do they participate in local activities?

About 30% of the Ukrainian refugees who have arrived in Norway are children below 18 years. Although this study does not include interviews with or survey of these children, we have asked the Ukrainian parents who arrived about their children's social integration and education.

In this chapter, we first present whether Ukrainian parents report that their children attend and are integrated into the Norwegian school system. Further, many parents report that their children still participate in different types of distance teaching from Ukraine, and we explore how this differs between cohorts and age groups. Lastly, we present the parents' assessment of their children's social integration: if they have Norwegian friends or participate in after-school activities.

11.1 Children's age distribution

First of all, in what age groups do the respondents' have children?

Figure 11.1: Age groups of the respondents' child/children (N=637).

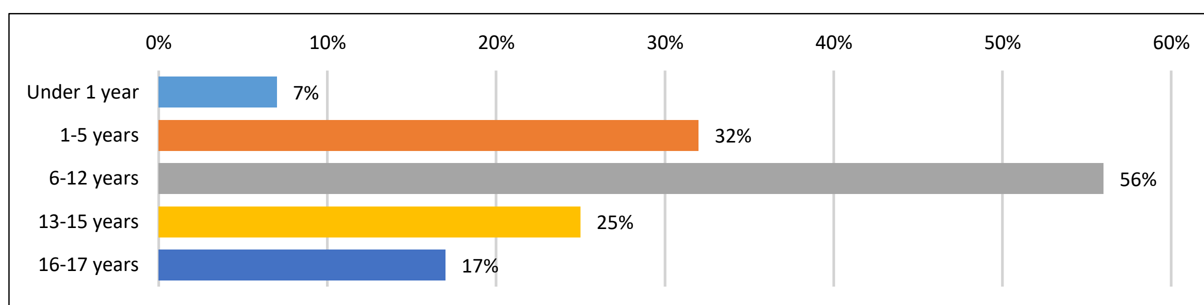


Figure 11.1 shows in which age groups the respondents had children. They could tick off for several age groups but would only tick off once if they had several children in the respective age group. 7% had infants under 1 year, and one third had children in the age group when attending kindergarten. Over half of those with children under 18 years in Norway had children in primary school (*barneskolen*) (aged 6–12 years). One forth had teenagers aged 13–15 years (who normally participate in lower secondary school (*ungdomskole*) and 17% in upper secondary (*videregående*) age (16–17 years).

11.2 Children's education

A concern in many countries is that Ukrainian children holding collective protection do not get their right to schooling fulfilled, but how is the situation for Ukrainian children in Norway?

After turning six years, all children living in Norway have the right to free primary education within three months, irrespective of legal status (Hernes, Danielsen et al. 2023b). As noted in both the 2022 and 2023 reports, Ukrainian parents often said that their children were quite satisfied with their experiences in Norwegian schools and kindergartens. This positive impression was echoed in the interviews and survey conducted in 2024.

11.2.1 Kindergarten

In the overall assessment of services, kindergartens got a very high score of 4.6 out of 5. Among those who had children aged 1-5 years, 86% reported that their children attended Norwegian kindergarten. 2% reported that ‘one/some do, others don’t’, and 12% did not attend Norwegian kindergarten.

The interviews conducted in 2024 reveal a high level of satisfaction among parents regarding access to kindergartens and the care their children receive there. Parents appreciated the ‘gentle discipline’ and that children can play a lot. Some interviewees stated that their children were enrolled in kindergarten shortly after arriving, while others had to wait for a while. Overall, parents reported very few challenges related to kindergartens. One interviewee highlighted the positive impact of sending her child to kindergarten:

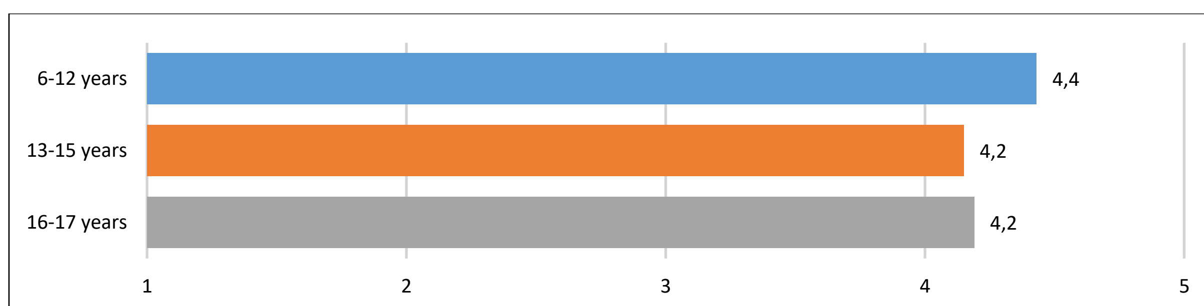
> I think that sending a child to kindergarten at one year old is the only right decision. Here he receives attention, care, friends, and a circle of communication. In my opinion, I wouldn't be able to develop him at home as well as they do there with games, songs, preschool teachers, and caretakers. So, we have only positive experiences. (B3)

11.2.2 High attendance in and satisfaction with Norwegian schooling

The survey shows that almost all children under 18 in school age (6-17 years) attended Norwegian schools, but there were minor differences between age groups. Of those in the target group of primary (*barneskole*) and lower secondary (*ungdomskole*), 99-98% participated in Norwegian schools. Among those who had children aged 16–17 years, 91% reported that their children in this age group attended Norwegian schools[33].

As shown in figure 7.5 in the overall assessment of services, Norwegian schools are also one of the services that the Ukrainian refugees were most satisfied with, with a score of 4.6 out of 5 possible. However, we also asked the parents to assess how satisfied or dissatisfied they thought that their children were with Norwegian schooling.

Figure 11.2: Parents assessment of children’s school satisfaction for different age groups (N=101-348).



*Means and standard deviations. Scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied).
**Weighted by gender and age.

Figure 11.2 shows that generally, the parents evaluated that their children of all ages were satisfied with Norwegian schools. The parents with children in the youngest age group

[33] It is important to emphasise that we have not asked the respondents about each child, but whether they had children (one or more) in the different age groups, and further whether their children in these specific age groups attended Norwegian schooling (and different types of (online) Ukrainian schooling, described in chapter 11.2.3). They had the option to answer ‘yes”, ‘no”, and ‘some do, others don’t” (the latter for those who had several children in the same age group). However, very few chose the option ‘some do, other don’t”, which could provide unsure results about the actual number of children. In the statistics we present here, those who have answered ‘some do, other don’t” are included in the percentage that attend school (equal to answering ‘yes”).

provided the highest score with 4.4, while the parents with teenagers gave somewhat lower scores (but still high) of 4.2.

The interviews shed light on the high satisfaction with the Norwegian school system. Cultural differences play a significant role in this, as the Ukrainian education system tends to be stricter and more focused on achievement. Feeling less pressure and control in Norwegian schools, Ukrainian children, according to their parents, often express a desire to study here and enjoy the school routine. One interviewee even described the Norwegian school system as more of a leisure environment than a traditional school. A woman who had a daughter in Norwegian lower secondary school (*ungdomskolen*) and a son enrolled in upper secondary school (*videregående*) said that her children thrived at school and emphasised what she described as a positive social environment without bullying:

> My children, to be honest, do not want to return. My son says he can't imagine living in Ukraine after Norway because there's more bullying in our schools. Well, it's a completely different attitude, from teachers and from children as well. Everything is completely different. And my daughter feels the same way. (A7)

Another mother whose son was in lower secondary school was a bit worried about his grades. However, the son's teachers gave very positive feedback on her son, and she tried to calm down and adjust her expectations:

> We attended the '*utviklingssamtale*' [development conversations between parents, students and teachers], it's their practice, twice a year. Well, again, this peculiarity where they say everything is very good: 'He's such a good boy, such a clever one, he even has grades of 4'. (…) Although I understand that in a new school, in a new language, getting grades of 4 is not bad, on a six-point scale, in principle. I don't have the feeling that everything is lost, I don't know anything [about his situation]. I don't know anything, but I see that he is normal, managing school quite well. (N7)

Despite parents generally feeling well-supported by teachers and administrators, some interviewees reported difficulties that their children had faced at school. One parent mentioned that the schools might benefit from having a better understanding of how to work with children who have come from war zones. She noted that her 13-year-old daughter, who had been traumatised from spending two months underground in Ukraine, frequently hearing bombs and missiles, struggled with the noise in gym classes, which brought back distressing memories:

> I believe Norwegian schools aren't prepared to work with children who come from war zones. I faced this issue personally. When I asked if teachers had received any training or resources on what it means to work with children affected by war, they just held back a slight smile. It was really upsetting. For instance, when my child is pressured to participate in physical education (*kroppsøving*) – told to get up and play – she struggles with the clapping and the noise because she's a traumatised child. We spent two months in a basement, and she's still scared by it. But for them, it's funny – why isn't she just running around with the ball? This disregard is not okay, and it's a painful issue for me right now. (N5)

The mother also shared that they had had an issue with the school when her daughter was graded with a lot of 2s (on a scale from 1-6, where 6 is the best grade) during her first half year in Norwegian school:

> It turned out that she wasn't supposed to be assessed in Norwegian at all, and the teachers could not just give these 2s to a child who had just arrived and was trying to adapt. In other subjects, she didn't hand in some papers, but she didn't understand that she had to hand them in, because she had a language barrier. And it was a moral blow to her – it was a big blow. (…) No one ever told me that there was a problem. And it came as a shock to us, of course. She lost her motivation to go to school. (N5)

However, the parents had filed a complaint to the school and after that the follow-up of her daughter at school had improved: 'Since then, she has started taking tests, and she already has a favourite subject where she got an A, and she does such cool projects.' (N5) Thus, these challenges had been addressed effectively.

Parents whose children transitioned from lower secondary (*ungdomskolen*) to upper secondary school (*videregående*) expressed satisfaction with the guidance and information they received from teachers and the school administration. Some parents were initially concerned about navigating the formal process and worried about making mistakes that might impact their children's future. The support from the school was, therefore, greatly appreciated: 'The school handled all the formalities and guided us through the entire process' (N8).

11.2.3 Many Ukrainian children still follow different types of distance education (digital/online schooling) from Ukraine

According to the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, education abroad will be recognised when children return to Ukraine.[34] However, some subjects, such as Ukrainian language, literature, and history, are often a mandatory part of national university entrance exams in Ukraine. These particular subjects also need to be passed in order for pupils to move from one grade to another. Therefore, many of the parents we interviewed were frustrated about the fact that their children may fall behind in these subjects while abroad. This topic has been on the political agenda in Ukraine, and in August 2023, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine issued an instruction outlining the situation for the education of children who left Ukraine due to Russia's full-scale invasion and who are simultaneously receiving education in schools in both the host country and in Ukraine. In the instructions, the Ukrainian Ministry encourages children to continue their Ukrainian education online, particularly Ukrainian language, literature and history, subjects which in many cases are not offered in other countries.[35]

The ministry has developed a grading equivalency scale to align the educational evaluation systems of different countries with the Ukrainian system. This scale facilitates the transfer of school results achieved by Ukrainian pupils abroad[36]. The general principle is that subjects studied abroad are credited, while students are required to undergo annual assessments for subjects that they did not study (for instance, Ukrainian language, literature, history and geography). If children successfully complete the annual assessment for subjects not taught in foreign schools (or all subjects in the class curriculum), they are promoted to the next grade. If children do not take the assessment or fails it, they remain in the same grade.

According to information from the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, children currently abroad can study in Ukrainian schools in one of three formats. The first one is an individual or family-based learning: in this format, parents are responsible for ensuring that their child follows the Ukrainian curriculum. This format requires children to complete the assessment in every subject at least twice a year. The second one is a more comprehensive distance education: here pupils study all subjects digitally through a Ukrainian educational institution in which they are enrolled. The third one is distance learning focusing on particular Ukrainian subjects: this option allows children to study subjects such as Ukrainian language and literature, Ukrainian history, geography, law, and other related subjects digitally.

In the 2023 report, we had one overall question about distance education/digital schooling from Ukraine, where 37% reported that their children continued to follow 'Ukrainian online

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[34] Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine https://mon.gov.ua/ua/ministerstvo/diyalnist/mizhnarodna-dilnist/pidtrimka-osviti-i-nauki-ukrayini-pid-chas-vijni/updated-potochni-vikliki-organizaciya-navchannya-dlya-ukrayinskih-ditej-za-kordonom-ta-vstupna-kampaniya/yak-organizuvati-navchannya-dlya-ukrayinskih-ditej-za-kordonom

[35] Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine from 21.08.2023 https://mon.gov.ua/ua/npa/pro-zabezpechennya-navchannya-uchniv-yaki-viyihali-z-ukrayini-vnaslidok-povnomasshtabnogo-vtorgnennya-rosijskoyi-federaciyi-i-zdobuvayut-osvitu-v-zakladah-osviti-krayini-perebuvannya-

[36] Recommendations of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine for Transferring Grades from Foreign Schools https://mon.gov.ua/static-objects/mon/sites/1/news/2024/06/12/Rekomendatsiyi.shchodo.perezarakhuvannya.otsinok.iz.zakordonnykh.shkil.12.06.2024.pdf

schooling'. In the interviews this year, it became clear that Ukrainian children participated in many different forms of Ukrainian distance education after arrival to Norway. Thus, in this year's survey, we developed more nuanced questions regarding different types of distance education. In the 2024 survey, we were also able to analyse such participation for different age groups.

We asked the respondents whether their children in the different age groups follow digital education/schooling from Ukraine. For all age groups they could reply: 'yes', 'some of the children' or 'no' for the following four categories; 1) 'follows distance education', 2) 'follows individual education (family education/home school)' and 3)' has only private lessons with Ukrainian teachers'. We also added the category 4) 'other', as an alternative for respondents who did not feel the three categories proposed were fitting. The first category is likely to be understood as the comprehensive distance education where pupils study all subjects digitally through a Ukrainian educational institution in which they are enrolled. The second is likely to be understood as an individual or family-based learning, where parents are responsible for ensuring that their child follows the Ukrainian curriculum.

So, how many Ukrainian children in Norway participated in any of the four types of Ukrainian teaching or schooling? Overall, 58% answered that their children participated in some form of distance education from Ukraine. However, there are differences depending on time of arrival and between age groups, as portrayed in the figure below.

Figure 11.3: Share of children who continue some form of digital teaching/schooling from Ukraine separated by time of arrival and age group (N=148-454).

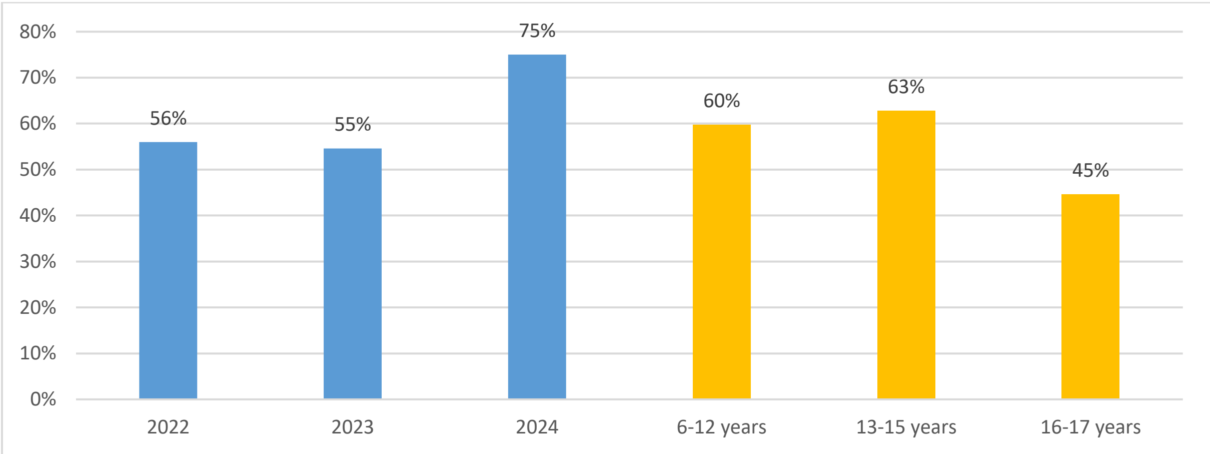


Figure 11.3 shows that the share that participates in any form of schooling in Ukraine is higher among the new arrivals: while 75% of those parents who arrived in Norway in 2024 reported that their children participated in some form of schooling, just over half of those arriving in 2022 and 2023 reported the same. Concerning differences between age groups, we find that a lower share of those aged 16–17 years participated in some form of schooling (45%) compared to the two youngest age groups (60-63%).

But how many participate in the different types of distance education from Ukraine, and does it differ among the three age groups?

Figure 11.4: Children's attendance of different types of Ukrainian digital/online education separated by age groups (multiple options possible) (N=148-454).

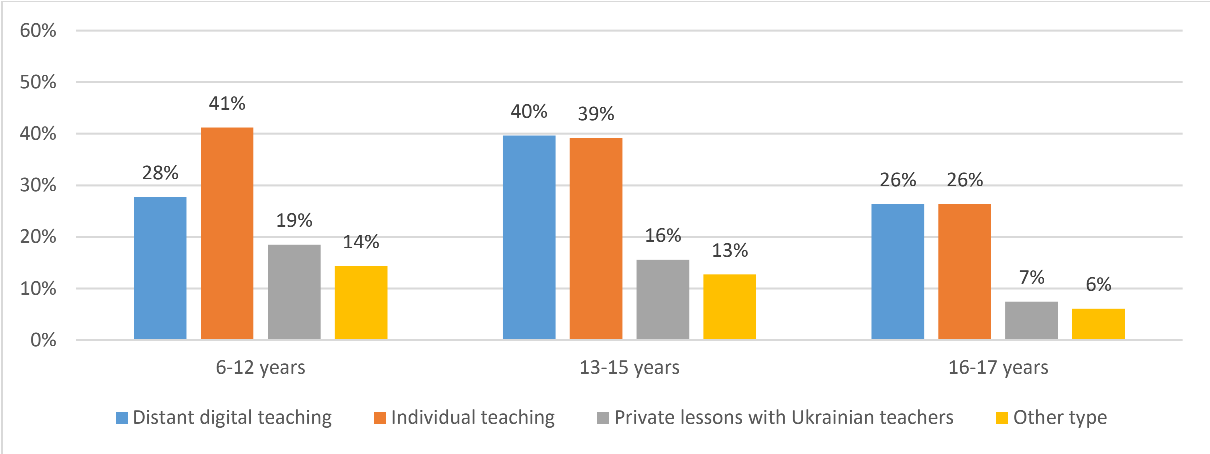


Figure 11.4 shows that individual teaching is the most common form of distance education from Ukraine for the 6–12-year-olds, with 41% following this form, while 28% follow digital teaching. For those aged 13–15 years, digital and individual teaching is equally common, with about 40% for each category. A lower share of those aged 16–17 years follow distant education and individual education (family/home school), about one fourth for each category. There are generally lower shares that have Ukrainian private teachers or report other types of teaching, and it is the least common among the oldest age group.

We also analysed the share reporting that their children followed any type of distance education from Ukraine (minimum one of the four categories listed in figure 11.4) and crossed this with those who reported that they followed Norwegian schooling or not.

Figure 11.5: Children's attendance of minimum one type of distance education from Ukraine crossed with attendance in Norwegian school (N=148-454).

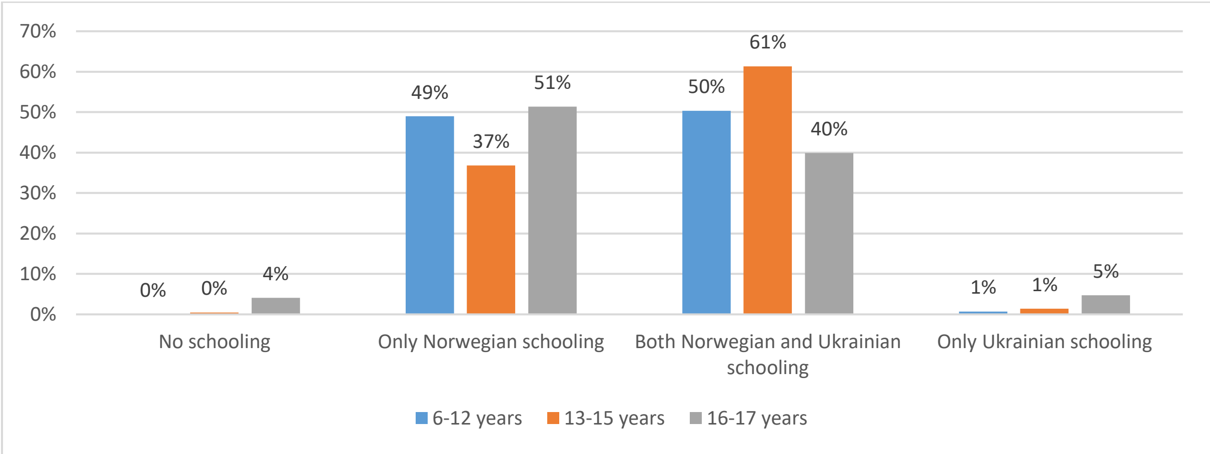


Figure 11.5 shows that only 4% of those with children in the age group 16–17 years did not follow any kind of schooling, while there was no one in the two youngest age groups that reported the same. About half of those in primary education and upper secondary levels followed only Norwegian school, while only about one third said the same among those who had children in the age between 13–15 years. There is more variation among the age groups for those who follow both Norwegian or any type of Ukrainian schooling, ranging between 40% for those between 16–17 years, and 60% for those between 13–15 years, with the youngest age group in between. Only 1% report that their children only follow Ukrainian schooling in the two youngest age groups, while 5% of those with children in the oldest age group report this.

It is, however, important to emphasise that we did not ask about the extent (hours/time spent) of the distance education from Ukraine, so we do not know the overall pressure dual schooling constitute for the respective children.

Refugees' thoughts about their future influence nearly every aspect of their life in Norway, and several parents noted that their children's education was of high priority to them in this regard. The challenge of balancing Ukrainian and Norwegian schooling remains complex for Ukrainian refugees. Many parents described how dual schooling is both mentally and physically exhausting for their children, who often 'don't even have time to lift their heads and look at the sky' (B2). Nevertheless, some parents encourage their children to continue with both school systems, generally focusing less on academic performance in Ukrainian school, but valuing the continuity of education in case they return home and want to avoid starting from scratch:

> Now, he continues his studies remotely in Ukraine. He didn't prepare for these tests – he hasn't opened a textbook – but when the test time came, the school encouraged the children to stay engaged in Ukrainian education. They assured us the tests would be very manageable and said, 'Don't worry, nobody's going to check or monitor you strictly, so if you can, stay involved.' Many families left the program, but for the school, it seems important that the children stay enrolled. He managed to complete these tests successfully, earning some grades. Right now, the specific grades aren't important; what matters is that he's promoted to the next grade and is officially in school there. I think this arrangement provides a bit of psychological relief – knowing that if we return, he'll still have a place in the Ukrainian school system. (N7)

The general impression from the interviews, however, is that over time, parents are increasingly inclined to discontinue their children's education in Ukraine. More and more Ukrainian children are transitioning from introductory classes to regular classes, with parents prioritising their educational and social integration in Norway:

> I withdrew my children from Ukrainian schools to help them integrate more comfortably into the Norwegian environment. For my son, this transition wasn't an issue. He joined a Norwegian class in January, and we expect that by summer, he'll move up to the next level (*videregående*). (B1)

Most interviewees noted that their children have made significant progress in Norwegian and are now more fluent than their parents, even able to pick up local dialects:

> My son started attending a regular school here. It was a bit of a shock, but honestly, it's a huge advantage. Now he speaks Norwegian better than I do – no exaggeration. And he's even picked up the local dialect! (B1)

Being in Norway during the transition from kindergarten to schools, some of the interviewees decided not to start first grade digitally in Ukraine. Instead, parents taught some elementary Ukrainian language and reading at home, and the child attended Norwegian school:

> Before starting school, we were teaching letters at home because, in Ukraine, children are expected to know how to read and write before entering first grade. We covered all of that at home. And here, we continue with it – he can read and write in Ukrainian. He didn't attend online classes in Ukraine, and he started first grade here. (A1)

11.3 Children's social integration

We also asked about other factors that could indicate the children's social integration into the Norwegian local communities, namely participation in after-school activities and if they had Norwegian friends.

Figure 11.6: Children's attendance in after-school activities (N=101-348).

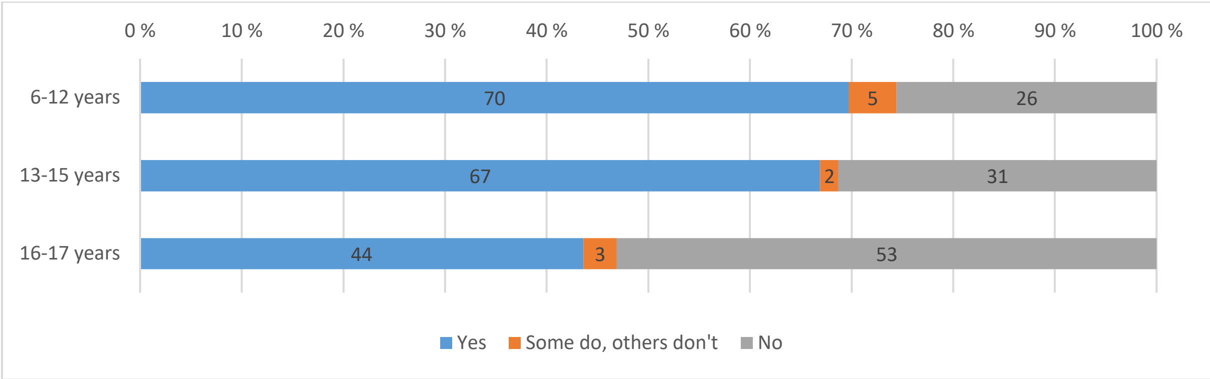


Figure 11.5 shows that about two thirds of the 6–15-year-olds participated in after-school activities, but the older teenagers (aged 16–17 years) participated to a lesser extent, with only 43%. There were generally somewhat higher shares participating among those who live in big cities. However, this difference was in particularly the case for those with children aged 16–17 years: while 37% of those with the oldest teenagers participated in such activities of those who live in rural areas, the corresponding number was 55% for those living in the big cities.

The interviewees also expressed that the afterschool activities were very popular among Ukrainian children, and that they thought that Norwegian municipalities offered great opportunities to keep their free time active and engaging. Interviewees reported that their children participated in sports clubs, music lessons, and art studios. Many children even combined multiple activities: 'She attends gymnastics, football, and choir' (D1).

Figure 11.7: Do your children have Norwegian friends? (N=101-348).

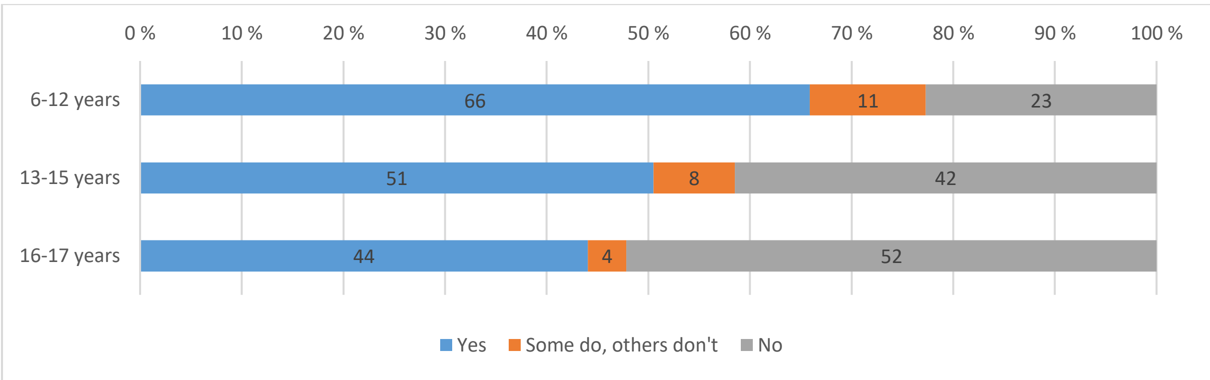


Figure 1.6 shows the similar pattern as with organised after-school activities. While two thirds of the youngest age group (6–12 years) had Norwegian friends, only half of those with children aged 13–15 years answered 'yes', and only 44% of those with children aged 16–17 years. Not surprisingly, a substantially lower share of those who arrived in 2024 (and who might still live in reception centres) had Norwegian friends. There are few differences related to geography, but there are fewer of those aged 16–17 years that had Norwegian friends of those who live in small cities (38%) compared to rural areas (45%) and big cities (50%).

Meanwhile, children's experiences vary depending on their age. In the interviews, while the parents said that younger children reported few barriers to integration, several parents of teenagers shared that their children struggled with socialisation in Norwegian schools. They often didn't have friends and felt somewhat excluded from the social circles at school. A woman described the situation for her 13-year-old daughter:

> She [her daughter] immediately joined a regular Norwegian class. She is the only Ukrainian in the entire grade, and it's very difficult for her because of that. Even now, she still struggles.

> She doesn't have any friends – neither Norwegian nor Ukrainian, no friends at all. She doesn't feel bullied or pressured in any way. However, she constantly complains that everything feels foreign to her, and unfortunately, she can't seem to adapt. (N5)

One interviewee told that her son had returned to Ukraine in the summer 2023. 'As soon as he turned 18, he immediately said ''I'm going home. I don't have friends here, there's nothing to do" (A4).' According to the interviewee, the reason for her son's return to Ukraine was also based on his reasoning that it would take too long before he could start his adult life in Norway. The son was enrolled in a digital study program in Ukraine. To study in Norway, he would have had to spend a lot of time to qualify:

> He says he would not even learn the language well enough to enrol here. Plus, he's now 18 years old and in his second year of university. In two years, he can get a good job. In Norway, he needs school, *videregående* (upper secondary), and only then university. That's many years. (A4)

However, there were also examples of youth who settled in very well. One mother faced the situation that her 17-year-old son thrived so well at the upper secondary school at the place where they lived at a reception center, that while she and the younger child had been settled to a different municipality in the same region, he was allowed to stay in a student accommodation and continue living there:

> We were brought to Oslo, stayed in Scandic, and we were there for a month and a half. Then we were sent to [place of reception center], where I stayed for three months with the children. And that's why my son remained, because he became very close friends with the [local] children. He went to school there, and he wanted to stay (…) The director [of the school] told me: 'we want him to stay here'. I have a very social, very communicative son. (A7)

11.4 Summary

About 30% of the Ukrainian refugees who have arrived in Norway are children below 18 years. In this chapter, we have presented how Ukrainian parents assess Norwegian kindergartens and schools and their children's social life in Norway. We have also presented data on whether the children follow distance education from Ukraine as well as those who participate in local activities.

86% of the parents with children aged 1–5 reported that their children attended Norwegian kindergarten. At the same time, almost all children of school age under 18 attended Norwegian schools. Among children aged 16–17 the percentage was slightly lower, but still 91% of respondents reported that their children in this age group attended Norwegian school.

Kindergartens and schools are among the services that get the highest scores, 4.6 out of 5 for both. In the qualitative interviews, parents spoke very warmly about the kindergarten and how going there contributed positively to the development of their children. When asked to assess their children's satisfaction with school, parents reported that children of all ages were satisfied with Norwegian schools – parents with children aged 6–12 being the most satisfied. In the interviews, we see that cultural differences play a significant role in this, as the Ukrainian education system tends to be stricter and more focused on achievement. Feeling less pressure and control in Norwegian schools, Ukrainian children, according to their parents, often express a desire to study here and they enjoy the Norwegian school routine. Generally, parents felt well-supported by teachers and school administrators. However, one raised a concern that teachers may not have relevant competence for handling pupils who struggle with war trauma.

Ukrainian authorities have encouraged Ukrainian children abroad to continue their Ukrainian education online, particularly Ukrainian language, literature and history. 58% of the parents answered that their children participated in some form of distance education from Ukraine. This share was higher among the new arrivals: while 75% of those parents who arrived in Norway in 2024 reported that their children participate in some form of distance education

from Ukraine, just over half of those arriving in 2022 and 2023 reported the same. Ukrainian children are attending different types of distance education from Ukraine, and it also differ between age groups.

In the interviews, parents described how dual schooling can be both mentally and physically exhausting for their children. The general impression from the interviews, however, is that with time, parents are increasingly inclined to discontinue their children's education in Ukraine.

As to children's social integration, about two thirds of the 6–15-year-olds participate in after-school activities, but the older teenagers (aged 16–17 years) participate to a lesser extent, with only 43%. We see a similar pattern when it comes to whether the children are reported to have Norwegian friends. While two thirds of the youngest age group (6–12 years) have Norwegian friends (according to their parents), only half of those with children aged 13–15 years answer 'yes', and only 44% of those with children aged 16–17 years.

In the interviews, parents said that younger children report few barriers to integration. Several parents of teenagers, however, noted that their children struggle with socialisation in Norwegian schools. There were different experiences, though, and we also encountered parents with children in upper secondary school that said that they were happy in Norway and had friends here.

12 The adults' social integration in Norway

What about the adult Ukrainian refugees' own social integration in Norway? What is their sense of belonging to Norway and Ukraine, and how do they trust the political systems in their home and host country?

Integration into Norwegian society is not only about finding a job and being settled in a municipality, but also about getting to know the locals and to participate and feeling included in the local community.

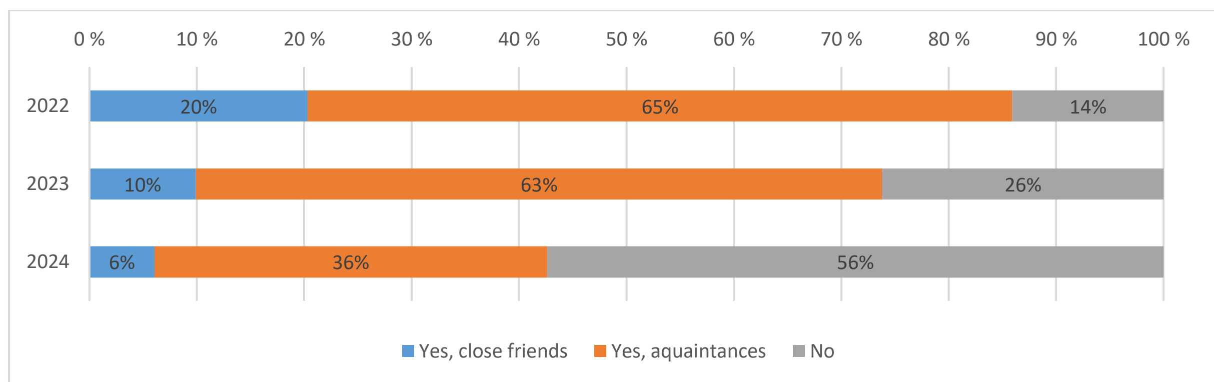
In this chapter, we first account for how adult refugees have socialised in the local communities (concerning friends and social activities), and how this has developed with residence time in Norway. We further analyse refugees' sense of belonging to Ukraine and Norway, and their political trust in the two countries, and compare these findings to an earlier study on these topics for immigrants in Norway.

12.1 Social contact in Norway

We asked the respondents about factors that could indicate their social integration into the Norwegian local communities, namely if they had Norwegian friends or participate in different types of local activities.

In the survey, we asked the respondents whether they had someone who is close to them in Norway, and with whom they could talk about personal issues. 70% answered yes, but there are some minor differences between subgroups. Men, those arriving more recently to Norway and those living in rural areas more often answer that they do *not* have someone close to them in Norway.

Figure 12.1: Norwegian friends or acquaintances by time of arrival in Norway (N=1563).



*Weighted by gender and age.
**Those answering, 'I don't know/prefer not to answer' (1%) have been excluded.

When asked whether they have *Norwegian* friends or acquaintances, figure 12.1 shows large differences by time of arrival in Norway. Not surprisingly, those who have lived in Norway for a longer time more often close had Norwegian friends and acquaintances.

For example, while only 14% of those who arrived in 2022 answered that they had no Norwegian friends and acquaintances, over half of the respondents in 2024 stated the same. Among those who arrived here in 2022 and had lived here for minimum two years, the majority reported having Norwegian acquaintances, but only one in five answered that they had close friends who are Norwegian.

There are few differences between age groups and gender, but those who live in the big cities have a higher share who answered that they have Norwegian friends (18%) than those who live in rural areas (10%), and those in small cities in the middle (14%).

The interviews reveal that over time, the social circles of Ukrainian refugees in Norway expand. Unlike the 2023 report, where the predominant impression was that interviewees maintained close contact with other Ukrainians, the situation in 2024 appears more nuanced.

On the one hand, while the 'Ukrainian community' still plays an important role in the daily lives of refugees, staying in touch with other Ukrainians has become more challenging due to differences in work schedules or a lack of shared interests. Networking with other Ukrainians is also closely tied to the key activities refugees engage in, such as meeting people while staying in Råde, participating in the introduction programme, or engaging in various activities within their municipality after settlement: 'My social circle mainly includes family and some Ukrainians I've met here in the municipality, in Råde, or through courses I'm taking here' (N4). Several interviewees, however, mentioned that maintaining close contact with other Ukrainian refugees had become more challenging as they secured jobs and had less free time to meet up: 'I wanted to plan to meet up with a friend. I'm not sure if it'll work out, though – our schedules might not align, unfortunately' (N8).

On the other hand, the Norwegian social environment has become more prominent in the 2024 interviews, though some informants still reported difficulties in connecting with locals. The main barriers to making connections are not only language, but also cultural differences, with one interviewee noting that it is often necessary to 'take the first step' in forming relationships:

> In conversations within our Ukrainian social circle, we realised that very few of us actually interact with Norwegians. For some, it's due to a language barrier, and for others, it can be hard to find common ground. Building connections with Norwegians requires a certain approach; often, you need to take the first step, initiate a conversation, or show some initiative. In my experience, Norwegians rarely make the first move to reach out. Sometimes, it's up to us to break the ice – without that, friendships often don't form. (N6)

While some interviewees highlight challenges in 'breaking the ice' when interacting with locals, others share more positive experiences in building connections with Norwegians. The 'Norwegian social circle' was described as consisting of neighbours or individuals that refugees interacted with from the start in Norway, such as private helpers they lived with: 'I'm in regular contact with a Norwegian family who took me in from the very beginning, and they've continued to be my support throughout this entire time' (N1).

However, it was noted that there were fewer connections made through colleagues at work. Despite the challenges some interviewees face in initiating communication with Norwegians, the overall impression from the interviews is that Ukrainian refugees are generally satisfied with their 'Norwegian circle' and appreciate the kindness of the locals: 'Norwegians are great people, very calm, very friendly, and open. They seem especially open with Ukrainians, I think' (N2).

The overall impression is that Ukrainians in Norway generally do not face a lack of social contact and manage to form connections with both other Ukrainians and local Norwegians. As one informant put it, 'There's someone to call if something happens. Someone to call if I need help getting medicine, for example' (N1). However, she also noted that she does not have a cozy space 'where you have people who are close to you in terms of language and identity, friends with whom you can fully relax.'

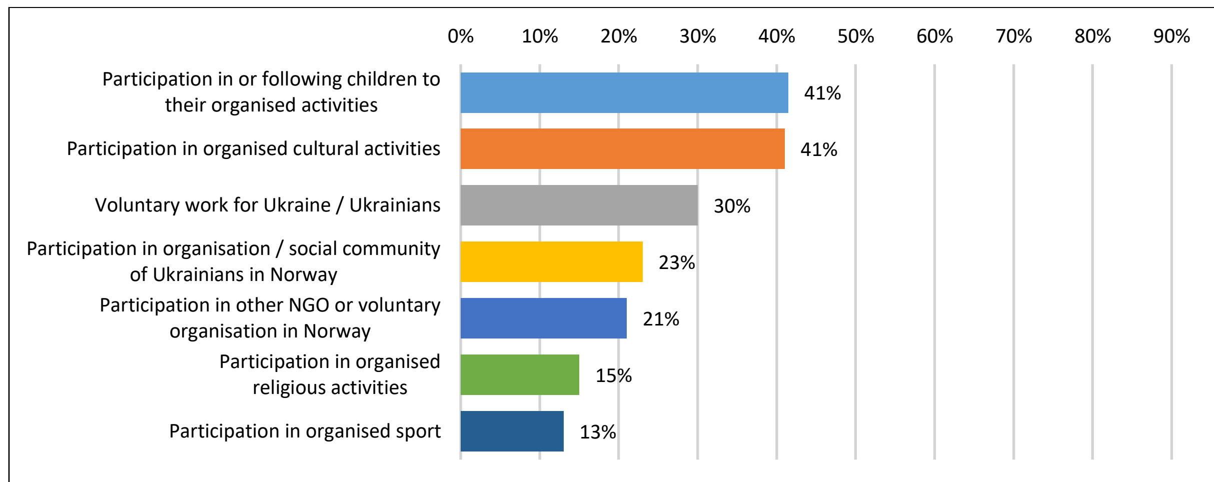
The recognition of the temporary nature of their stay in Norway, due to the collective protection status, also influences some refugees' social experiences. One interviewee stated that while she would like to make lasting friendships here, as she hopes to continue living in Norway, it could become difficult if she is forced to return to Ukraine: 'I want to make friends here. But if I have to go back, why should I get close to anyone here? Maybe it's easier if I don't have anyone here, in case I need to leave, you know?' (N2).

12.2 Participation in local activities

Another indicator of social integration is whether one participates in voluntary or organised activities in the local community.

A majority (67%) of the respondents say that they participate in at least one of the activities listed in Figure 12.2 below.

Figure 12.2: Participation in social activities during past 12 months (N=1547).



*Weighted by gender and age.

About 30% ticked off for one activity, and about 50% ticked off for two or three. Figure 12.2 shows that participation in organised cultural activities is the most common activity along with activities related to their children's organised activities[37] (both at 41%). Many were also involved in voluntary work for Ukraine and Ukrainians (30%) and participation in an organisation or social community of Ukrainians in Norway (23%). One in five reported to participate in other (as in non-Ukrainian) NGOs or voluntary organisations.

From the interviews, it is apparent that the Ukrainian refugees' involvement in local life plays a significant role in forming friendships with locals. One interviewee, who was actively engaged in local volunteering, stated that through her work with non-governmental organisations, she got to know local people, which paved the way for ongoing connections:

> The Red Cross director has been visiting us and even inviting us over to their place. We've prepared meals together – once we made bowls at their home. They were so welcoming… Norwegians don't usually invite people into their inner circle. They also came to our home, where I cooked Ukrainian dishes, and we all sat around the table. My husband played the guitar, and we had great conversations. It was a wonderful time together. (N3)

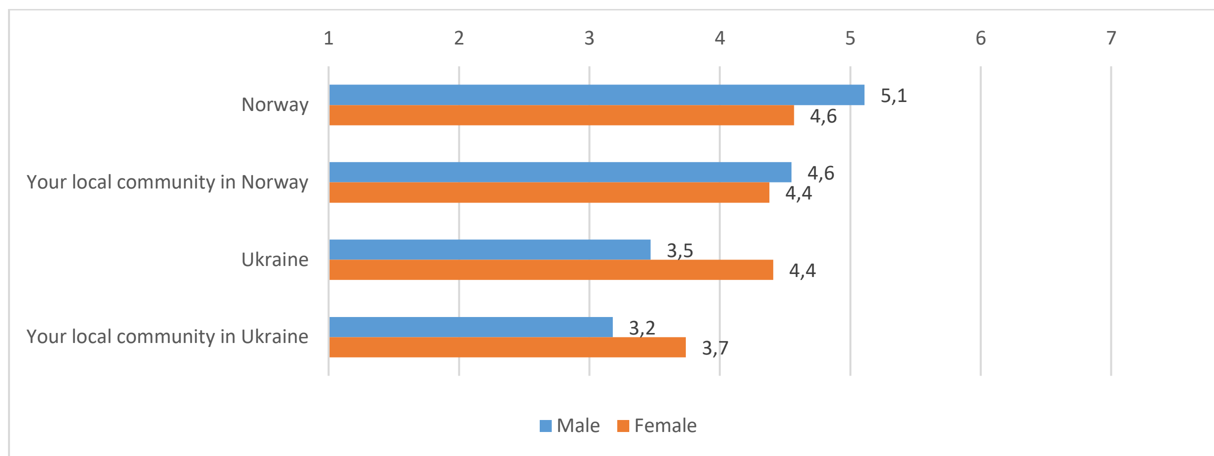
Some of the informants also demonstrated an exceptionally high level of engagement in social activities. One informant joined a Norwegian political party and was actively involved in a project focusing on female leadership, while another became part of a steering group in the Ukrainian community, working on various cultural projects.

[37] The share for this option is calculated only for those who report to have children under 18 years in Norway (N=521).

12.3 Sense of belonging and political trust in Norway and Ukraine

In the survey, we also asked about the respondents' sense of belonging to both Ukraine and Norway. The questions are taken from a previous study of immigrants in Norway conducted in 2016 (SSB 2016). To contextualise the findings from the survey, we shortly compare the average responses for the Ukrainian refugees with the main findings from the 2016 study.

Figure 12.3: Sense of belonging to Norway and Ukraine (N=1547).

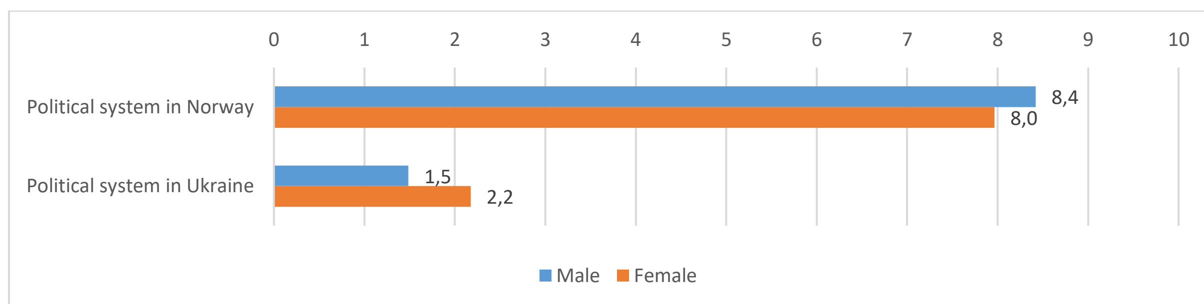


*Weighted by gender and age.
**Scale from 1 (no belonging) to 7 (strong belonging).

Figure 12.3 shows – quite surprisingly – that the Ukrainian refugees report a higher sense of belonging to Norway than to Ukraine. In the SSB (2016) survey, immigrants in Norway are asked about their sense of belonging to Norway and their country of origin. The average sense of belonging to Norway is 5.5 out of 7 and 5.2 for their country of origin. Ukrainian refugees have somewhat lower score for their sense of belonging to Norway, but it is important to remember that many Ukrainian refugees have a shorter residence time in Norway compared to the respondents in the SSB study. More surprising are the Ukrainians refugees' lower scores on their assessment of sense of belonging to Ukraine, with an average of 4 (compared to 5.2 for other immigrant in the SSB study).

We also found very interesting gender differences concerning the question of belonging, as portrayed in the figure. Men answered that they feel a higher sense of belonging to Norway than women, and reversely, a lower sense of belonging to Ukraine. In addition to the gender differences, the youngest age groups (18-29 years) also expressed a lower sense of belonging to Ukraine. Also, those who were settled in rural areas in Norway had a lower sense of belonging to their local community in Norway compared to those who were settled in big or small cities.

Figure 12.4: Trust in the political system in Norway and Ukraine (N=1547).



*Weighted by gender and age.
**Scale 0 (no trust) – 10 (fully trust).

Overall, figure 12.4 shows that Ukrainian refugees generally have exceptionally high trust in the Norwegian political system (around 8 out of 10), and exceptionally low trust in the Ukrainian political system (between 1.5 - 2.2 out of 10). Immigrants generally express higher trust in the Norwegian political system than the average population in Norway, particularly those with a refugee background. Nevertheless, when comparing Ukrainian refugees' trust in the Norwegian political system compared to other immigrants in Norway in the SSB study, we find that they express higher levels of trust than all other groups (the highest among other groups are 7.1 out of 10 for those who immigrated from Iraq and Somalia) (SSB 2016).

We also see a similar pattern concerning gender differences when it comes to trust in the political system in Norway and Ukraine as we saw for belonging. Men have more trust in the political system in Norway than women, and they are less positive to the political system in Ukraine than women.

There are also some other subgroup differences worth noting. The oldest age groups (from 50+ years), generally have somewhat higher levels of trust in the political systems in both Norway and Ukraine. Those arriving more recently have higher levels of trust in Norway and lower levels of trust in the political system in Ukraine than those who arrived in 2022.

In the interviews, we did not ask explicitly about sense of belonging or political trust, but some elements from the interviews may shed light on some of the reasons for the rather surprising results in the survey.

Concerning sense of belonging, some interviewees reflected upon societal differences when comparing Norway and Ukraine, highlighting the more positive sides of the Norwegian culture. One interview stated that:

> No, I don't think there will be an opportunity to return to the same job. No, just to look for another job. Possibly even change the city. How can I explain it? Our nation is not of incredibly kind people, honestly. This is due to many historical facts, primarily the Soviet Union, the denunciations, it's a historical fact, people lived off denunciations of others. This remains in society even today. And if I was born in this body with different positions, it doesn't mean that the majority of people are like that. No, it's quite difficult to live there. If you want to live by the law, if you want to live... You constantly live in tension because you're being beaten, so to speak. If you show weakness, they will tear you apart. There is no such thing here [in Norway]. (…) That's a big plus. (…) The hardest thing for me will be to give this up, just peace of mind. Because going back there again, where you're being tried, beaten, and you have to be like a hedgehog, hold your position, and at the same time work, function. Now, it will intensify, everyone understands this. It will be impossible. (C6)

As noted in the chapter on work, interviewees who already started working were appreciative of the Norwegian working culture that they experience as more egalitarian than in Ukraine:

> Here, in principle, I like the work environment more because there is true equality. And when the owner of the factory comes in, stands next to me in the workplace, he can help me, he has no problem helping me. Even though he owns a fairly large factory, there are no issues. He

> always says hello or something else. In Ukraine, factory directors might pass by and not look in your direction, as if they are second only to God. (C5)

Some also noted that working hours were more humane and strictly regulated here in Norway, which left more time to spend with your children and loved ones.

The interviews also pointed to aspects that can shed light on high level of trust in the Norwegian political system. Many emphasised that Norway was a welfare state, where the government provides support regardless of who you are or how much you earn. This perception began from the moment of arrival, with the welcoming smiles of police officers at Norwegian airports (an experience frequently described by interviewees as strikingly different from Ukraine) and extends to the assistance provided by Nav in finding employment (a contrast to the common practice in Ukraine, where individuals usually seek jobs independently). These differences in how society is structured and operates also help explain the high level of trust in Norway's political system expressed by many Ukrainian refugees.

The exceptionally low levels of trust in the political system in Ukraine may be strongly related to the challenges the country have with corruption. The war has also created new tensions between Ukrainians who have fled and those who stayed behind (see more on this in chapter 13.4.3). Further, some interviewees expressed criticism of the new mobilisation act that the governments launched in May 2024 (for more details on the Ukrainian mobilisation act, see Deineko and Hernes 2024), which eroded their trust in Ukraine's political system.

12.4 Summary

In this chapter, we have analysed the Ukrainian refugees' social integration in Norway along with their sense of belonging and political trust in both Norway and Ukraine.

Social integration

First, we find that 70% reported to have someone who is close to them in Norway, and with whom they could talk about personal issues. When asked whether they have *Norwegian* friends or acquaintances, we found – not surprisingly – that those who had lived in Norway for a longer time had more close Norwegian friends and acquaintances. For example, while only 14% of those who arrived in 2022 answered that they had no Norwegian friends and acquaintances, over half of the respondents in 2024 stated the same.

While contact with the 'Ukrainian community' in Norway played an important role in the daily lives of refugees, staying in touch had become more challenging due to differences in work schedules or a lack of shared interests. The recognition of the temporary nature of their stay in Norway, due to the collective protection status, also influenced some refugees' motivation to invest in close friendships here.

Two thirds participated in some type of local social activity. Participation in organised cultural activities and – for parents – activities related to their children's organised activities were the most common. Many were also involved in voluntary work for Ukraine and Ukrainians and/or a social community of Ukrainians in Norway. The interviews exemplified how the Ukrainian refugees' involvement in local activities played a significant role in their social integration and forming friendships with locals.

Sense of belonging to Norway and Ukraine and political trust

In the survey, we asked about the respondents' sense of belonging to both Ukraine and Norway and compared the answers to a previous SSB (2016) study on these topics among immigrants in Norway. We find that Ukrainian refugees have somewhat lower score for their sense of belonging to Norway compared to previous studies of immigrants in Norway. However, it is important to remember that many Ukrainian refugees have a shorter residence time in Norway compared to the immigrants in the SSB study. More surprisingly, was the Ukrainians refugees' lower scores on their assessment of sense of belonging to Ukraine

compared to other immigrants. Interestingly, men answered that they felt a higher sense of belonging to Norway than women, and reversely, a lower sense of belonging to Ukraine. The youngest age groups (18-29 years) also had a lower sense of belonging to Ukraine than the older age groups.

Concerning political trust, the differences are striking. Ukrainian refugees generally have exceptionally high trust in the Norwegian political system (around 8 out of 10), and very low trust in the Ukrainian political system (around 2 out of 10). When comparing Ukrainian refugees' trust in the Norwegian system with the SSB study, we see that they express higher levels of trust in the Norwegian system than all other immigrant groups. Men also have more trust in the political system in Norway and lower trust in the political system in Ukraine than women.

In the qualitative interviews, some interviewees were reflecting upon societal differences when comparing Norway and Ukraine, highlighting benefits of the Norwegian society and welfare state, where you would be supported regardless of who you were or how much you earned. Others emphasised a more humane and less strict working life in Norway, which left more time to spend with your children and loved ones.

13 Future prospects

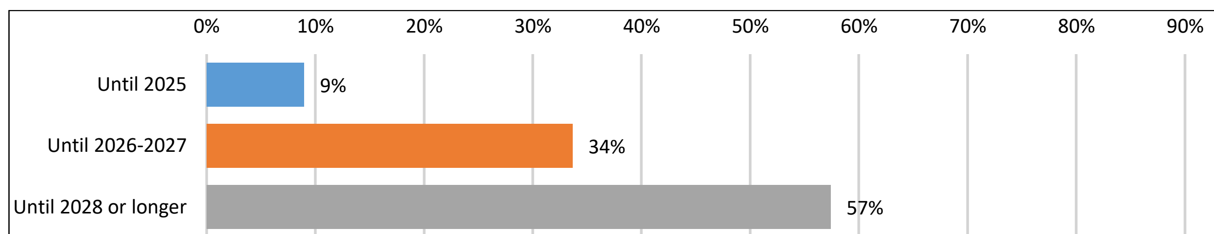
What are the Ukrainian refugees' thoughts about and prospects for the future? What factors affect whether they want to return to Ukraine or stay in Norway, for example concerning human capital factors, family situation, integration in Norway, and the personal situation back Ukraine?

In this chapter, we first present the respondents' thoughts about how long the war will last as an important background variable to understand their future prospects. Thereafter, we analyse the Ukrainian refugees' return aspirations, both over time (since 2022 to 2024), and the factors affecting their aspirations. Lastly, we build on the qualitative interviews to explore the rationales underlying these different positions and the dilemmas that they face when assessing their future.

13.1 Thoughts about how long the war will last

We asked the respondents how long they thought the war in Ukraine would last, and 59% of the respondent answered, 'Hard to say/I don't know', but 40% provided an estimate.

Figure 13.1: Estimation of the duration of the war (N=636).



*Weighted by gender and age.
**Those who answered, 'Hard to say/don't know' (59%) have been excluded.

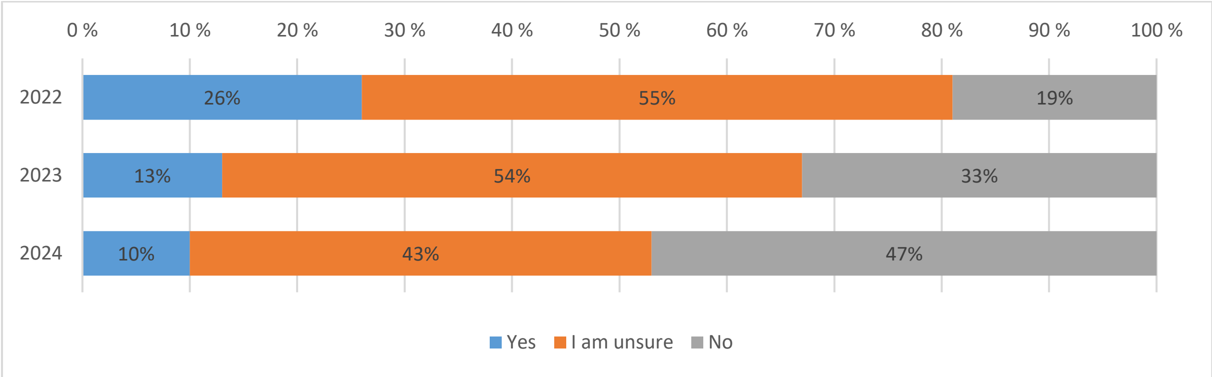
Figure 13.1 presents the respondents' estimated duration of the war (excluding the 59% who expressed uncertainty about its end). Over half of these respondents believed that the war would last until 2028 or longer. Only one in ten believed that the war will be over by the end of 2025. The younger age groups were more pessimistic about the duration of the war than the older age groups. More women answered that they do not know, while a larger share of the men believed that the war will be long-lasting.

In the survey, another question related to future prospects asked whether the respondents think that they would be able to move back to their hometown. 43% did not think that they would be able to move back to their hometown, while only 18% though they would be able to do so. About 40% were unsure. Compared to the 2023 survey, there are now a larger share that do not think that they will be able to move back to their hometown (28% in 2023 and 43% in 2024).

13.2 More people want to stay in Norway than previously

What aspirations for return to Ukraine do the Ukrainian refugees have 2.5 years after the full-scale invasion, and does it differ between different scenarios and subgroups?

Figure 13.2: Statement: 'I will return to Ukraine as soon as the war ends', comparing answers from the 2022 (N=680), 2023 (N=1596) and 2024 (N=1547) surveys.



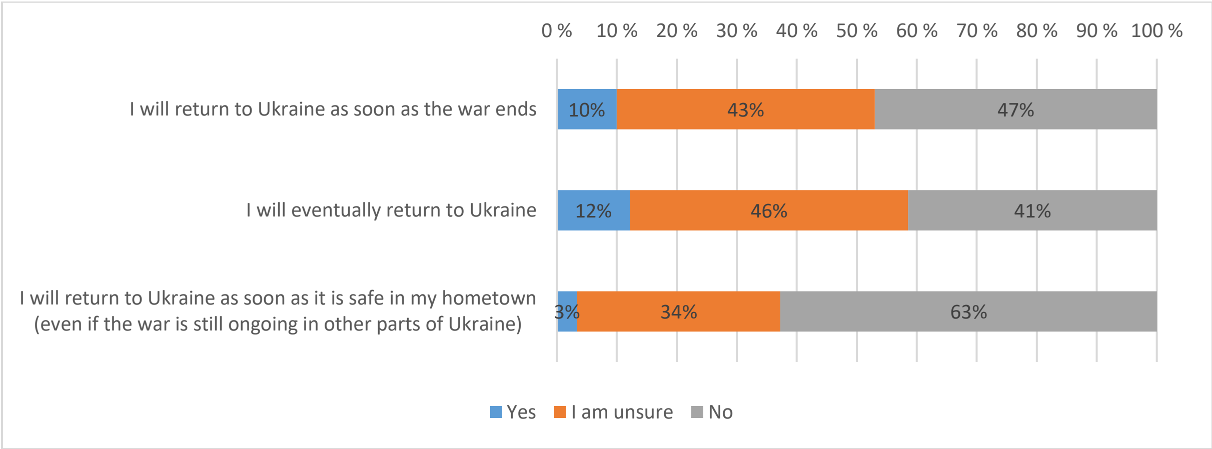
*Weighted by gender and age in all surveys.

Figure 13.2 compares results from the 2022, 2023 and 2024 surveys related to the Ukrainian refugees' future prospects for return to Ukraine when the war ends. There is a clear trend with a prolonged war; although there is still a large share saying that they are unsure, there is a clear decline in respondents who positively confirm that they want to return to Ukraine after the war has ended – from 26 % in 2022 to only 10% in 2024. Further, the share that has decided that they do not want to return has more than doubled from 2022 to 2024. While about one in five answered that they would not return to Ukraine as soon as the war ends in 2022, almost half reported that they do not want to return in the 2024 survey. Also, fewer respondents were now unsure (declined by about 10ppt. in 2024, compared to 2022 and 2023).

By exploiting our longitudinal data of respondents that have answered the survey before (2022 and/or 2023), we are also able to explore changes on an individual level. When asking the question in figure 13.2. to the same respondents in 2022, 2023, and 2024, we observed a trend where a considerable proportion of those who in 2022 or 2023 planned to return had become more uncertain in later years, with some even deciding to stay. By 2024, a substantial number of those who were initially uncertain had decided to stay. Furthermore, those who from the outset did not intend to move back to Ukraine largely maintained this position in 2024, although some had since become undecided. Overall, most of the changes in individual positions appear to reflect a growing reluctance to move back to Ukraine.

We further asked if the respondents eventually wanted to return to Ukraine, and if they would return if it became safe in their hometown, but while the war was still ongoing in other parts of Ukraine. In the figure below, the 2024 survey results for the statement 'I will return to Ukraine as soon as the war ends' (presented also in figure 13.2) is also included to compare the 2024 responses to different scenarios.

Figure 13.3: Statements of return aspirations under different scenarios (N=1547).



*Weighted by gender and age.

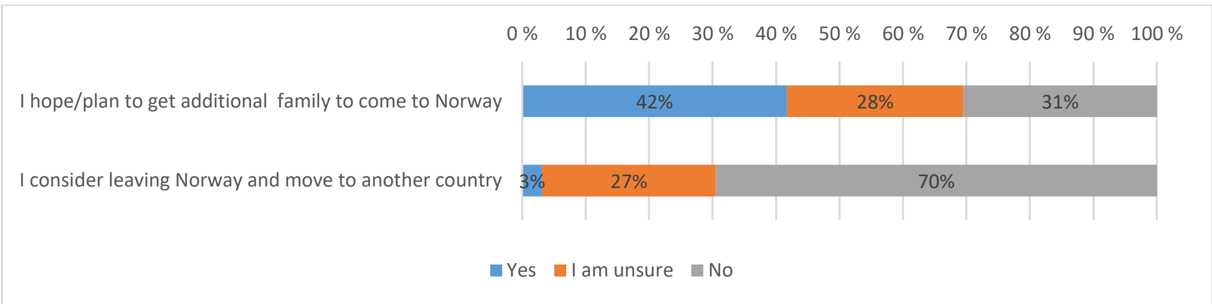
Figure 13.3 shows that there are very small differences between the first two statements: those who answered that they would return to Ukraine 'as soon as the war ends' and those who answered that they will *eventually* return to Ukraine. When we ask if they would return to Ukraine if their hometown was safe but while the war was still ongoing in other parts of Ukraine, only 3% said that they would return, and 63% stated that they would not return. For this latter statement, we also see an increase in persons who answer that they would *not* return compared to the 2023 and 2022 survey.

The majority of respondents are also very clear that they do not want to restart their lives in a new city in Ukraine if their hometown does not become safe. Faced with the statement: 'I would rather continue living in Norway than restart my life in a new city in Ukraine', 82% answered that they would rather continue to live in Norway.

13.2.1 Plans to move or get additional family to Norway

In the survey, we asked whether the respondents had future plans to move to another country or bring additional family to Norway.

Figure 13.4: Plans for family reunification or move to another country (N=1547).



*Weighted by gender and age.

Figure 13.4 shows that over 40% hoped or planned to bring additional family to Norway. Very few (3%) currently planned to leave Norway to move to another country (other than Ukraine), but 27% were unsure.

One of the interviewees who was unsure of whether her family would move to another country, illustrated how their assessment to move to another country would depend on how their situation developed, and that they not necessarily were determined to stay in Norway at all cost: 'But the goal of staying in Norway, to find a job by any means, just to stay here, because it is 'love at first sight' – such intentions and sentiments are not present in our

family.' (N4) Whether they would like to stay in Norway or not was related to what job they were able to get here and how their life in general in Norway evolved.

13.2.2 Who wants to return and who wants to stay?

Ukrainian refugees are not a homogenous group, and their situations vary quite significantly, which has also been shown to influence their initial aspirations for return (Hernes, Aasland et al. 2024). Therefore, we investigated whether some subgroups of Ukrainian refugees were more inclined to want to stay in Norway or return to Ukraine?

To analyse this question, we first explored the internal correlation between the variables that indicate inclination to return to Ukraine, inclination to remain in Norway or being uncertain. Most of the variables had a high internal correlation[38], and we therefore computed an additive index[39] as a dependent variable. For the index, a high score indicates inclination to return, and a low score indicates motivation to stay in Norway (or alternatively not to move back to Ukraine). Those who are unsure are given a medium score. This index was used in a multilinear regression analysis, where we included independent variables which we believed could have an impact on refugees' prospects of future residence. The results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 13.1.

[38] We applied a reliability analysis to check the internal correlation of the index, and with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.8, it is reasonable to assume that the index demonstrates a satisfactory level of internal consistency.

[39] We used the following variables for computing the index: I will return to Ukraine as soon as the war ends; I will return to Ukraine as soon as it is safe in my home town; I will eventually return to Ukraine; I consider moving to a different part of Ukraine than my home town if only certain areas of Ukraine become safe; I consider leaving Norway and move to another country; I think that I will never be able to return to my hometown; I would rather continue to live in Norway than restart my life in a new city in Ukraine (the latter two with opposite values as for those above). The index was computed by recoding and calculating the mean score on these variables for each of the respondents.

Table 13.1: Multiple linear regression. Dependent variable: Prospects return to Ukraine index. High value = expressed high motivation to return (i.e., to stay in Norway) (N=1547).

		Unst. coeff	Std. err.	Stand. coeff.
Background factors	Female sex (vs. male)	0.15**	0.02	0.18
	Age (in years)[40]	0.00**	0.00	0.12
	Has children 18 yrs of age (vs. none)	-0.06**	0.02	-0.07
Qualifications	Education 11 yrs or less (vs. higher)	0.00	0.04	0.00
	Education vocational (vs. higher)	-0.02	0.03	-0.02
	Fluency in English (4pt scale)	0.00	0.01	0.01
	Fluency in Norwegian (4pt scale)	-0.12**	0.02	-0.23
Prior network	Prior network in Norway (vs. none)	-0.01	0.02	-0.01
Cohort	Arrived 2023 (vs. 2022)	-0.06	0.03	-0.07
	Arrived 2024 (vs. 2022)	-0.15**	0.04	-0.13
Main status	Currently unemployed (versus working)	0.02	0.03	0.02
	Currently in Introduction programme (vs. working)	0.06*	0.03	0.07
	Other status (vs. working)	0.06	0.03	0.05
War duration	'War ends by 2025' (versus all others)	0.26**	0.05	0.12
Family in Ukraine	Husband/wife/partner left in Ukraine	0.10*	0.04	0.06
	Children left in Ukraine	0.10**	0.03	0.08
	Parents left in Ukraine	0.01	0.02	0.01
Previous residence in Ukraine	Lived in central Ukraine (vs. west)	0.04	0.04	0.04
	Lived in south-eastern Ukraine (vs. west)	0.02	0.04	0.02
	Lived in eastern Ukraine (vs. west)	-0.03	0.05	-0.04
	War damage in Ukraine (index)[41]	-0.04**	0.01	-0.11
Evaluation of reception	Satisfaction with reception in Norway	-0.05**	0.01	-0.10
Constant		0.71**	0.11	

*Significant at 0.05 level **Significant at 0.01 level
***Weighted for gender and age Adjusted R^2= 0.17

Several variables have a statistically significant correlation on the perceived prospects of return. Men are considerably less likely to consider returning than women, and those with children under 18 years in Norway are more inclined to wish to stay on in the country. The respondent's age also matters; young respondents are more likely to wish to remain in Norway than older respondents. Whether or not the respondent has family left in Ukraine also has, as expected, an effect on motivation to return. However, it is only those with

[40] Since this is a continuous variable with one-year intervals, the unstandardised coefficient is close to zero. However, despite its apparent lack of effect in raw units, the standardised coefficient reveals the variable's effect on the dependent variable.

[41] An additive index based on responses on damage to dwelling, neighbourhood and local infrastructure during the war (tested for internal consistency).

children and their husband/wife left in Ukraine that express higher aspirations to return, while having parents left in the country does not have a similar effect.

A variable with a large effect on considerations about future residence is the respondents' estimation of the duration of the war: those believing that it will be over by the end of 2025 have considerably greater motivation to return. It is also noteworthy that the first arrivals to Norway (the cohort arriving in 2022) are more motivated than those arriving in the two following years to return to Ukraine. Although we did find that the inclination to stay increases with longer length of residence in Norway in the longitudinal analysis presented in chapter 13.2 above, it seems that those arriving more recently are even more determined to stay in Norway from the outset.

Though people currently in the introduction programme display a slightly higher return motivation than other categories of respondents, whether a respondent works, is unemployed or is outside the labour force does not make a big difference on return aspirations. However, overall satisfaction with reception in Norway makes a small difference; those who were more satisfied are more likely to wish to remain in Norway. Furthermore, previous level of education does not affect return aspirations, but knowledge of Norwegian reduces motivation to return to Ukraine considerably. Knowledge of English does not have the same effect, however.

Geographical pre-war location in Ukraine (east, west, central or south-east) does not have a statistically significant effect on return aspirations. However, those who have experienced severe damage to their house, neighbourhood and/or local infrastructure are, as could be expected, less motivated to return than those without such war damage in their former place of living.

13.3 Reflections and reasons for aspirations to return or stay

In the qualitative interviews, we see that the interviewees have varying assessments of whether and why they want to return or not – and what aspects they highlight in their assessments.

Several interviewees did not see a future for themselves in Ukraine, and different reasons were highlighted in their reflections. First, and similarly to the findings in the 2023 report, several interviewees were sure that returning to Ukraine would require a process of reintegration and that it could be particularly challenging for their children.

> The children are already attending a Norwegian school here. My daughter will go to kindergarten here. They are learning another language. They are not learning the same Ukrainian that is taught in Ukraine. Even if we come back in two years, there will already be a huge gap for them. (C5)

Bringing the children back to Ukraine was seen as 'just uprooting once more' (N7). Although there had been challenges with Norwegian as a foreign language after arrival, several anticipated challenges with Ukrainian language upon return. Another mother emphasised how they had adapted to the new life in Norway, appreciating aspects of the Norwegian society, and were reluctant to move back to a post-war Ukraine:

> We don't plan to return. Because I don't see a happy childhood for my child in a post-war country. As sad as it is to admit. I understand when people live there, as we did when the killings started at Maidan in 2014. When you live in the epicentre, it's really not that scary, but when you look at it from the outside, it's a different story. Plus, as I already mentioned, I really like my job [in Norway]. I feel self-realised. And I have family time. For example, if in Kyiv I came home from work at 7 PM, here I come home at 4 PM, pick him up. We have a lot of time to spend together. So, of course, I like the Norwegian work-life balance better. (B3)

For small children, two years is a significant time. Some interviewees arrived in Norway with small children, or even while pregnant. They noted that their children are 'Norwegian' in certain ways, having grown up in a Norwegian environment and spent more of their lives

here than in Ukraine: ‘Our child is growing up here – it's been two years now. She’s spent more of her life here than anywhere else’ (B4). This aspect makes it difficult to reflect on potential return to Ukraine when the collective protection expires.

Over the past two years, family dynamics have shifted for many – some have divorced, further loosening their ties to Ukraine. As children continue to integrate into life in Norway, many express a desire to stay and build their lives there:

> My children, to be honest, don’t want to go back. My son says he can’t even imagine living in Ukraine after being in Norway because there’s more bullying in Ukrainian schools. The attitudes – from both teachers and students – are completely different. My daughter feels the same way. I’ve also divorced my husband, so there’s really nothing holding me in Ukraine. (A8)

Further, a mother who arrived in Norway with her son was hesitant to return because she did not want him to take part in the war:

> I understand that they are counting on the war ending completely. Well, there is a chance of that, but it's small. I understand that returning with my son significantly increases the chances that when he is 18, 20 or 30, he will be asked to go to war. I understand that there is nothing wrong with it; it's only positive that a person fights for their country. But it would be difficult for me on a human level. (N7)

Other interviewees – particularly from the occupied territories or territories badly affected by the war – either pointed to that they had nowhere to return, or that they were concerned about what a post-war Ukraine would look like. One interviewee reflected upon where ‘home’ was now that their former home was destroyed[42]:

> I cannot plan to return to Ukraine, I have nothing there. What I have is currently under occupation, and when, what, how, and where, I do not know. As for what Norway will decide, I don’t know if they will extend it for another 5 years. I would just like to have the opportunity to choose. Not so that the law says that in 2 weeks you have to go. (…) So, like in the song, you know, the fact is that I don't have a home, that's a bit true about me. Because the home that was, is no longer home, and this is home as long as I live here. In principle, you know, if I can live here, work, be useful, I would continue to live here. Because I just want to live after all this, I just want to live. (N8)

A man from occupied territories also worried about other aspects of society in a future post-war Ukraine. If the territory of their former Ukrainian hometown under occupation would be liberated, it would still take many years to clean it from mines and other remnants of the war. Further, he worried that the Ukrainian society would be affected by the war for a very long time even after an end and anticipated a lot of societal problems due to the traumas of the war.

> Also, no one should forget about post-war syndrome. As you may know, when the war in Afghanistan happened, many guys came back home after it. And what happened to them? It was gang groups, weapons, violence, racketeering, and everything else. I don't think that after a person has been killing for 4-5 years, and some have been fighting since 2014, they will come back and say... Yes, I'll go work in a factory or sell in a store. Some will, but it's a question of security for many more years to come. (C5)

He further reflected on how this could affect his children. He told of an incident he heard about:

> A soldier came back, got drunk, killed two policemen, killed his wife or girlfriend, and something like that. For him, death is already commonplace. I don't want my children to see this ‘normality’, which is the situation for these people. (C5)

[42] For more on Ukrainian refugees’ reflections on ‘home’ – in Ukraine, Norway, in both countries or ‘no home’, see Deineko and Aasland (2024)

In line with the survey results presented in figure 14.3, the interviewees did not want to go back to Ukraine in order to become internally displaced (move to another location): 'Because nor do we have the financial cushion nor ideas to start a business or something like that' (N5). Similarly, among those who expressed a wish to return to Ukraine, they were clear that they would not like to return before the war ended.

> Of course, we would very much like to return home to Ukraine, but my husband and I understand that it is very dangerous, and we will not risk our child and ourselves. Therefore, if we are talking about returning to Ukraine as an option, this can only happen after all hostilities have officially ended, a signed defeat of the aggressor country, some compensation they plan to make to Ukraine, or something like that. (N4)

Further, many interviewees were not taking the possibility to remain in Norway for granted. Several interviewees noted that they would like to continue staying in Norway – emphasising that they were investing time and efforts in language learning and work – but at the same time, underlining that they did not take this possibility for granted due to their current status of temporary protection.

One interviewee believed that Norway would listen to Ukrainian authorities when deciding the fate of the status of Ukrainian refugees in Norway:

> If Ukraine, as a partner, says return the people to us, we need people, then Norway will return them, of course. So, I understand that this likelihood is very high. This means that what I am doing here now, I will need to convert into activities that I can do there. (N7)

Others were more open to different paths forward depending on how life unfolded and were open also for perhaps moving to other countries in the future. They emphasised that whether they would like to stay in Norway was related to what jobs they were able to get here and how their life in Norway in general evolved.

13.3.1 Temporary collective protection as a factor of uncertainty

In this year's round of qualitative interviews, we spoke with several persons with whom we had spoken with already in 2022 and kept contact with since. The impressions from our conversations this year were that people's awareness of their temporary status had increased compared to previously. The uncertainty that they were feeling was connected not only to the question of when the war will end – but very much also to the fact that their current status in Norway is a temporary one. While this point was raised also in previous reports, as time passes and ties to the host country Norway is being developed and strengthened, people start feeling that their temporary status is inappropriate and discomforting. Several interviewees reported that the temporary status made it difficult for them to plan their future and that the uncertainty it created affected their everyday life and integration:

> Uncertainty. Uncertainty about the future. Because even [other] refugees live for some time [on temporary permits], and then…then they receive a permanent residence permit. And then they, well, at least they know that they can live, they can work. But I don't know. How can you build your life if you don't know your status in this society? (N8)

Several interviewees explained how they experienced that this uncertainty affected also their integration process and social life in Norway. One interviewee explained how she was hesitant to make social 'investments' not knowing how long she would be allowed to stay in Norway:

> It is necessary to find your own *permanent* people [close friends] here. It is all subconscious anyway. I want to make friends here. But if I have to return, what is the point of getting close to someone here? (N2)

One interviewee from occupied territories had brought several family members to Norway and were starting to think of building a future here. However, the temporary status made it difficult to plan ahead:

> The only question, as I said, is to have proper, valid documents later on. Not just valid, but something like residency or something else, to help us stay here normally, calmly apply for a mortgage, and continue building our lives… Because we don't quite understand what will happen in the future, in a year or two, it brings some anxiety.'(C5)

While many spoke of the uncertainty of the future, some emphasised that they had coping strategies and tried to make the most out of the 'here and now':

> Well, look, you know that right now we can't think about such a future, and I can't plan how things will go, whether I will live here. If the war is ending, we are all being told that we have to leave this country, and no one has any guarantees about who will stay and who will not. I am making my starting point here and now. I am here now, I am doing my best, I am not waiting to leave for Ukraine and live there and do everything there. (N3)

One employed woman talked about her evaluation concerning applying for a work visa or not, and expressed less concern about what would happen to their permits:

> Because it's still 6000 NOK per person to apply [for a work visa]. And if you get the same living conditions, then... But I'm not fighting or worrying about what's next. I don't think Norway will just say one day, 'Goodbye, everyone should book a flight for tomorrow if you don't have a work visa.' How would that be? Some decisions will be made, some corridor will be there. Now we even read that when your temporary protection ends, it will automatically be extended and during the period when you don't have a blue card, you have the right to work and continue your activities. So, I think there will be some humane conditions. (B3)

13.3.2 Work visas as a path towards a more secure residence status

Several interviewees noted that they would have preferred having a more permanent residence status in Norway. They were calling for possibilities to change their status and for information from Norwegian authorities about what to expect with regard to their status.

One interviewee found it puzzling that they undergo quite thorough integration while there is no formal path to get a permanent residence status, irrespectively of how well integrated they become.

> If they said something like, 'Guys, you are here temporary, but for those who meet certain conditions, there will be a procedure'. I don't know, for transitioning to another status. Now the process of obtaining individual protection says, 'That's it, you didn't get individual protection, you will return collectively, goodbye.' Work visa, well yes, but at least they [Norwegian authorities] don't advertise it. (N7)

The interviewee reacted to the fact that Norwegian authorities have not explicitly stated that people who find qualified work may change their status and apply for a work visa where residence time counts on the path towards permanent residence.

Work visas, however, were mentioned by several interviewees as a way of switching to a more permanent status: Some interviewees who had found a permanent job within their field of education were already considering applying for a work visa and they were quite confident that it would work out well.

Otherwise, there were many different perceptions among the Ukrainian refugees about what would help to eventually get permanent residence, either through work visas or by future legislative amendments. One interviewee thought transitioning to a work visa was the only way to stay long-term: 'Well, in principle, if there is no work visa, then we will all go home. There's only one choice. If someone finds a job within their field of expertise and gets a visa, naturally, that's a chance to stay' (N6). However, she mentioned that she was of the impression that most Ukrainians who had found work had temporary positions, and therefore most Ukrainians would not qualify for a work visa.

Although Norwegian authorities have not provided any instructions of ways for Ukrainian refugees to switch to a more permanent residence status, interviewees explained that they act in ways that they believe will increase their changes of being able to stay in Norway also

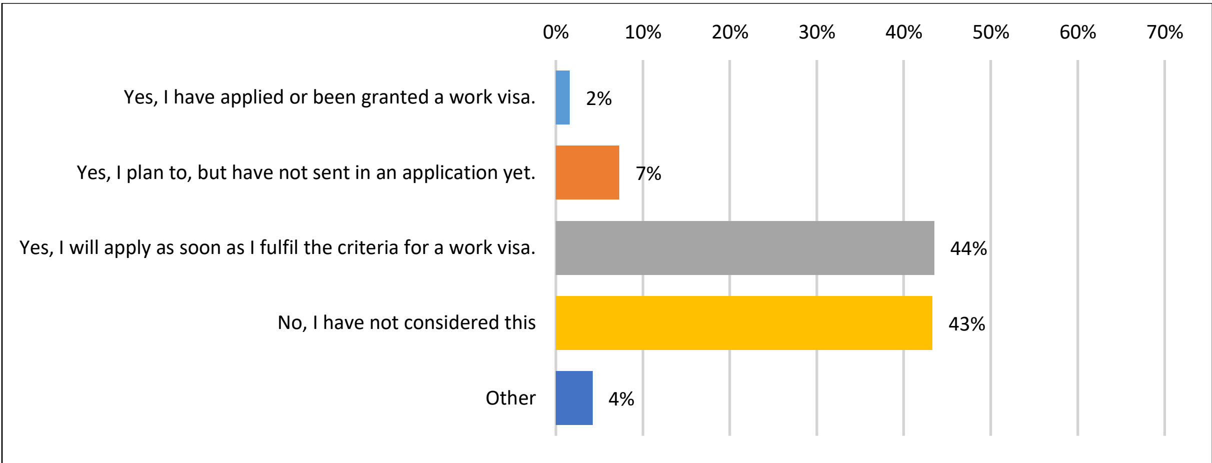
when collective protection ends. Some interviewees were convinced the chances of staying on would be better for people who do not depend on state support and are able to provide for themselves:

> For the last three months, we have been completely self-sufficient, not receiving any help. As I started working in the first month, and from the second month, we haven't received any state aid. No subsidies. We want it to continue this way so that later, we don't know when it will end or how it will end, but so that we can fully apply for residency or some full documents here. (C5)

One interviewee reflected that: 'But it seems to me that those who have the opportunity to provide for themselves, those who have a job, will be able to apply for residence after collective protection' (N3).

Based on the interviews, we included a question in the survey that asked the respondents if they had considered or planned to apply for a work visa instead of collective protection.

Figure 13.5: Share that plan to apply for a work visa (N=1547).



*Weighted by gender and age.

Figure 13.5 shows that very few of the respondents had applied at the time of the survey in October 2024, but that half of the respondents either planned to apply (7%) or planned to apply when they fulfil the criteria for a work permit (44%). Just below half of the respondents had not considered this option.

Interestingly, we find that those who previously lived in the western part of Ukraine to a higher degree plan to apply for a work visa, than those from other regions in Ukraine. This difference may be related to the recent restrictions for persons from western parts of Ukraine concerning temporary protection permits (a policy change that was introduced right before the survey was launched in October 2024, see chapter 3.1 for a closer description).

13.3.3 Concerns about how 'returnees' will be treated in the Ukrainian society

An important element in an assessment of whether to return or stay, concerns how the Ukrainian refugees believe that the Ukrainian society will treat those who have escaped for later to return. A notable and indicative difference between Ukrainian 'citizens' and 'refugees' was marked in the New Year speech by President Zelenskyy on December 31, 2023, where he noted: 'Because I know that one day I will have to ask myself: who am I? To make a choice about who I want to be. A victim or a winner? A refugee or a citizen? And everyone

knows the answer'[43]. Several interviewees were worried that they could face negative attitudes in Ukraine upon a potential return from people who had lived in Ukraine during the war.

One woman shared that she frequently had conversations with her son about whether they are cowards because they left Ukraine, because it was their impression that there had been created such a division between those who left and those who remained:

> And from the perspective of information campaigns [that come from the state], it is not emphasised that we are one nation, that it doesn't matter where you are, you are Ukrainian. What matters is where you are and what you are doing for victory and everything else. And this is a constant conversation with [name], with my son: that means we are cowards, because we 'ran away'. (N7)

We also asked the interviewees what the Ukrainian authorities could do to make people want to return in the future. One recurring point was that Ukrainian authorities ought to prevent the formation of negative stereotypes of Ukrainian refugees to form in Ukrainian society:

> Well, first of all, a big social divide has occurred, and it is being maintained. The first thing the authorities should do is to prevent that negative stereotypes about refugees are being formed. But they are being formed. This is evident in comments by public servants, which can be thoughtless. The fact is that such content is freely launched by various media platforms, and the situation escalates. (N5)

However, another interviewee stated that: 'It's not even the authorities that decide whether to return to Ukraine or not. It's determined by the state of society'.

When answering the question about what Ukrainian authorities may do, several interviewees also stressed how Ukrainian authorities should help create conditions under which it would be possible to live a good life in Ukraine:

> I believe, at a minimum, to raise salaries in key areas that need development. Secondly, provide the opportunity to study and improve oneself, to have the opportunity to gain broader knowledge, to improve one's skills, and to move up the career ladder. And providing benefits for purchasing housing. (N4)

One woman thought that it would not so much be about what the Ukrainian authorities could do that would determine whether people will return, but that other conditions would be more decisive, such as what people have left in Ukraine in terms of family members, close relations and housing. This aligns with findings from our survey on determinants of return aspirations (see chapter 13.3).

13.4 Summary

This chapter has examined the Ukrainian refugees' thoughts and prospects for the future.

Although the majority were unsure about how long the war will last, very few believed in a rapid solution. Concerning return aspirations, there is a clear trend when we compare the surveys conducted in 2022, 2023 and 2024. Although by 2024, there was still a large share stating that they were unsure, there has been a clear decline in refugees wanting to return to Ukraine – from 26 % in 2022 to only 10% in 2024. Further, the share that stated that they would *not* return has more than doubled from 2022 to 2024: now, almost half said that they do *not* want to return to Ukraine after the war. The majority of respondents were also very clear that they do not want to restart their lives in a new city in Ukraine if their hometown does not become safe: 82% answered that they would rather continue to live in Norway than restart my life in a new city in Ukraine.

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[43] 'New Year address by President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy," December 31, 2023. The Presidential Office of Ukraine. https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/novorichne-privitannya-prezidenta-ukrayini-volodimira-zelens-88037.

The following subgroups were more inclined to want to stay in Norway: men, the younger age groups, parents with children in Norway, and those who have experienced severe damage to their house, neighbourhood and/or local infrastructure. Those with children or their husband/wife left in Ukraine were more inclined to return to Ukraine. It is also noteworthy that the first arrivals to Norway (the cohort arriving in 2022) are more motivated than those arriving in the two following years to return to Ukraine.

The qualitative interviews provide some explanations for the indecisiveness and reluctance with regard to returning. Similarly to last year's report, several interviewees emphasised stability for their children, and that returning to Ukraine would require a process of reintegration which could be particularly challenging for their children. Others worried about the risks of living with a war-traumatised population in a future post-war Ukraine. Further, many were concerned about how the Ukrainian society would treat those who had escaped if they returned, referring to an ongoing debate in the Ukrainian society. One recurring point in this regard was how the interviewees emphasised that the Ukrainian authorities ought to prevent the formation of negative stereotypes of Ukrainian refugees to form in Ukrainian society.

Some interviewees, however, were more open to returning depending on how the war in Ukraine developed and how their lives unfolded in Norway.

The temporary perspective and residence permits were a prominent topic in the interviews. The impressions from our conversations this year were that people's awareness of their temporary status had increased compared to previously. Some interviewees explained how they experienced that this uncertainty affected their integration process and social life in Norway.

Several interviewees were calling for possibilities to change their status and for information about what to expect with regard to their status. Work visas were mentioned as a way of switching to a more permanent status, and half of the survey respondents either planned to apply for work visas (7%) or planned to apply when they fulfil the criteria for a work permit (44%).

14 The Ukrainian refugees’ assessment of the Norwegian policy restrictions after 2023

What do the Ukrainian refugees think about the new policy restrictions that have been implemented after the fall of 2023?

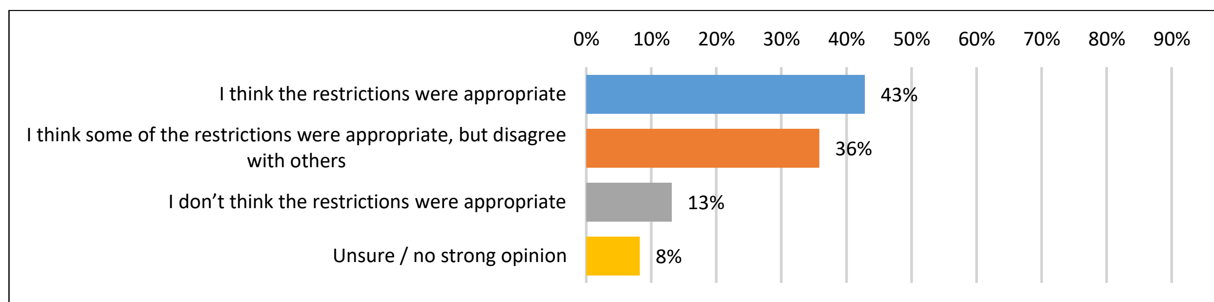
As described in chapter 3, after the relatively high number of arrivals from Ukraine (compared to the other Scandinavian countries) during the fall of 2023, the Norwegian government introduced several restrictions for Ukrainian refugees, including abolishing some of the more initial liberal policies for Ukrainian refugees, restricting some financial benefits, and several regulations related to who were eligible for collective, temporary protection.

In this chapter, we first present the survey respondents’ overall assessments of these restrictions, before describing how they justify their opposition or support to these restrictions based on the qualitative interviews and open-ended answers from the survey.

14.1 Assessment of the restrictions

In the survey, we asked about the Ukrainian refugees’ own assessment of the restrictions that were made during the previous year. In the beginning of the question, we informed that ‘after the fall of 2023, Norway has introduced several restrictions related to the reception and integration of Ukrainian refugees, and their rights in Norway (e.g. restrictions on traveling to Ukraine, financial assistance etc.)’, and asked what they thought of these restrictions.

Figure 14.1: Assessment of new government restrictions in 2023-2024 (N=1547).



*Weighted by gender and age.

Figure 14.1 shows that the most common answer was that they thought the restrictions were appropriate (43%). One third thought that some of the restrictions were appropriate while others were not, while only 13% stated that they do not think that the restrictions were appropriate. The rest did not know or had no opinion.

14.1.1 Varied views on the travel restrictions to Ukraine

In the interviews, we asked to what extent the refugees were acquainted with the policy amendments and the new restrictions concerning Ukrainian refugees that had been implemented during the last year. Similarly to the results in the survey, the interviewees were divided in their perceptions of the restrictions.

While some were familiar with several of the changes made, the amendment that was most frequently mentioned was the prohibition to travel to Ukraine. Some interviewees mentioned the prohibition already at the start of the interview when we asked about what aspects that had been the most significant changes in their lives during the past year (even before asking explicitly about the restrictions). There was however no univocal opinion on the prohibition.

Among the interviewees, there were both people very critical and very supportive of it. In the interviews, people provided arguments and nuances that explained their view.

Some interviewees reacted very strongly to the prohibition to travel to Ukraine even though they had not travelled frequently to Ukraine themselves. They felt deprived of a fundamental right:

> The fact that it's forbidden, it's such a very painful process, very painful decision for me and absolutely unacceptable, incomprehensible. I perceive it as some kind of imprisonment, disrespect, and generally about something, about the fact that we are people of lower quality. Some kind of 'subhuman' who do not need to contact their families, people who do not need a future here, because there is none here, it is not voiced. Like we are some machines that only have to work - not think about the future and not look back at the past. Because no, they don't give the opportunity to build a future, and the past we should forget. (N1)

In this interview, we see how the prohibition to travel is connected with the limitations of the temporary status that creates insecurity about their possibilities to stay in Norway.

Some reported that the prohibition to travel had broken their trust in Norwegian authorities:

> And now, when I speak, whether in society, when we gather, or in school [introduction programme] where I used to go, I understand that people are in such despair. The worst assumptions are being voiced, that we will all be kicked out one day, no one will ask, we will be deported. There are stories, and their negativity is growing in these stories, because there is no dialogue with people. (N5)

The trust had been broken, the interviewee explained, because they felt this prohibition came out of the sudden – as a big negative surprise they had not been prepared for through explanations and dialogue. It therefore left many Ukrainians with a feeling not knowing what to expect from the Norwegian authorities next. The interviewee also expressed frustration that it was unclear what travels would be accepted as there was no possibility to clarify it beforehand:

> Worst of all is the lack of a direct answer, criteria. This is the worst. Because when I asked this question, they said, 'we don't know.' 'Go, and then these materials will be added to your case, and then it will be reviewed someday.' (N5)

While some reacted strongly towards the prohibition to travel to Ukraine, others expressed understanding of the measure since they had seen other Ukrainians travelling back and forth frequently. In their opinion, this could sometimes be seen as exploiting the social support that they got in Norway. Still, they experienced it as very sad knowing that this possibility to go see relatives in Ukraine was taken away from them.

For others, it had not been an alternative to visit to Ukraine and they did not feel affected by the prohibition:

> I'm being very open and honest right now. We haven't crossed the border even once. That's why it didn't affect us, because if we thought we could go to Ukraine and it was safe and great, we wouldn't have come here [to Norway]. (N4)

Another interviewee was very supportive of the prohibition:

> I don't understand how mothers drag their children back there. I took mine out, and I don't understand how you can commute from there to here. We have not been anywhere [in Ukraine] after we left. (C6)

A man from occupied territories was supportive of the prohibitions, because he did not understand why people from areas in Ukraine that in his opinion were safe – or 'at least 90% safe' as he expressed it – had to leave the country in the first place. He was generally critical of those who had left from – relatively safe in his opinion – western parts of Ukraine, because he knew people from the eastern part that left their homes to move to the western parts of Ukraine, and who paid very high rents to people who rented out their homes to internally displaced persons. He asked: 'Why should people profit from someone else's misfortune?'. Related to the prohibition to travel back to Ukraine, his logic seemed to be that people from

occupied territories like himself had no possibility to travel to Ukraine anyway, and that the prohibition only affected those who could have chosen to remain in Ukraine.

However, another interviewee from occupied territories – who did not feel that much affected by the prohibition herself – was more critical of the prohibition. She noted that the prohibition forced women with children to return to Ukraine, because it was impossible to remain a family when husbands and fathers were not allowed to leave Ukraine, when the women and children no longer had the possibility to go for short visits to meet their family members in safer areas.

Although most of the voiced opinions about the restrictions concerned the prohibition to visit Ukraine, some interviewees also mentioned other policy amendments. However, because the interviewees in our study came to Norway in 2022 or in 2023, before the amendments were implemented, they were not affected by the restrictions with regard to registration, private accommodation or pets. However, one interviewee had experienced that the possibility for free travel to the registration center at Råde was retracted, and that the possibility to arrive with pets without big costs related to quarantine and vaccinations, created difficulties for more Ukrainians arriving more recently. She had helped several people to get to Råde from the airport.

In the survey, we also asked those who had answered that they disagreed either with all or some restrictions to specify which elements they disagree with, and why. Also in the survey, the restrictions concerning the prohibition of visiting Ukraine was the central theme. The responses brought up emotional distress, family separations, inability to resolve emergency situations, and even marital issues, as negative effects of the imposed restrictions on travels to Ukraine. Several respondents argued that restrictions on movement and on possibilities to meet with family violate basic human rights, particularly freedom of travel and the right to family life. Insecurity in terms of which types of visits would be accepted, and which would not, was also often mentioned.

Though ban on travels to Ukraine was dominating, several respondents also brought up other restrictions introduced by the authorities that they did not agree with. One of these was the recognition of six Ukrainian regions to be 'safe' (introduced in October 2024, right before the survey was launched), and therefore not offering automatic collective protection to refugees from these regions:

> I do not agree that there are regions in Ukraine that Norway has recognised as safe. Then why don't they open airports in those regions and allow regular flights? There are drones and missiles strike across the entire country. Does Norway guarantee that nothing will hit those regions for the people they strip of protection? Recently, in Lviv, a 9-year-old child and an entire family peacefully sleeping were killed – tell them it's safe there. (female, age 40s)

Others perceived contradictions and paradoxes in the rules:

> On the one hand, there are safe regions from which collective protection is not granted, but on the other hand, it is not allowed to travel to Ukraine because it is unsafe. (female, age 40s)

Although there were fewer respondents reporting opposition to the reduction in financial support, disagreements with these restrictions were also quite common, exemplified by the following citations:

> I don't agree with the financial restrictions, because the prices constantly increase. (male, age 50s)

> I think Norway is an expensive country, so I consider the reduction in aid to be the wrong decision, because prices are rising while aid is decreasing. (female, age 20s)

> I am, of course, infinitely grateful to Norway, a deep bow to this wonderful country for everything it has provided and continues to provide to me and my family. However, the reduction in financial support is being felt in the basic needs of the family, particularly in the quality of food. (male, age 30s)

Another recurring theme was the reduction in time offered in the introduction programme and thereby often cuts in length of language training (in practice):

> Reduction of the integration program for people who are truly making progress in learning Norwegian. (male, age 20s)
>
> The shortened terms of the introductory program create a certain inequality of opportunities compared to other refugees. (male, age 50s)

Several respondents argued that many of the restrictions introduced not only harm Ukrainian refugees themselves but also Norwegian society:

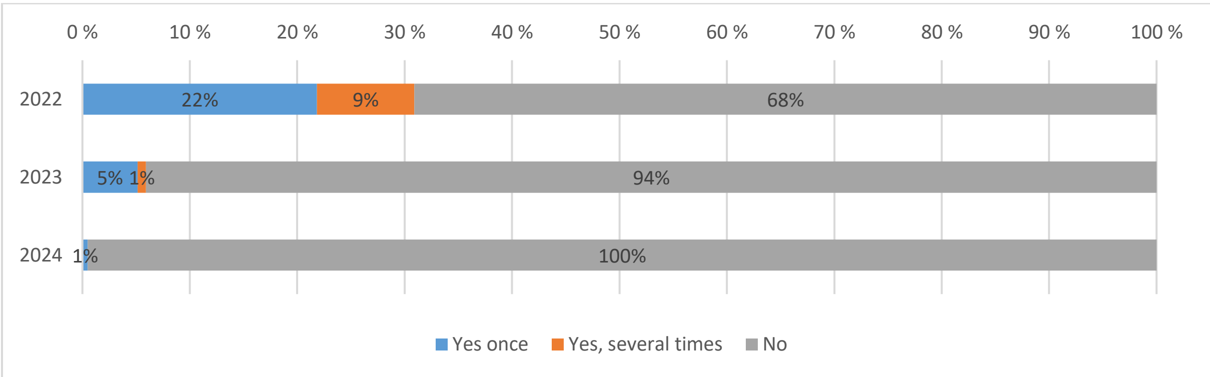
> Moreover, reducing the overall course of Norwegian language lessons and social benefits for Ukrainians, as well as the poor assessment of potential harm from 'half-measures' in this regard, leads to a situation where individuals, not having fully learned Norwegian, struggle to find their place and integrate into Norwegian society. In other words, the government is saving money on the development and support of Ukrainians, which in turn contributes to the loss of already invested funds in Ukrainians who have not been able to or have poorly integrated, many of whom, among other things, had highly qualified professions that are very much needed in Norway today. (male, age 30s)

14.2 Visits back to Ukraine

As shown, the restriction that most Ukrainian refugees reacted to the most was the ban on travels back to Ukraine. In the survey, we also asked about whether the respondents had visited Ukraine after their arrival to Norway.

In the overall sample, 83% had not visited Ukraine, but there are very large differences between men and women, and between cohorts. Of the men, only 3% had visited Ukraine since their arrival, while 25% of the women had been back once (18%) or several times (7%).

Figure 14.2: Visits back to Ukraine by time of arrival in Norway (N=1547).



*Weighted by gender and age.
**Those who answered, 'I don't want to answer' (1%) are excluded from the figure.

Figure 14.2 shows that for those arriving after 2024, only 0.5% had visited Ukraine. Also, for the 2023 cohort, 6% had visited Ukraine, and only 1% several times. For those arriving in 2022, who had more time to travel back to Ukraine before the restriction was implemented in December 2023, 22% had travelled once, while 9% had visited Ukraine several times.

14.3 Summary

In this chapter, we have investigated the Ukrainian refugees' thoughts on the new policy restrictions imposed after the fall of 2023.

In the survey, we first asked about their overall assessment of the restrictions. Most respondents understood the restrictions and thought they were appropriate (43%). One third

thought that some of the restrictions were appropriate while others were not, while only 13% did not agree with the restrictions. The rest did not know or had no opinion.

In the interviews, similarly to the results in the survey, the interviewees were divided in their perceptions of the restrictions. While some were familiar to several of the changes made, the amendment that was most frequently mentioned was the prohibition to travel to Ukraine. Among the interviewees, there were people who were very critical towards it and very supportive of it.

Those opposing reacted very strongly to the prohibition to travel to Ukraine and felt deprived of a fundamental right of free movement. Their reasoning was also strongly connected to the limitations of the temporary status that created insecurity about their possibilities to stay in Norway. Other emphasised that the travel restriction had broken their trust in Norwegian authorities, because its implementation came very sudden, leaving a feeling of not knowing what to expect from the Norwegian authorities next. However, while some interviewees reacted strongly towards the prohibition to travel to Ukraine, others expressed that they understood why it was implemented. They expressed that travelling back and forth to Ukraine could be seen as exploiting the social support that they got in Norway or that it only affected persons who could have could have chosen to remain in Ukraine.

In the survey, we also asked those who had answered that they disagreed either with all or some restrictions to specify which elements they disagreed with, and why. Many in the survey respondent also reacted to the travel restriction to Ukraine, bringing up emotional distress, family separations, inability to resolve emergency situations, and even marital issues, as negative effects of the imposed restrictions on travels to Ukraine.

Though ban on travels to Ukraine was dominating, several respondents also brought up other restrictions introduced by the authorities that they did not agree with. Some mentioned the recognition of six Ukrainian regions to be ‘safe’, and therefore not offering automatic collective protection to refugees from these regions. Although there were fewer respondents reporting opposition to the reduction in financial support, disagreements with these restrictions were also quite common, often highlighting that the inflation of prices in Norway constrained their financial situation severely. Lastly, some respondents also mentioned the reduction in time offered in the introduction programme and thereby often cuts in the length of language training (in practice).

In the survey, we also asked about whether the respondents had visited Ukraine after their arrival in Norway. We find that that 83% had not visited Ukraine, but there are very large differences between men and women, and between cohorts. Of the men, only 3% had visited Ukraine since their arrival, while 25% of the women had visited Ukraine at least once. We also found that of those arriving after 2024, only 0.5% had visited Ukraine. Also, for the 2023 cohort, only 6% had visited Ukraine after arrival. For those arriving in 2022, who had more time to travel back to Ukraine before the restriction in December 2023, 22% had travelled once, while 9% had visited Ukraine several times.

Part 3

The municipal refugee services' experiences with Ukrainian refugees and related policies

15 Data and methods for analysing municipal refugee services’ work and assessments

A description of the overall research design is presented in chapter 1.1. In this section, we will describe the data and methods of analysis of the municipalities’ refugee services.

This years’ analysis of municipal refugee work is limited to data from a survey to all municipal refugee services. The survey is mainly based on the 2023 version, but with relevant adjustments to address new relevant topics. To develop and include new relevant questions, we built on qualitative (individual and focus group) interviews with totally 66 individuals conducted with municipal and other local actors in four case municipalities during the winter/spring 2024 as part of the UKRINT project[44]. The following types of municipal departments/local organisations were represented (number of interviews in parenthesis): municipal refugee office (17), Nav (15), leaders from other municipal departments, e.g. healthcare, HR (10), local employers (17), adult education[45] (6), volunteer organisation (1). We also built on the rich data material from the qualitative interviews with Ukrainian refugees conducted in 2024 (see chapter 4.1 for a description). Although the 2023 report included analyses of the qualitative interviews, this year’s report has a more limited scope and only include analyses of the survey. However, the analyses in this report will compare survey data from 2023 and 2024 when relevant.

The survey was conducted in September-October 2024. The questionnaire was distributed by e-mail to all municipal e-mailboxes, requesting it to be forwarded to the leader of the refugee service in the municipality. A similar survey was sent to Oslo’s 15 city districts in parallel with the survey sent to the municipalities.

222 municipalities answered the survey, a response rate of approximately 63%. Some municipalities cooperate closely on the refugee services, and a couple of the service leaders contacted us to communicate that they would only complete the survey for the host municipality. We have not taken this into account when calculating the response rate. Eight of 15 city districts in the municipality of Oslo completed the survey, representing a response rate of 53%. The results of the two surveys were combined in the analyses.

Quantitative data material

The main data material from the survey consists of quantitative data on a wide range of issues concerning the refugee services. The respondents appear to have completed the survey very conscientiously. Few data are missing, apart from answers to questions obviously not relevant for all the respondents.

Data from the survey were combined with register data from Statistics Norway about the municipalities, namely population, location/centrality, finances, number of refugees settled in 2022-2024 and unemployment.

The analyses conducted in this report are mainly simple means, frequency distributions and bivariate correlations. There is substantial variation in the data. We have analysed the material with the general hypothesis that municipality size (population), location and refugee settlement experience are variables that may explain some of the variance. However, these three variables are highly correlated. Usually, we show the results for one of the variables and only make comments on correlations in the text if there are results of particular interest.

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[44] https://www.oslomet.no/forskning/forskningsprosjekter/langtidsopphold-norge-eller-rask-tilbakevending-til-ukraina-ukrint

[45] ‘Adult education” is upper secondary education that is adapted for adults.

Qualitative data material

In addition to the quantitative data, we asked several open-ended questions in the survey, where respondents were asked to formulate their viewpoints in their own words. We also asked informants for supplementary comments on several issues. These answers constitute almost 70 pages of text. Due to the time available to prepare this report, we have not yet been able to analyse this qualitative data material systematically. These data are therefore used mainly for illustrative purposes, and all quotes in this part of the report are from the open questions in the survey. The quotations and examples from the open questions are used partly to show 'typical' arguments and partly to illustrate the variation in respondents' views.

Dropout analysis

In order to see whether the participating refugee services are representative, we conducted a dropout analysis. We primarily analysed the distribution of participating municipalities on two main variables: population size and location (county).

Table 15.1: Participating municipalities as share of all municipalities, by population size. Oslo's eight participating city districts are counted as one large municipality.

Municipality size	Number of municipalities	Participating municipalities	Percent participating
3000 and fewer	129	85	66%
3001-9000	106	65	61%
9001-30000	86	50	58%
30001 and more	36	23	64%
Total	357	223	62%

Table 15.1 shows that all categories of municipalities (by size) are represented in our material, ranging from 58% of the total number of municipalities to 66%.

Table 15.2: Participating municipalities as share of all municipalities in the county. Oslo: number and percent of city districts.

County	Number of municipalities	Number of participating municipalities	Percent participating
Agder	25	15	60%
Akershus	21	10	48%
Buskerud	18	12	67%
Finnmark	18	9	50%
Innlandet	46	25	54%
Møre og Romsdal	27	20	74%
Nordland	41	26	63%
Oslo	15	8	53%
Østfold	12	8	67%
Rogaland	23	19	83%
Telemark	17	13	76%
Troms	21	13	62%
Trøndelag	38	20	53%
Vestfold	6	5	83%
Vestland	43	27	63%

Table 15.2 shows that all counties, except Akershus, are represented by at least 50% of the municipalities in the county. While 83% of the municipalities in Vestfold and Rogaland have answered our survey, Akershus has 48% and Finnmark 50% of their municipalities participating.

All in all, we conclude that there are no obvious regional biases in the material since all main parts of the country seem to be well represented in the survey data material.

16 Organisation, cooperation and governance in the settlement and integration of Ukrainian refugees

Norwegian municipalities play a crucial role in the settlement and integration of refugees. Through local refugee services, they are responsible for providing all frontline public services to refugees within their municipalities and for providing introduction programmes and Norwegian training.

Municipalities function in a multi-level governance system in which the legal framework, guidelines and resources are provided by the national authorities. Even though municipalities are responsible for implementing national policies towards refugees, they have significant flexibility in how they address the task. There are considerable differences between municipalities in their follow-up of 'their' refugees. Some of these differences occur due to the wide variation between Norwegian municipalities. The smallest municipality has a population of 215, the largest over 700,000. Some municipalities include large cities or are located close to varied labour markets and a wide range of public services, whereas more rural municipalities are located far away from such services. Basically, irrespective of population size and location, they have the same responsibilities towards refugees settled in their area.

Because of the large numbers of refugees from Ukraine arriving from 2022, all municipalities were mobilised in refugee settlement and integration processes. Some municipalities had considerable experience in working with refugees, while others settled their first refugees in many years in 2022 or 2023. This means that some municipalities already had a robust municipal organisation for handling the refugee service, albeit it was in need of reinforcement, while others had to build up the service from scratch.

This section addresses four main questions:

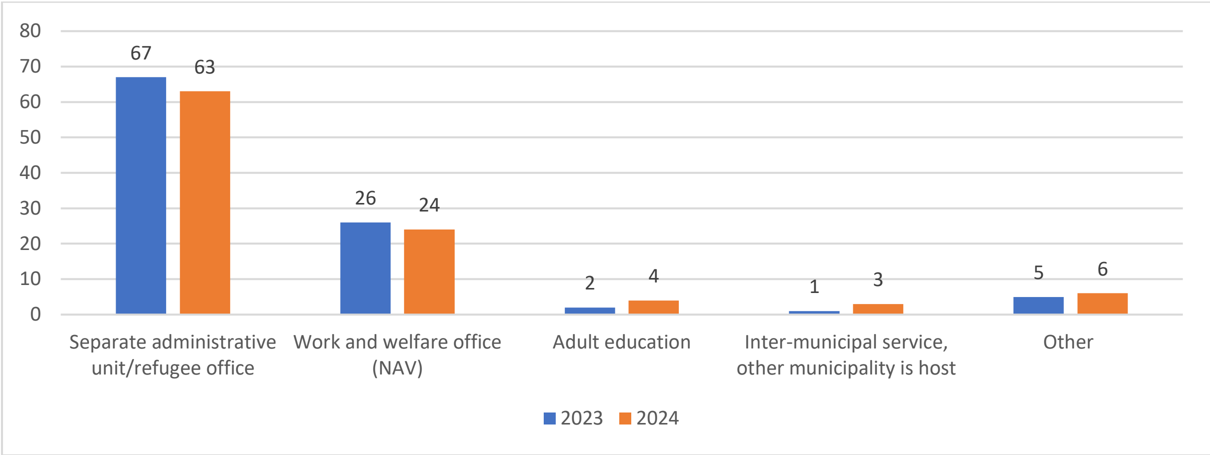
- How do the municipalities organise their work with refugees?
- How is refugee work anchored within the municipal organisation?
- How is the capacity in the municipal refugee services?
- How is cooperation between local actors and services working with refugees assessed?
- How do leaders of local refugee services consider information and guidance from national authorities?

Our 2023-report (Hernes, Aasland et al. 2023) documented how the municipalities organise their work with refugees, their cooperation with other municipalities and local actors on this issue, and how refugee service leaders assessed information and guidance from the national authority, namely IMDi. In this chapter, we will update our knowledge on these issues. The main impression is that most organisation structures are quite stable, but that one more year of experience in settling refugees, to a certain degree has influenced municipal cooperation with other actors.

16.1 Organisation of municipal refugee services

Local refugee services are most often organised either as a separate administrative unit or as an office within the broader Nav office. The 2024-numbers are very similar to the results from 2023. The decline in municipalities organising refugee services as a separate administrative unit or within the work and welfare office (Nav), is weak and non-significant (Figure 16.1).

Figure 16.1: Which municipal unit is responsible for newly arrived refugees? (N_{2023}=215; N_{2024}=230).



*Frequencies, percent.

Figure 16.1 shows the majority still organises the refugee services in a separate refugee office in 2024 (63%), while about one out of four organise it through Nav.

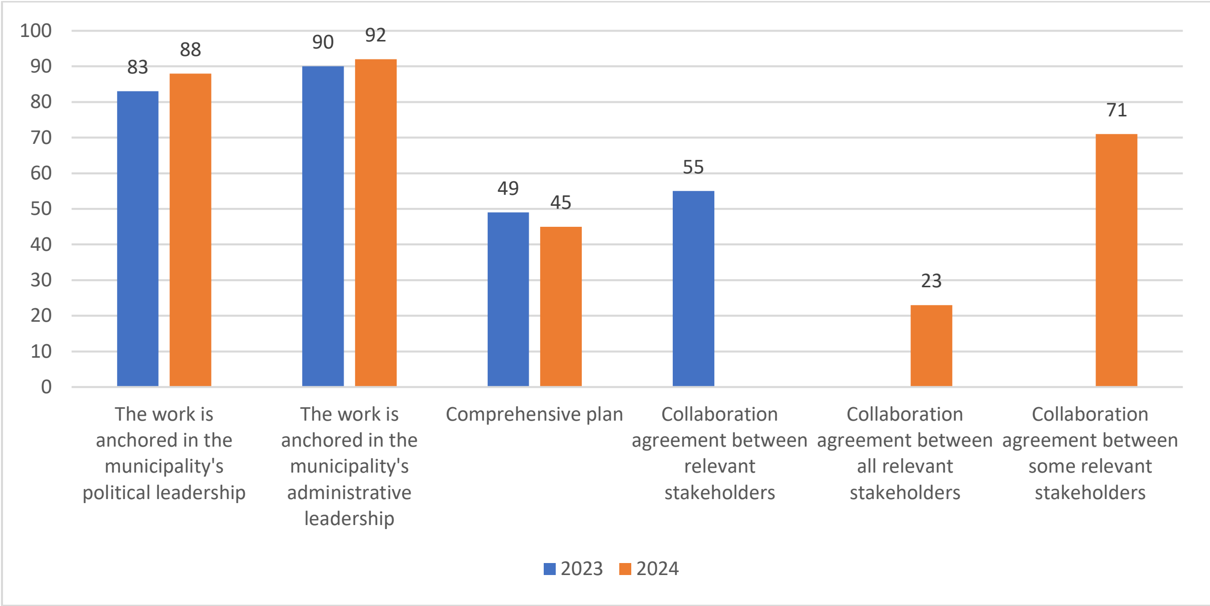
More detailed analyses reveal that large municipalities have chosen the Nav option to a greater extent than small municipalities. Intermunicipal cooperation on refugee services usually takes the form of small municipalities purchasing services from large municipalities, alternatively small municipalities joining together to form a stronger unit. Comparing 2023 and 2024, there is a weak tendency of less municipalities reporting that they sell services relating to refugees to other municipalities and more saying that they provide all services themselves. The survey data may, however, underestimate the number of municipalities in intermunicipal cooperation somewhat, because municipalities purchasing refugee services from others may have decided not to participate in the survey due to scarce information about the services.

In the survey, some respondents answering 'other' have specified their organisation model. Some of the respondents report that they buy some elements in their refugee services from others, either other municipalities, intermunicipal services or private providers.

16.2 Political and administrative anchoring

Refugees settling in a municipality in a new country need a wide range of services depending on their health, education and family situation. Providing these services is a major task for a municipality, and it demands anchoring the work with the municipal political and administrative leadership, as well as cooperation with relevant local services.

Figure 16.2: How is the work with Ukrainian refugees anchored in the municipal organisation? (N_{2023}=215; N_{2024}=224).



*Frequencies, percent.

Figure 16.2 shows that most refugee services have anchored their work with the municipal leadership. Political anchoring may imply that they have a formal decision in the municipal council on the settlement of refugees. Less than half of the municipalities report that they have a comprehensive plan for the work. The more general question from 2023 ('Do you have a collaboration agreement between relevant stakeholders') was in 2024 split in two more specific questions, namely collaboration agreement between *all relevant stakeholders* and *some relevant stakeholders*.

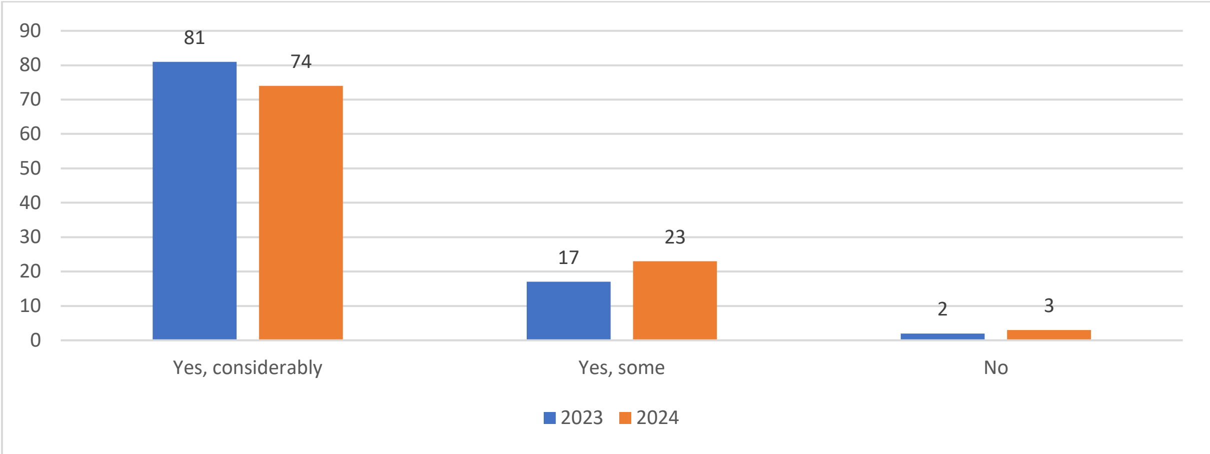
In 2023, we found clear differences between small and large municipalities when it comes to having plans or cooperation agreements in their work with refugees. These differences are less clear in 2024, even if many of the smallest municipalities (under 3000 inhabitants) still have a less formalised organisation of their refugee work. Moreover, a significant number of respondents from refugee services in smaller municipalities answer 'do not know' to the questions on collaboration agreements. It is worth noting, however, that formal cooperation agreements often are seen as unnecessary in the smallest municipalities, because employees in different services usually know each other personally.

16.3 Capacity in the refugee service

With the large number of Ukrainian refugees arriving from February 2022 onwards, Norwegian municipalities have settled refugees as never before. Even the tiniest of municipalities have received refugees, many of them with no previous experience in this work, at least not in the years preceding 2022. Municipalities with experience with refugee settlement, had usually downscaled their refugee services due to the low arrival numbers from 2017 onwards (Hernes, Danielsen et al. 2022).

Our report from 2023 documented how the influx of Ukrainian refugees from early spring of 2022 onwards resulted in capacity challenges in many municipalities (Hernes, Aasland et al. 2023).

Figure 16.3: Has the settlement and integration of Ukrainian refugees resulted in the need for increased capacity in the municipality's refugee service? (N_{2023}=215; N_{2024}=224).

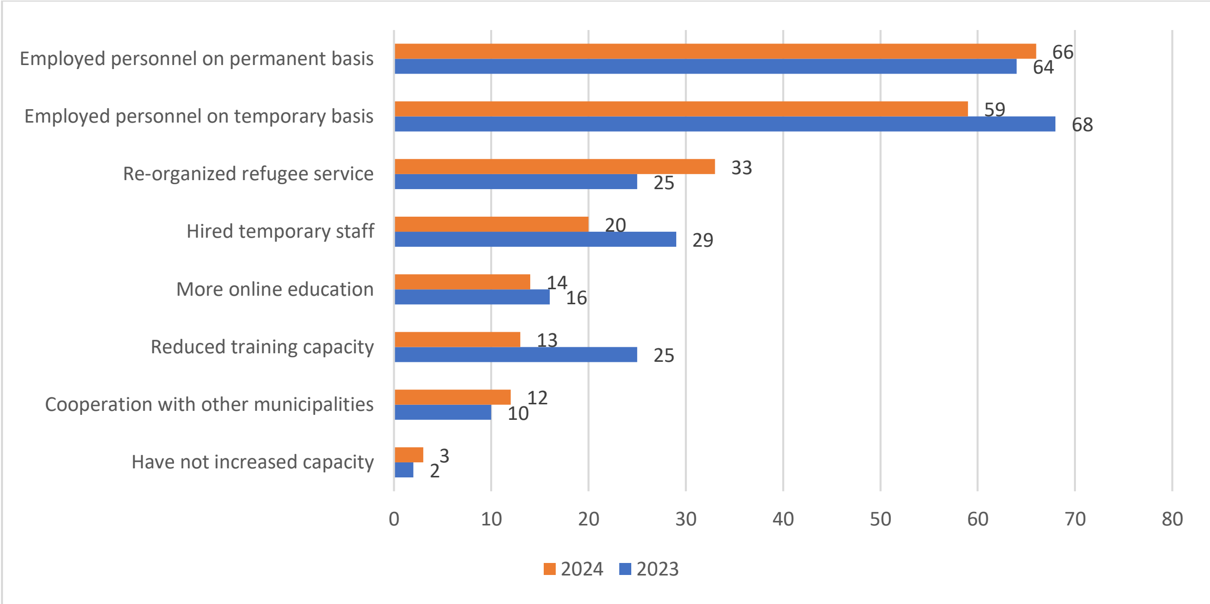


*Frequencies, percent.

Figure 16.3 shows that nearly all municipalities reported a need to increase the capacity in their refugee service. Also in 2024, three out of four municipalities report a need for considerable capacity increase. The impression is, however, that the capacity is somewhat less strained in some municipalities in 2024 compared to 2023.

The municipalities in need of higher capacity have used different strategies to meet this challenge, and we register some interesting developments from 2023 to 2024 (figure 16.4).

Figure 16.4: What has been done to accommodate the need for increased capacity? (N_{2023}=202; N_{2024}=218).



*Frequencies, percent.

Figure 16.4 shows that in 2024, fewer municipalities report that they employ or hire (from staffing agencies) personnel on a temporary basis to handle the need for increased capacity, while re-organisation of the refugee service is more common. In 2023, one of four municipalities (25%) reported that they had to reduce the Norwegian training services offered to refugees due to capacity issues. In 2024, this holds for only one in eight (13%).

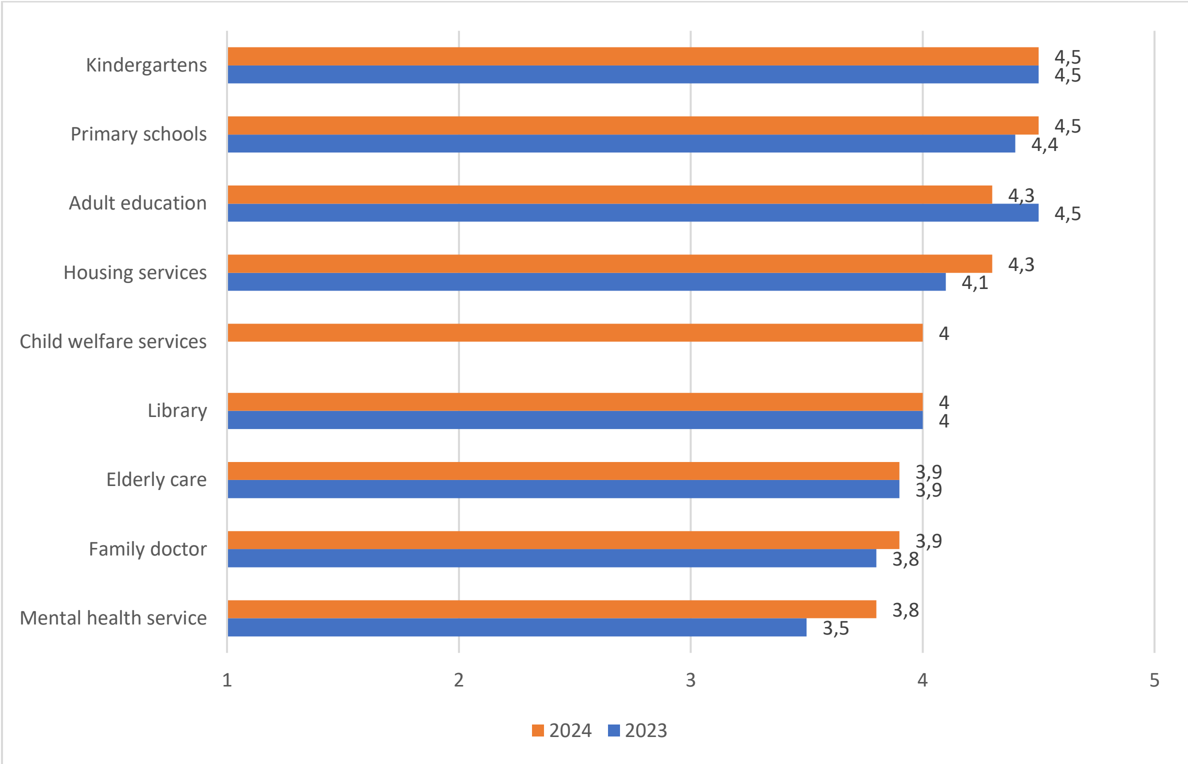
These figures may indicate that some municipalities to a larger degree have ‘normalised’ settlement of refugees as a part of their municipal tasks. This may be due to the somewhat

lower numbers of arrivals in 2024 compared to 2023, or merely that municipal services have had another year to build up and consolidate their work with refugee settlement. Moreover, the municipal actors' time perspective of the Ukrainian refugees' 'temporary protection' may have changed, so that municipalities now consider their work as more long term that they did when Ukrainian refugees started arriving in 2022.

16.4 Cooperation with local and external services and actors

Refugees need a range of services in their daily lives. Most of these services are provided by municipalities. The municipal refugee service will often have to cooperate with several other services to secure that refugees are provided services according to their needs.

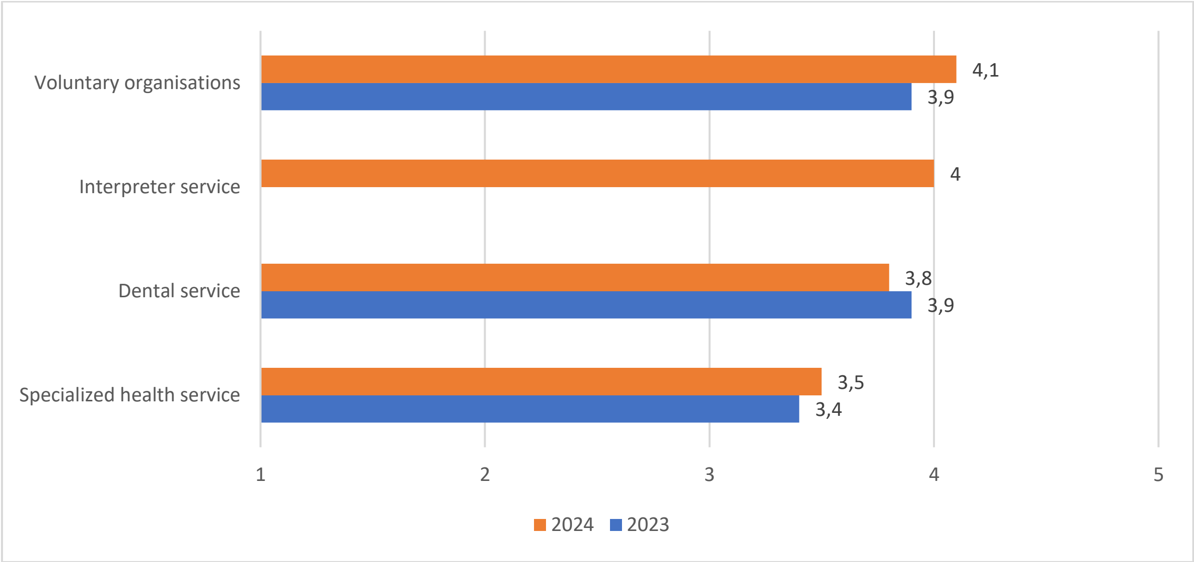
Figure 16.5: How do you assess the cooperation with the following local actors and services in facilitating the integration of Ukrainian refugees? (N_{2023}=211-215; N_{2024}=218-222).



*Means. Scale: 1 = Very bad, 5 = Very good.

Figure 16.5 shows that refugee service leaders generally assess the cooperation with other local services on refugee-related issues to function well. As in 2023, cooperation with educational services, such as kindergartens, primary schools and adult education is ranked as particularly good, while the scores for health services are considerably lower (but somewhat better than in 2023). These assessments align with the refugees' own assessment of services, where kindergarten and schools are ranked very high, while healthcare services get lower scores (see chapter 7.3).

Figure 16.6: How do you assess the cooperation with the following actors and services in facilitating the integration of Ukrainian refugees? (N_{2023}=215; N_{2024}=224).



*Means. Scale: 1 = Very bad, 5 = Very good.

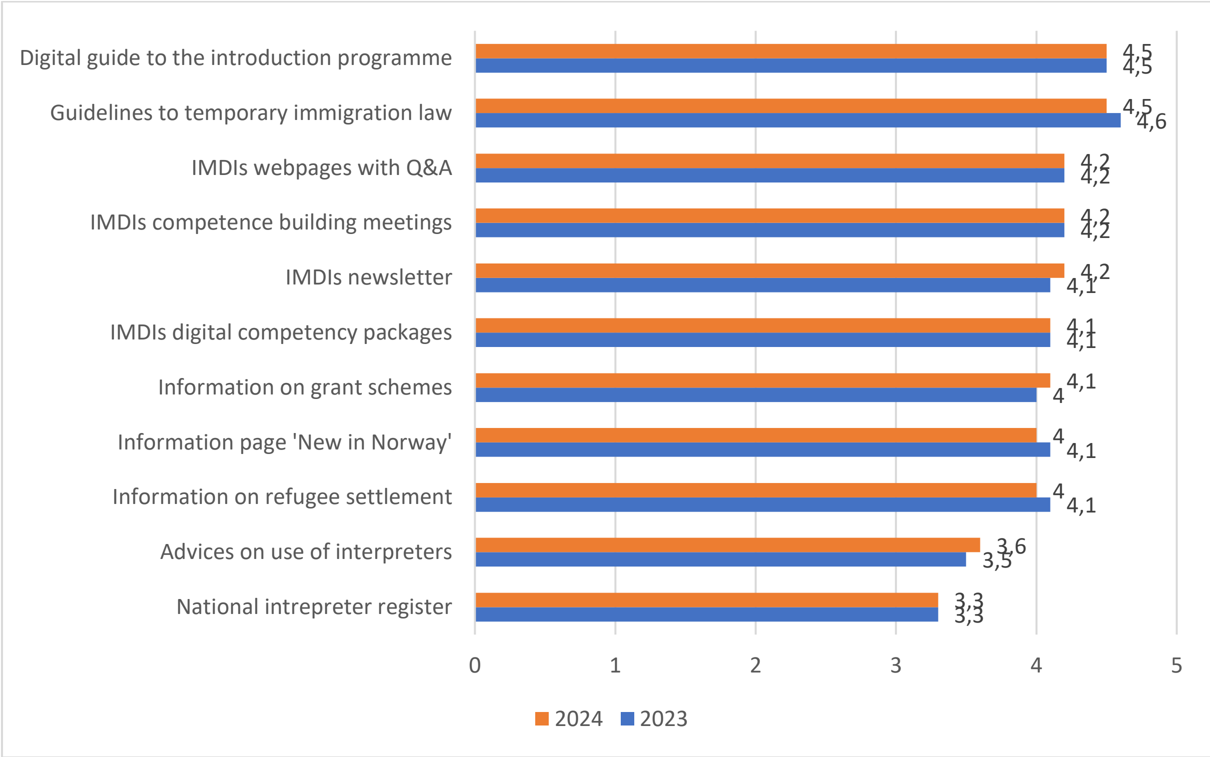
Some external (non-municipal) actors provided services relevant for refugees. Again, we see in figure 16.6 that health-related services are rated somewhat lower than other services. The cooperation with voluntary organisations and interpreter services gets a score of minimum 4 out of 5.

16.5 Multi-level governance of refugee settlement

In this section, we look at how the local refugee services assess the activities of the national integration authority, IMDi.

IMDis information and guidance activities were upscaled after February 2022 to provide information to the many inexperienced and overloaded refugee services, and to secure a minimum level of quality and equal treatment across municipalities. Moreover, with the increasing number of Ukrainian refugees, there has been several changes in national policies addressing this group (see chapter 3). These changes also had to be communicated to the municipalities in charge of implementing those policies, and we asked the leaders of the municipal refugee service about their assessment of IMDi's information and guidance activities.

Figure 16.7: How do you assess the following activities, information and services from IMDi? (N_{2023}=215; N_{2024}=224).



*Means. Scale: 1 = Not at all useful, 5 = Very useful.

Figure 16.7 shows that the refugee service leaders' assessment of IMDi's activities and information measures are quite stable. Generally, the mean scores are high. This means that the municipal refugee services are generally quite satisfied with IMDi's information and guidance activities, even though we observe variation on certain issues. Nine of eleven activities get a score of 4 or more on a scale from 1 to 5. Refugee service leaders are most satisfied with IMDi's 'digital guide to the introduction programme' and 'guidelines to temporary immigration law'. Two activities concerning interpreters get the lowest score, namely 'advice on use of interpreters' and the 'national interpreter register'. However, also for these two activities the average satisfaction is on the positive side. We have no further information on why IMDi's interpreter activities are scored lower than other activities. There are no comments about this topic in the answers to the open-ended questions. Moreover, Figure 16.6 showed that refugee services are satisfied with the cooperation with interpreter services, with an average score of 4 out of 5.

In our 2023 report, we concluded that respondents from municipalities with less experience with settling refugees were generally less satisfied with IMDi's activities. The picture is not as clear in the 2024 survey. Less experienced municipalities give higher scores than more experienced municipalities on several activities: IMDi's newsletter, National interpreter register and IMDi's competence building meetings. On the other hand, they are still less satisfied with the 'New in Norway' information page, the digital guide to the introduction programme, and guidelines to the temporary immigration law. Refugee service leaders from the least experienced – and often smallest – municipalities also show less satisfaction with IMDi's information on grant schemes compared to leaders from more experienced municipalities.

County governor

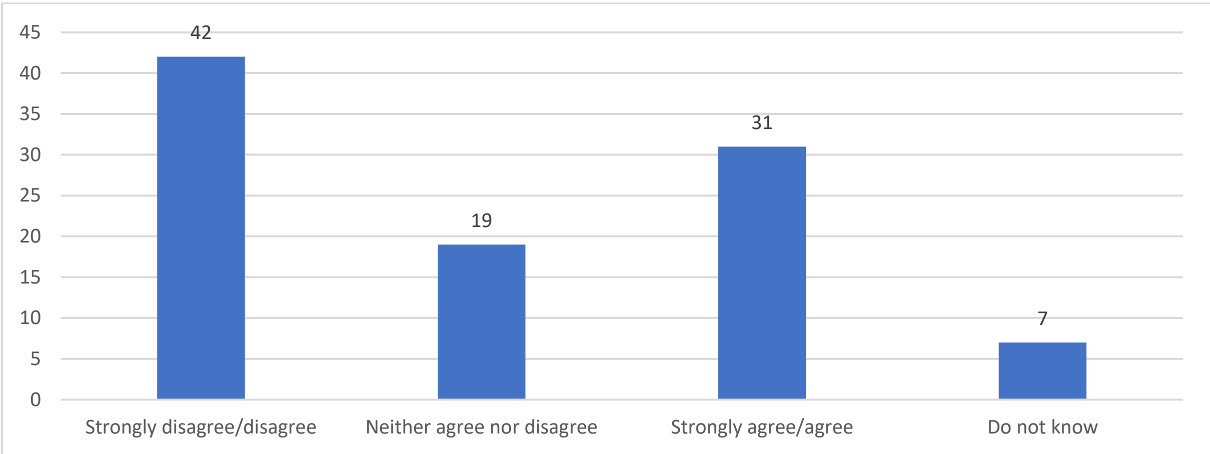
We find it appropriate to mention the role of the county governors in this section where we discuss multi-level governance of the local refugee work. The county governor is an important institution in conveying information from state agencies to municipalities – and vice

versa: from the municipalities to the state governing bodies. We have asked the municipal refugee services to assess their cooperation with the county governor on settlement of refugees. On a scale from 1 (very bad) to 5 (very good), the average score in 2024 is 3.8, up from 3.6 in 2023. Compared to other services and actors, county governors score relatively low, but there are large variations. The 'best' governors score 4.4 and 4.2, whereas the lowest score 3.2 and 3.3. These discrepancies between county governors align with previous studies showing that the municipalities' assessments of the country governors' role in the integration field vary widely for different counties (Hernes et al. 2020).

16.6 Voluntary organisations' role in refugee settlement

Civil society and voluntary organisations may be important supplements to services provided by the municipality. Voluntary organisations serve as social meeting places where people can integrate into social communities locally and, thereby, into society more broadly (Espegren et al. 2022). In our 2023 report, we documented that many municipal refugee services cooperate with local voluntary organisations to provide a wide range of services to Ukrainian refugees (Hernes, Aasland et al. 2023).

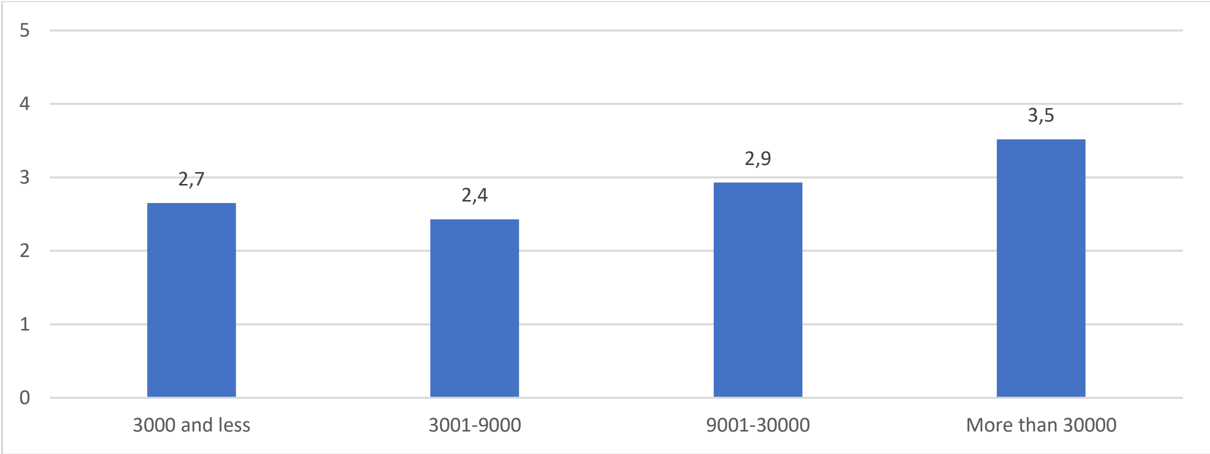
Figure 16.8: Please state to what extent you agree with: 'There is a formal agreement between the municipality and voluntary organisations in working with refugees' (N_{2023}=215; N_{2024}=215).



*Frequencies, percent.

Figure 16.8 shows that in 2024, about one of three municipal refugee services agree or strongly agree to the statement about having a formal agreement with voluntary organisations in working with Ukrainian refugees. It is particularly common among the larger municipalities to have such an agreement (figure 16.9 below).

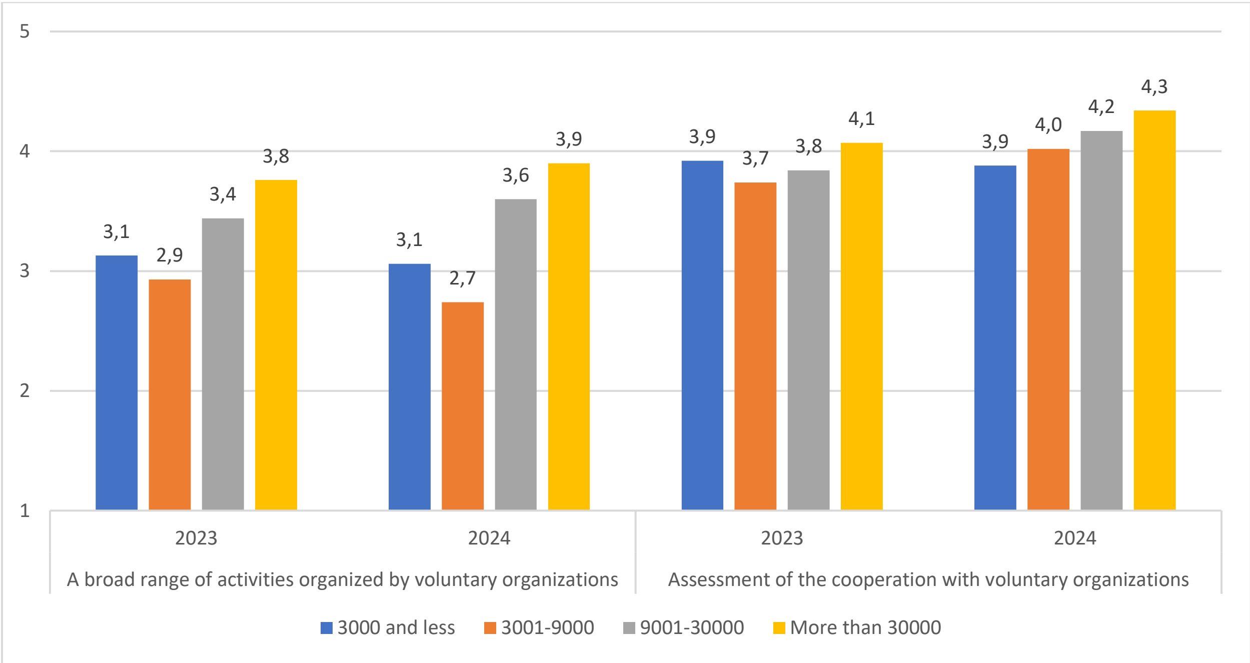
Figure 16.9: Please state to what extent you agree with: 'There is a formal agreement between the municipality and voluntary organisations in working with refugees' (N_{2023}=215; N_{2024}=215).



*Means. Scale: 1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree.

Further, we asked the respondents from municipal refugee services about their general impression of the local voluntary organisations' activities targeting Ukrainian refugees.

Figure 16.10: Assessment of cooperation with voluntary organisations locally (N_{2023}=215; N_{2024}=224).



*Means. Scale: 1 = Strongly disagree/Very bad, 5 = Strongly agree/Very good.

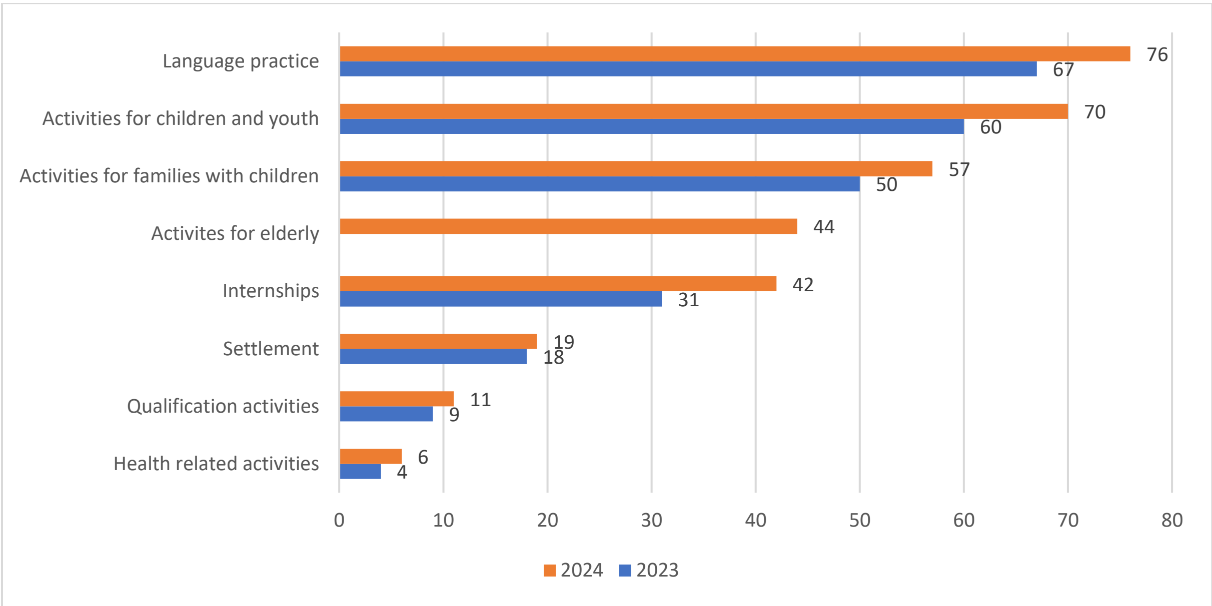
Figure 16.10 shows that in many municipalities, voluntary organisations play an important role in providing activities for refugees. A total of 45% of respondents state that they fully or partly agree that Ukrainian refugees in their municipality have a wide range of activities provided by voluntary organisations. We also checked whether municipal size matters for this response. On a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), the largest municipalities score 3.8 whereas the smallest municipalities score 3.1 on the question of the role of local voluntary organisations in provision of activities for Ukrainian refugees.

There seems to be a tendency, albeit weak, that larger municipalities rate their cooperation with voluntary organisations somewhat higher than less populous municipalities. Bivariate

correlations analysis shows strong positive correlation between having a formal agreement, voluntary organisations providing a wide range of services and the municipalities assessment of the cooperation. This means that municipalities with formal agreements with voluntary organisations experience that these organisations provide many services to the refugees, and value the cooperation with them highly.

Compared to the 2023 data, we see a weak tendency that voluntary organisations play a more important role in organising activities in 2024. All types of municipalities, except for the smallest, rate their cooperation with voluntary organisations somewhat higher in 2024 compared to 2023.

Figure 16.11: Does your service cooperate with civil society organisations in providing services to Ukrainian refugees on these tasks? (N_{2023}=215; N_{2024}=224).



*Frequencies, percent.

Figure 16.11 shows that cooperation with voluntary organisations is particularly strong – and stronger – when it comes to language practice, activities for children and young people and activities for families with children. Since some informants from voluntary organisations expressed a concern that some municipalities gave too little attention to elderly refugees (Hernes, Aasland et.al. 2023), this year we asked whether voluntary organisations take on such tasks. 44% of the respondents report that voluntary organisations provide activities for elderly refugees.

Not surprisingly, we find that voluntary organisations provide a wider range of activities in large municipalities than in small municipalities. Services to families with children and elderly are particularly more common in larger municipalities. When it comes to language practice and work practice, however, the difference between municipalities of different sizes is negligible.

16.7 Summary

Norwegian municipalities play a crucial role in the settlement and integration of refugees. Through local refugee services, they are responsible for providing all frontline public services to refugees within their municipalities and for providing introduction programmes and Norwegian language training.

Municipalities function in a multi-level governance system where the legal framework, guidelines and resources are provided by national authorities. While municipalities are

responsible for implementing national policies towards refugees, they have significant flexibility in how they address the task. There are considerable differences between municipalities in their follow-up of refugees due to factors such as population size and location.

This chapter has examined four main aspects of municipal refugee services: how the work is organised, how it is anchored within the municipal structure, the capacity of the refugee services, and cooperation with local and external actors.

The organisational structure of refugee services is relatively stable, with most being either a separate administrative unit or part of the broader Nav office. Larger municipalities tend to integrate refugee services within Nav. Intermunicipal cooperation often involves smaller municipalities purchasing services from larger ones.

The work with refugees is generally well anchored politically and administratively, though smaller municipalities tend to have less formalised structures. Most municipalities report a need for increased capacity in their refugee services, but this appears somewhat less pronounced in 2024 compared to 2023. Strategies to address capacity issues have evolved, with fewer municipalities relying on temporary hires and more focusing on service reorganisation.

Cooperation with local services and actors is generally assessed positively, particularly for education, but less so for healthcare services. Municipal refugee services also rate the information and guidance provided by the national integration authority (IMDi) highly, though smaller and less experienced municipalities are somewhat less satisfied on certain issues. This tendency is, however, less pronounced in 2024 than in 2023.

The report highlights the important role of voluntary organisations in supplementing municipal services, especially for language practice, activities for children/families, and services for the elderly. Larger municipalities tend to have more formalised agreements and stronger cooperation with the voluntary sector.

17 Introduction programme and language training

Ukrainian refugees between 18 and 55 years have the right to attend an introduction programme. Although it is not obligatory, those in need of financial assistance after settlement may be obliged to participate to be eligible for such financial assistance. The introduction programme for Ukrainian refugees should – similar to the regular programme – contain language- and work-oriented elements, but the programme consists of fewer obligatory elements (see chapter 3.3 for a description).

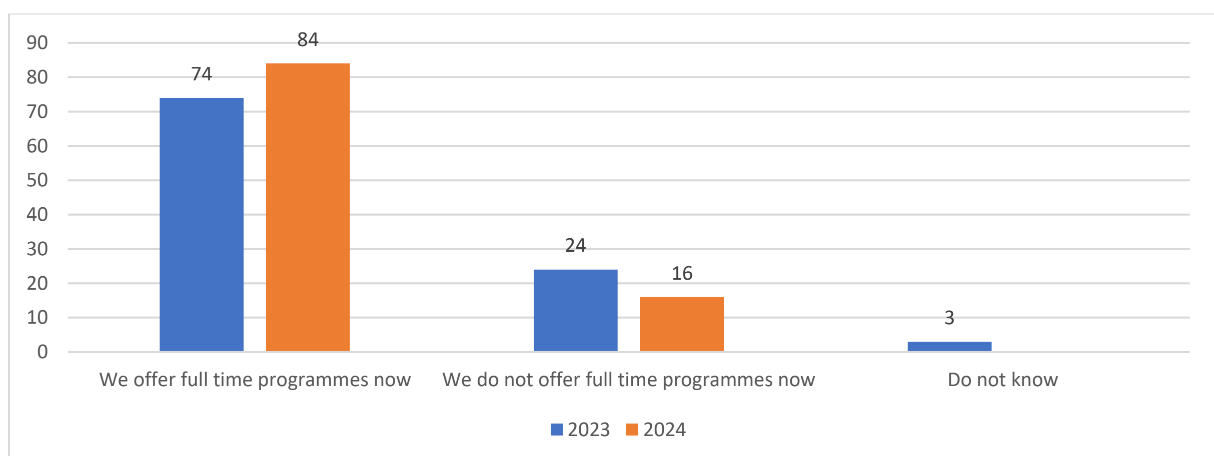
As we saw in chapter 16, many municipalities had to quickly upscale or (re-)establish refugee settlement and integration services as a response to the arrival of Ukrainian refugees. In this chapter, we investigate the following questions:

- Have the municipalities been able to provide full introduction programmes and language training for the Ukrainian refugees, and what challenges have they faced in their service provision?
- How has implementation of the legislative changes been practised across municipalities (regarding, e.g., programme extensions and content)?
- How do municipal respondents assess the introduction programme for Ukrainian refugees? What challenges do they emphasise?

17.1 Introduction programme: scope of provision and extensions

Because the arrival of Ukrainian refugees happened suddenly and in large numbers, it took time before some of the refugee services were fully operational. In our 2023 report, we documented that some municipalities needed some time to establish a full-time introduction program. Other municipalities started out with full-time programs, but realised that this was too ambitious, and had to make cuts (Hernes, Aasland et al. 2023). In the 2024 survey, we asked the respondents in the refugee services whether their municipality have the capacity to offer a fulltime introduction programme.

Figure 17.1: Does the municipality have the capacity to offer a full-time introduction program for Ukrainian refugees? (N_{2023}=215; N_{2024}=224).



*Frequencies, percent.

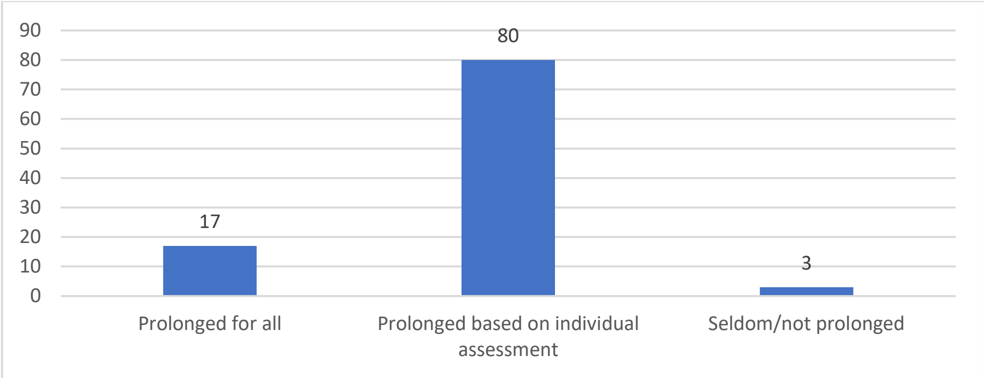
Figure17.1 shows that 84% of the respondents report offering full-time introduction programme in 2024, a 10 percentage points increase from 2023. The large number of arrivals seems to have stretched the capacity of some municipalities so far that they were

unable to offer full-time programmes initially, but this is steadily changing. However, there are still some, particularly in the group of small municipalities (less than 3000 inhabitants), that are not able to provide a full-time programme for their refugees.

Most Ukrainian refugees first enrol in the introduction programme for six months, which is the regular length for anyone who has completed secondary school according to the Integration Act of 2021. It is, however, possible to extend the programme for up to one year.

The 2023 survey showed that one in five local refugee services reported that they extend the introduction programme for all Ukrainian refugees, whereas three in four extend the programme based on individual assessment.

Figure 17.2: How common is it for the refugee service to extend the introduction programme for Ukrainian refugees? (N = 224).

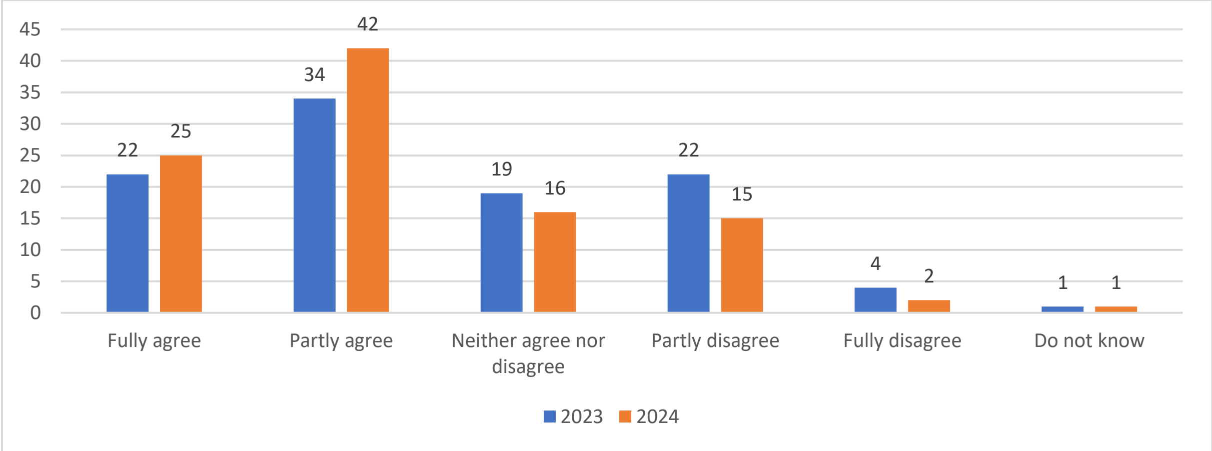


*Frequencies, percent.

Figure 17.2 shows that very few reported that they rarely or never extended the programme. The 2024 numbers are quite similar. Almost all municipalities say that they prolong the introduction programme period for all (17%) or based on individual assessment (80%). The smallest municipalities are more inclined to prolong the introduction programme for all refugees. Whereas 28% of the smallest municipalities say that they prolong the programme for all, this is reported only by 7% of the largest municipalities.

We also asked about how the refugee services assess the clarity of the criteria for extending the introduction programme.

Figure 17.3: The criteria for extending the introduction programme are clear (N_{2023}=215; N_{2024}=224).



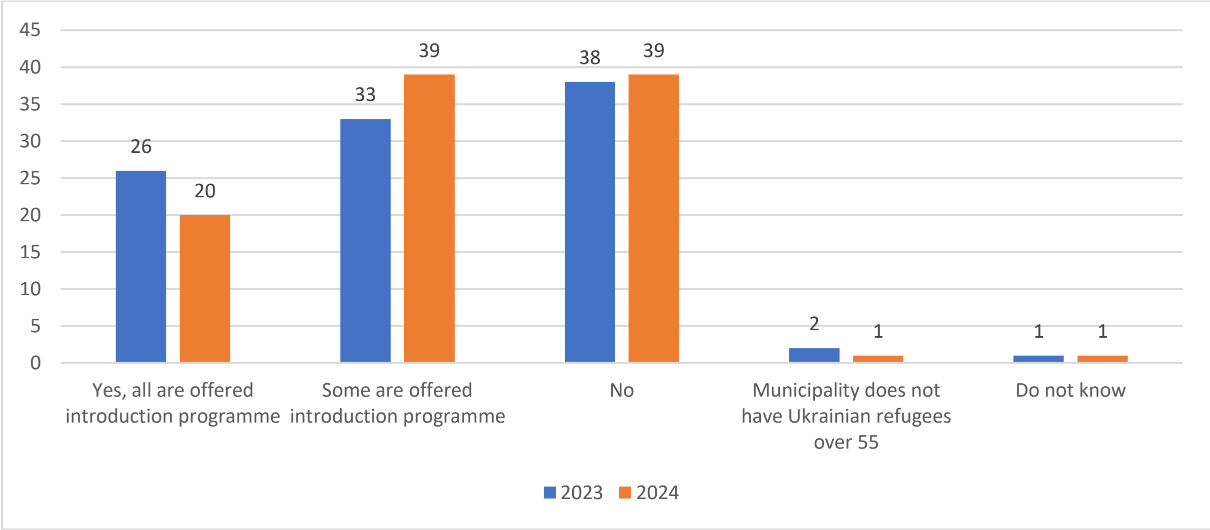
*Frequencies, percent.

Figure 17.3 shows wide variation in the responses. The general impression is that of greater clarity from 2023 to 2024 on the issue of extension of the introduction program. About two of

three respondents fully (25%) or partly (42%) agree that the criteria are clear. Closer analyses show that respondents from the largest municipalities on average find the criteria clearer than respondents from smaller municipalities.

All municipalities are obliged to offer Ukrainian refugees aged 18–55 years participation in an introduction programme. Municipalities may also offer the introduction programme to Ukrainian refugees aged 55–66 years, though this is not an entitlement for this group. We have asked whether the municipalities are able to provide introduction program for refugees 55-66 years.

Figure 17.4: Are Ukrainian refugees aged 55-66 offered an introduction program? (N_{2023}=215; N_{2024}=224).



*Frequencies, percent.

The 2024 numbers in figure 17.4 show that the proportion of municipalities *not* giving this group the opportunity to attend the introduction program is stable just below 40%. Our data indicates, however, that some municipalities have shifted from offering introduction program to all 55-66-year-olds to offering it to some of the refugees in this age group.

There are considerable variations between municipalities in their capacity to offer introduction program to refugees over 55 years, and the smallest municipalities provide programmes more often than the largest municipalities. While 35% of the smallest municipalities give all refugees aged 55–66 years the possibility to attend the introduction programme, none of the largest municipalities do likewise. 25% of small municipalities and 83% of the largest municipalities report that they do not offer introduction programme to this group.

As temporary protection holders, Ukrainian refugees can exit and re-enter the introduction programme if they get (temporary) employment. This flexibility is somewhat disputed. A majority of the respondents from municipal refugee services find it difficult that Ukrainian refugees are allowed to exit and re-enter the introduction programme. This is seen as particularly difficult in larger municipalities. Among respondents from municipalities with more than 30 000 inhabitants, 72% agree/fully agree that this option poses a challenge for the municipality. Among the smallest municipalities, the percentage is 40.

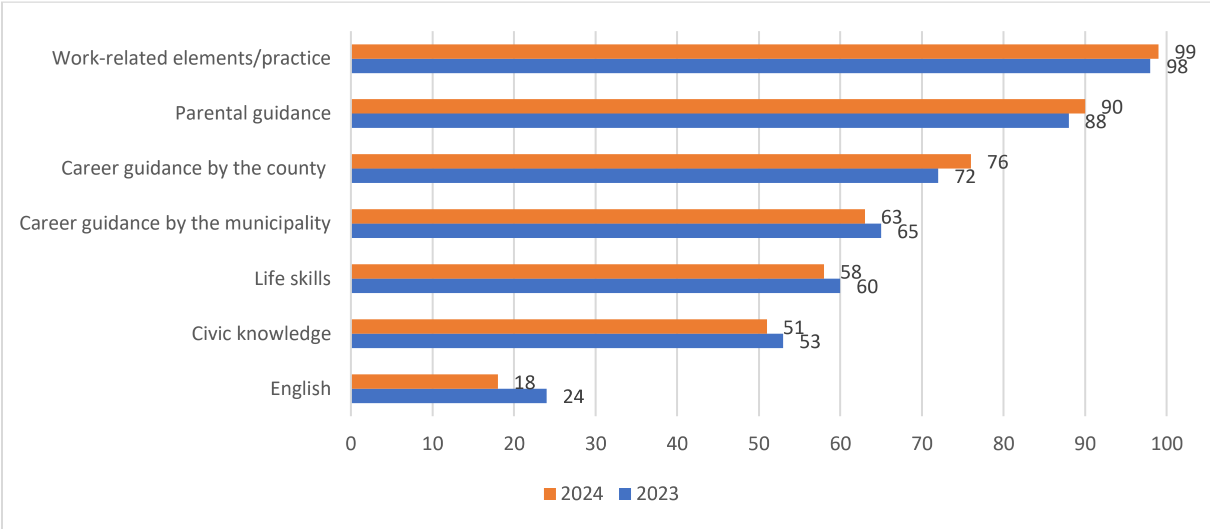
17.2 Introduction programme content

Although the introduction programme should be individually tailored to each participant, the Integration Act (2021) also sets out some mandatory elements. As described in chapter 3.3, according to the temporary amendments, the introduction programme for Ukrainian refugees

should encompass the mandatory elements language training, work-related or educational measures, and parental courses for parents with under-aged children. The other regular elements are not an obligation for the Ukrainian refugees but may be an option if it is provided by the municipality.

In the survey of the municipal leaders of the refugee service, we asked whether they include different elements in their introduction programme. Their assessment is an overall assessment of whether the different elements are used for (at least some) participants but should not be read as statistical data on the share of participants that have received different measures.

Figure 17.5: Does the introduction program for Ukrainian refugees in your municipality include the following elements? Percent answering that they have the element today (N_{2023}=215; N_{2024}=224).



*Frequencies, percent.

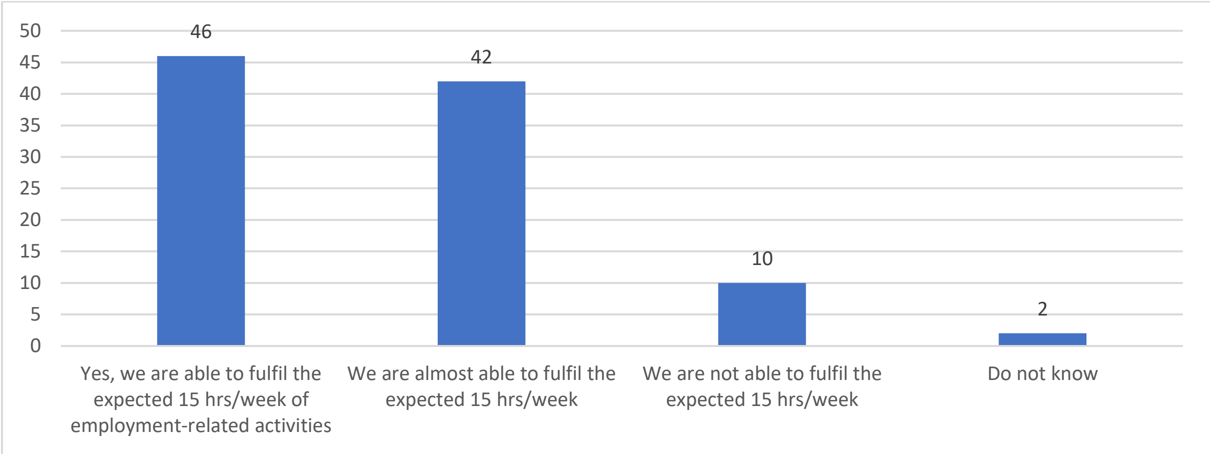
Figure 17.5 shows that almost all local refugee services include work-related elements in the introduction programme. Most of them also include parental guidance. Since this is a mandatory element, the respondents answering 'no' might not have refugees with under-aged children in their programme at present. There is much wider variation in the non-mandatory elements, particularly life skills and civics education. On average, about 40-50% of the refugee service respondents report that their municipality does not include these elements in their introduction programme.

Small municipalities have a more limited administrative capacity compared with larger municipalities. They have also – naturally – received fewer refugees. This may imply that the introduction programme is somewhat narrower in content in small municipalities. Our data support this assumption, showing that the smallest municipalities include career guidance by the municipality, life skills, civics education and English to a lesser degree in their introduction programme.

17.2.1 Work orientation

Over the past year, there has been increasing attention on how the introduction programme can put more emphasis on work-related issues. According to new national regulations from February 2024, the programme is now expected to have a minimum of 15 hours per week of employment-related activities from the fourth month for those who have work as their programme goal, with the aim to get more refugees into employment earlier. We have asked the municipal refugee services whether they were able to adjust the introduction programme to contain more employment-related activities.

Figure 17.6: Is your municipality able to provide work-orientated introduction programs for Ukrainian refugees? (N = 224).

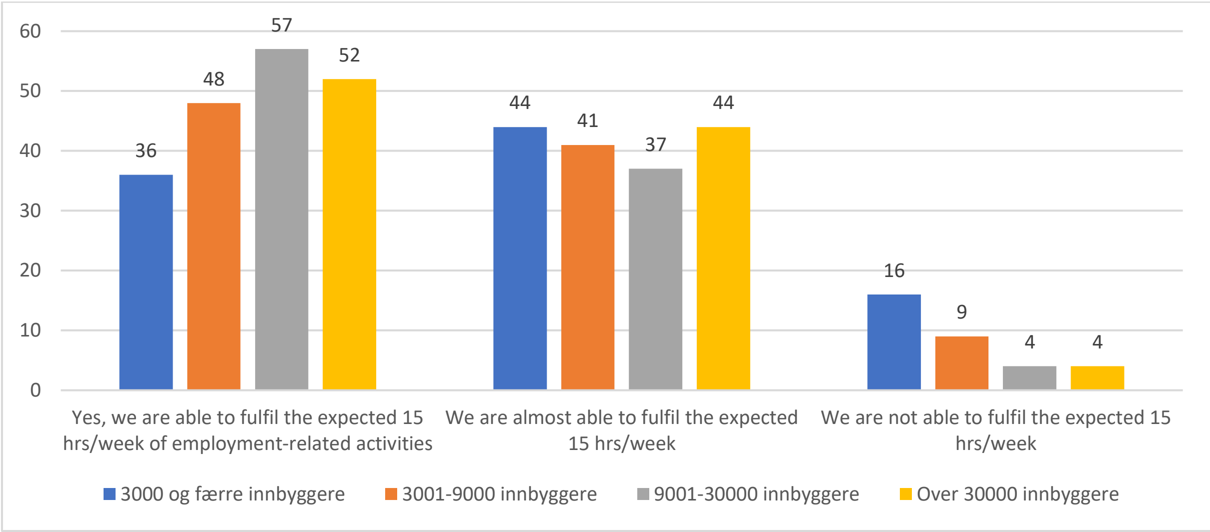


*Frequencies, percent.

Figure 17.6 shows that a little less than half of the refugee services report that they fulfil the expected 15 hours per week of activities related to work and employment. Equally many say they are almost able to meet the expectations, whereas 10% are not able to fulfil the expected 15 hours per week.

There are also differences related to municipal size and type of organisation in this regards.

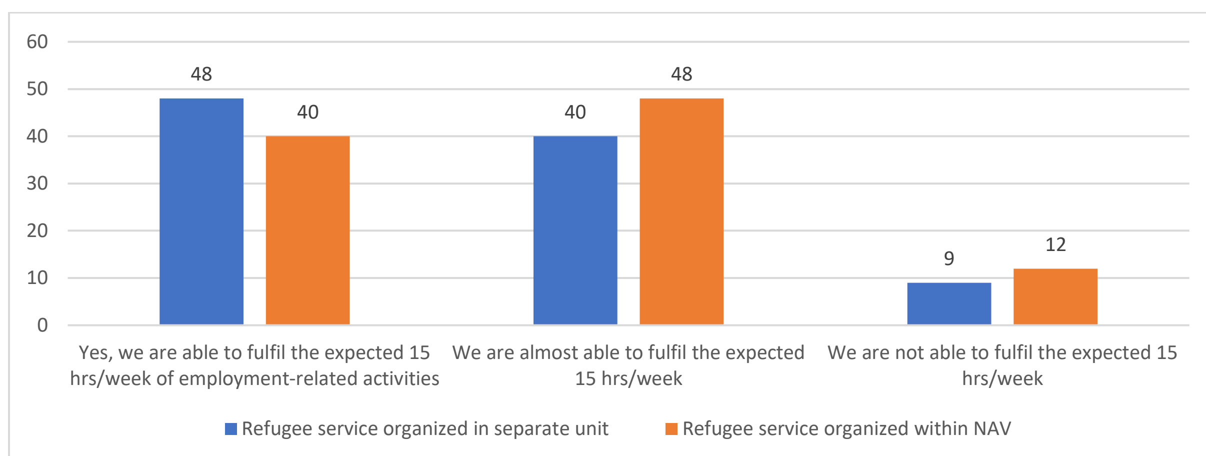
Figure 17.7: Is your municipality able to provide work-orientated introduction programs for Ukrainian refugees? By municipal size. (N = 224).



*Frequencies, percent.

Figure 17.7 shows that the smallest municipalilties (less than 3000 inhabitants) on the average have greater challenges in meeting the expectations of 15 hours per week of work-related content.

Figure 17.8: Is your municipality able to provide work-orientated introduction programs for Ukrainian refugees? By organisation in/outside Nav (N = 224).



*Frequencies, percent.

Interestingly, figure 17.8 shows that refugee services organised outside Nav tend to report that they fulfil the expected 15 hours per week to a somewhat greater extent than services organised within Nav.

Challenges in finding work practice

We asked the respondents in the survey to share their thoughts on why it is easy or difficult to find work practice for Ukrainian refugees. A large number of respondents mention language as a major obstacle, noting that language is the primary concern raised by employers when it comes to accepting refugees. Refugees with poor Norwegian or English skills are seen as placing too great a burden on the workplace. Many believe it is far too early for refugees to enter work practice after only four months in the introduction program.

In general, we see that more respondents have better experiences with private employers than with municipal ones. Some write that 'private employers see more solutions.' One of the respondents stated:

> It is easier in the private sector because we have a diverse job market where some companies can provide on-the-job training instead of requiring the right skills from day one.

However, economic challenges mean that some private companies are downsizing their operations and therefore cannot take in refugees for work practice.

Most respondents find that there are greater challenges associated with placing refugees in work practice within the municipal sector. Several respondents point out that municipal finances are strained, and that municipal services are under pressure in terms of resources and capacity:

> In the municipal sector, we have had poor experiences. Having people in work practice is resource-intensive, and there is no time for it.

It is perceived as somewhat more difficult in the municipal sector, both because it is less firmly established and because the existing workload is already high. Additionally, it is challenging to find personnel to take on the role of mentor for the refugees.

One factor mentioned by some leaders of refugee services is the lack of support ('*forankring*') from municipal leadership as a reason why municipal units do not take in refugees for work practice. Municipal services fail to see the potential benefits of having refugees in their workforce:

> Other service units do not fully acknowledge that the qualification of refugees is a shared municipal responsibility and are reluctant. Many do not see it as a win-win situation but rather as additional work.

However, some refugee services report positive experiences with work practice within their own municipalities: 'In our municipality, the municipal units understand the importance of providing refugees with internship opportunities.' Another says:

> Over the past year, following several statements from the municipal director and the head of refugee services and adult education, more municipal departments have started taking in refugees. These include schools, kindergartens, the technical department, nursing homes, and home care services.

In another municipality, they have also ensured proper support for the initiative:

> It is easy in our municipality within the municipal sector because the municipal director has mandated that all municipal units must say yes to at least one participant when we call about an internship placement.

Certain factors serve as barriers in both the municipal and private sectors. Some mention issues with long distances and lack of public transportation as challenges. Several respondents state that the local market is now 'saturated.' This is true for both small and large municipalities:

> We live in a small municipality, and until recently, it was easy to find work practice. But now, there are already people in work practice at most businesses and municipal services, so it's difficult to find placements for those who need them now. In neighbouring municipalities, there are also many Ukrainians in need of work practice.

> After 2.5 years of high settlement levels, we are now approaching a point where the availability of work practice in the municipality and with private employers is not sustainable in the long term. In a municipality with 50,000 residents, there are limits to how many employers we can mobilise for work practice and employment at any given time. We see that the initial support and collective effort ('*dugnaden'*) we experienced at the start of the war is tapering off.

Some respondents emphasise the importance of building trust with employers, ensuring them that refugee services will provide support for both participants and businesses when needed. However, not all refugee services have the capacity to provide the close follow-up that is necessary. That said, some refugee services report that their efforts to maintain strong relationships with employers are yielding results:

> We have worked extensively on following up employers. It is important that there is a genuine possibility for a job after the internship period, so we maintain close dialogue with employers about what it takes to achieve that. Both the refugee consultant and the teacher provide support during the internship. We are now experiencing employers reaching out to us, wanting to have people in work practice (this applies especially to the private sector).

> It is easy in our municipality to place people in work practice within the private sector because the introduction services, Nav, and adult education programs follow-up with the participants during their internship period. Employers appreciate this, as it alleviates some of the responsibility and reduces the perception that it is too demanding to follow-up.

A general concern mentioned by some is the uncertainty regarding how long Ukrainians will stay. Hosting refugees for work practice requires significant effort from employers, raising questions about whether the investment is worthwhile if there is a risk that the Ukrainians might soon leave the municipality or the country: 'We have an employer who signs work contracts with Ukrainians, but now they say they are taking a risk by recruiting so many refugees from Ukraine because they might be sent back.'

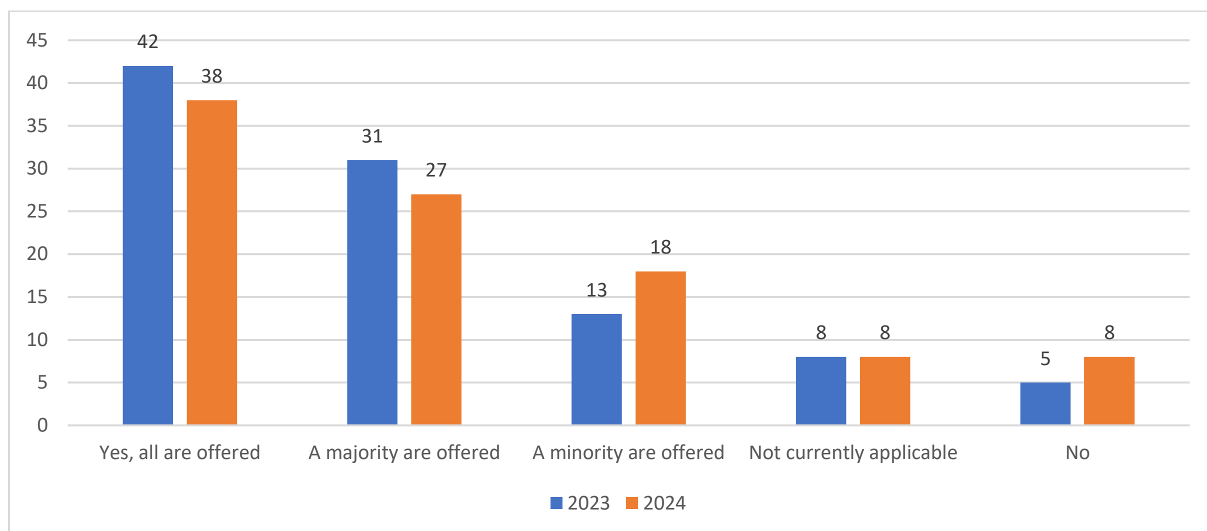
17.3 Language training

All refugees under the age of 67 are entitled to Norwegian language training. For refugees with higher education (upper secondary level or higher), the right to language training is restricted to one year, compared with the general rule of 18 months. Since the majority of Ukrainians have higher education, most of them have the right to one year of Norwegian education. The municipalities may provide an additional six months of language training

(which will trigger extra state subsidies), but this extension is not something Ukrainian refugees are entitled to (see chapter 3.3).

We asked respondents from local refugee services whether their municipality offers more than one year of language training to Ukrainian refugees.

Figure 17.9: Are Ukrainian refugees in your municipality offered more than one year of Norwegian language training? (N_{2023}=215; N_{2024}=224).



*Frequencies, percent.

Figure 17.9 shows that almost 40% of the refugee service leaders report that their municipality provides extended Norwegian language training to all Ukrainian refugees who request more training. Moreover, 27% report that they offer more than one year of language training to the majority of the refugees from Ukraine. 8% report that they do not offer extended language training. The general impression is that some municipalities in 2024 are somewhat less inclined to provide extended training in Norwegian, compared to 2023.

The tendency from 2023, that small municipalities to a larger degree offered language training for more than one year to all Ukrainians refugees, is not present in the 2024 data. The differences based on municipality size are less pronounced in 2024.

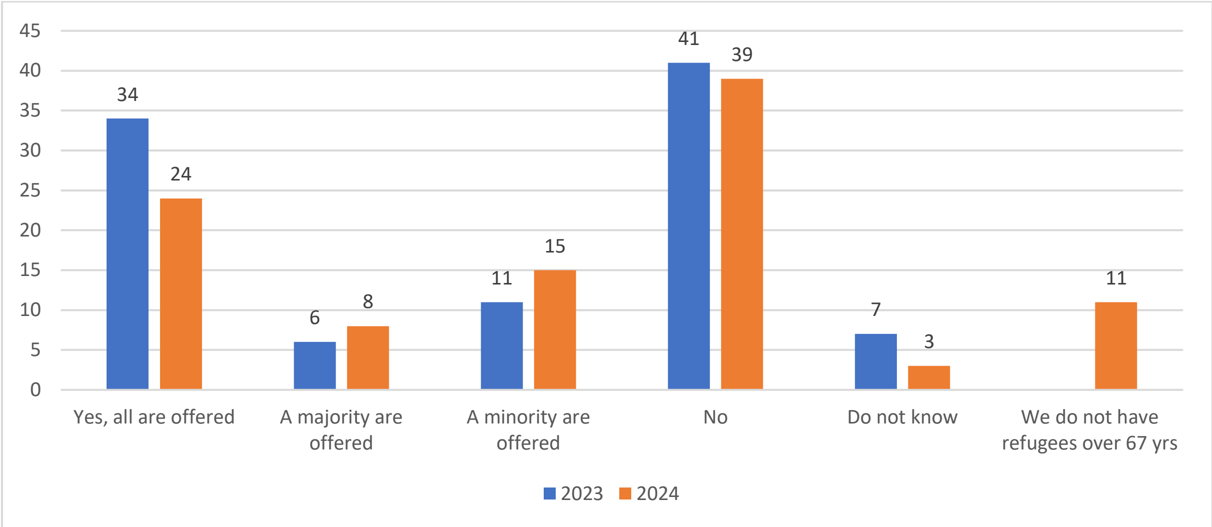
In an open-ended question in the survey, we asked the municipalities who do *not* prolong the language education why they do not do so. The most common reasons are scarce resources and capacity. Lack of teachers and education localities are important factors. One of the respondents wrote that:

> The municipality already faces challenges in organising sufficient and adequate training within one year and needs to address this before offering anything additional. Evening classes are not provided in adult education. Ukrainian refugees are primarily expected to enter employment after six months in the introduction program.

17.3.1 Language training for elderly Ukrainian refugees

Knowledge of the Norwegian language is important for labour market integration. The age group 18–67 years is therefore prioritised for language training, but the municipalities are also free to offer training to refugees aged over 67 years (and still receive state subsidies).

Figure 17.10: Are Ukrainian refugees over 67 years offered language training? (N_{2023}=215; N_{2024}=224).



*Frequencies, percent.

Figure 17.9 shows that 32% of municipalities offer Norwegian language training to all or most refugees in this group, down from 40% in 2023. About 40% report that they do not give older refugees language training.

The differences in respect to municipal size, which we earlier observed in 2023, are not so pronounced in 2024. A little less than 50% offer language training to some or all refugees in this age group, but municipalities with fewer than 3,000 inhabitants report to a larger degree that *all* refugees in the group are offered language training.

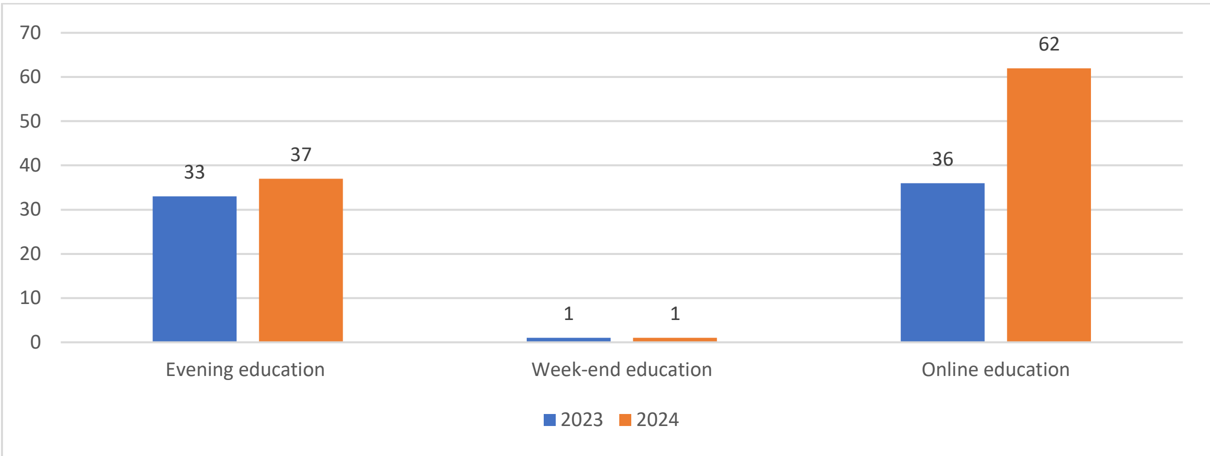
Ukrainian refugees may be offered English language training as part of the introduction programme, which is not the case for other refugees enrolled in the introduction programme. However, as described in chapter 9.1.1, only a small share of Ukrainian refugees reported having English language training included in their programme. In our survey from 2024, even less municipalities report that they have English education as part of their introduction programme. 38% of the largest municipalities offer English training to at least some refugees, while only 10% of the smallest municipalities have English as an option. Particularly among the larger municipalities, many respondents (more than 20%) say that English training was included before, but not now.

17.3.2 Flexible language training

Lack of opportunities to learn Norwegian outside normal working hours has been seen as a hindrance for Ukrainians' integration into the labour market. Many have perceived that they have to choose between (less skilled) work or to continue in language learning, which could lead to better and more permanent work. More flexible language training opportunities could help solving this problem.

In the 2023 report, we documented that about one-third of municipalities offered the possibility for evening language classes for refugees who work during the day or are otherwise prevented from attending classes during the daytime. Likewise, one-third provided online language training. There were, however, large differences between municipalities in this respect. Almost 80% of the largest municipalities offered evening education compared with only 9% of the smallest municipalities. The same tendency, though not as pronounced, was observed for online education.

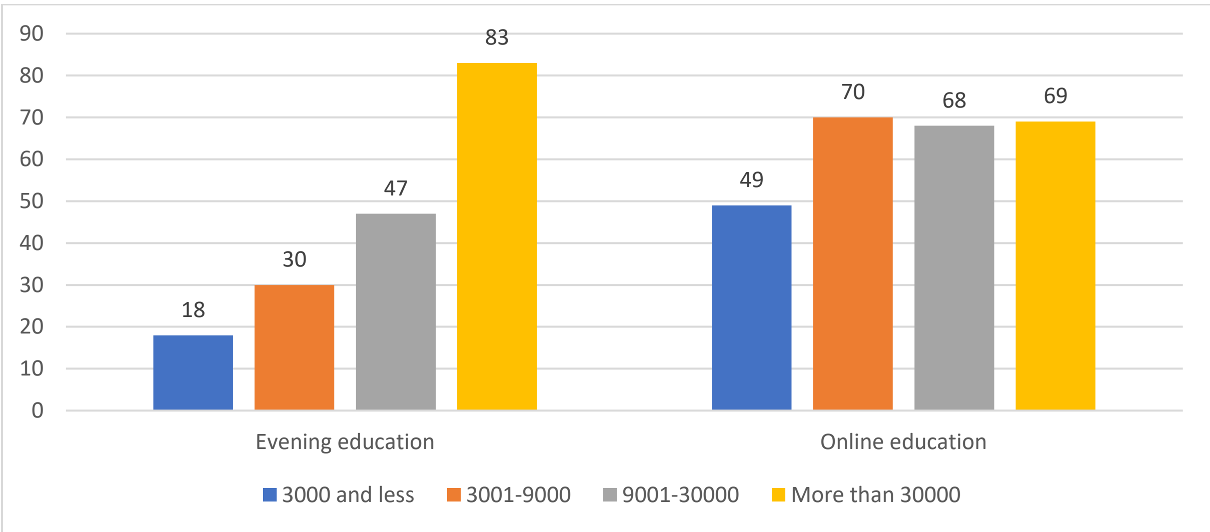
Figure 17.11: Are refugees in your municipality offered flexible Norwegian language training? (N_{2023}=215; N_{2024}=224).



*Frequencies, percent.

Figure 17.11 shows that our 2024 data convey a considerable development in flexible language training - first and foremost when it comes to online education. While we can observe just a small increase in the possibility of evening education, and week-end education still is almost zero, there has been a steep increase in the proportion of municipalities offering online education.

Figure 17.12: Are refugees in your municipality offered flexible Norwegian language training? By municipality (population) size* (N = 224). Percent answering 'yes'.



*Frequencies, percent.

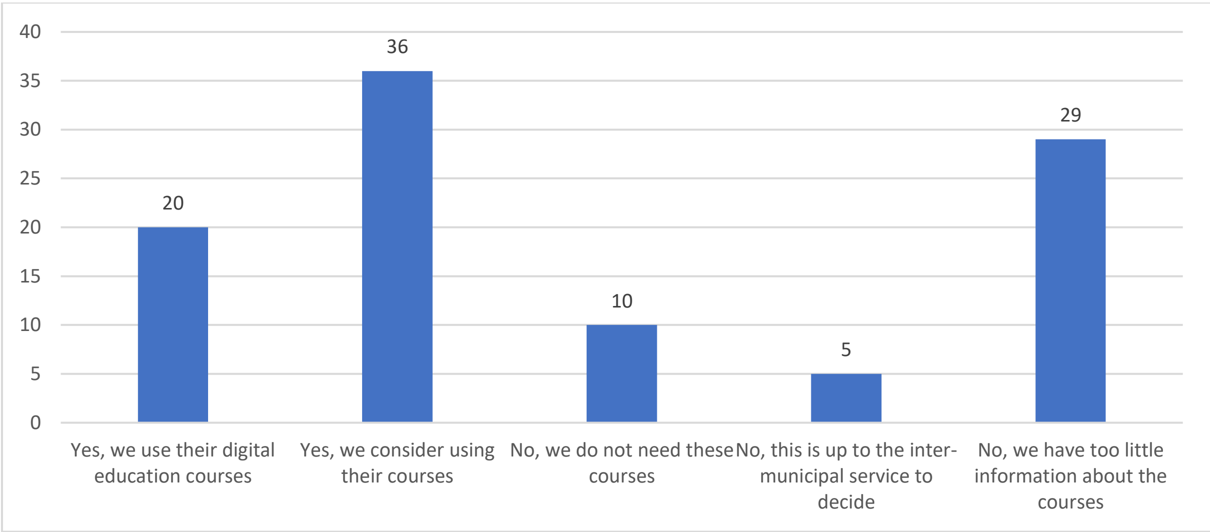
Figure 17.12 shows variation between municipalities. Concerning evening courses, the larger municipalities have a substantially larger share that offer this compared to the smaller municipalities. However, there is a more equal distribution for online education, although the smallest municipalities more seldom offer this.

Comparisons of development from 2023 show an interesting development. The numbers are stable for the smallest and the largest municipalities, but among municipalities in the two middle categories there has been a considerable increase in online courses. For municipalities with 3000-9000 inhabitants, 70% say they offer online courses, compared to 24% in 2023. Among municipalities with a population between 9000 and 30000, the proportion has doubled.

In the 2023 report, and in the survey and interviews in 2024 with Ukrainian refugees (see chapter 9.3), we observe that some refugees find that the general language courses proceed too slowly. Therefore, we asked the municipal refugee services whether they are able to offer language training differentiated according to individual refugees' level or preferences. 38% of the municipal services confirms that they provide differentiated education. Services from the largest municipalities are more likely than other municipalities to report that they provide differentiated language training in accordance with the needs and wishes of individual refugees.

Earlier in 2024, the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-dir) launched a package of digital Norwegian language courses targeting municipal refugee services. The services can buy these courses for their refugees.

Figure 17.13: Has the refugee office in your municipality considered to use digital Norwegian education offered by the HK-dir? (N=224).



*Frequencies, percent.

Figure 17.13 shows that one in five municipal refugee services (20%) reports that they have already implemented the courses. These municipalities are of all sizes. More than one in three municipalities (36%) are at the time of the survey (September-October 2024) considering using the courses, whereas 10% of the municipalities answer that they do not need these language courses. Almost 30% of the municipalities report too little information about the courses. Particularly the largest municipalities report lack of such information.

In an open-ended question in the survey, we have asked our informants if they have any comments on the digital Norwegian education offered by HK-dir.

Several respondents have commented on this. Some of them have little information about the courses, and some say that there are other actors who have the responsibility to consider this. Most respondents have information on the courses, though, but their assessments vary.

One group of respondents are very positive to the flexibility the courses imply for the refugees. Some of them say that they need more courses like this. This informant underscores the importance of the courses for refugees in employment:

> This is a very good idea that will help those who start working from day one, who have young children and cannot attend school because of this, and those who cannot participate in classes due to poor health, to learn the language.

Several respondents write that they use the courses as supplements. Some report that they find the courses particularly convenient to use during summer holidays, when the local language education in closed.

The more critical voices have different arguments in their comments. One writes that they do not want to use the courses because they want the employees working with language education in their municipality to keep their jobs. Several informants claim that the digital courses should be free of costs for the municipalities to use:

> The cost is what makes this option unsuitable for our municipality. We cannot afford to fully cover adult education while also offering digital services to some individuals or groups.

One, who is generally positive, writes that digital courses result in excellent written language education, but that oral training is better to do in person, in groups. Another informant puts it this way:

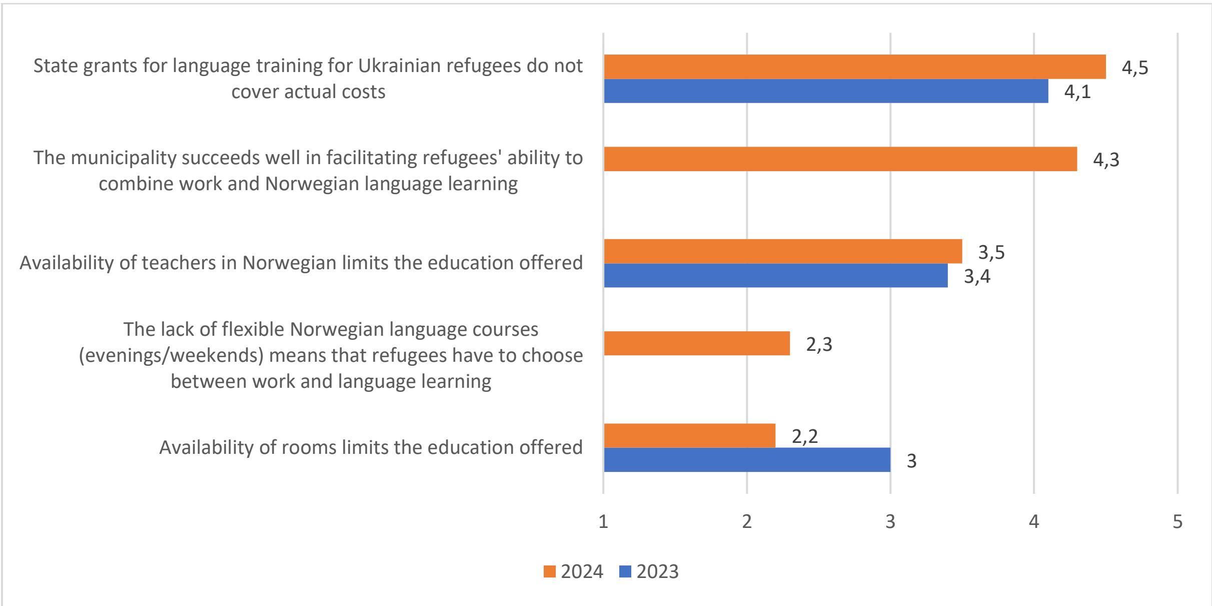
> I think this offering is suited for municipalities that do not have their own learning centres. As for us, we provide teaching and training opportunities at all levels. Learning communication skills is something best practiced in a community setting.

Finally, some refugee service leaders are sceptical to the courses because they only come in *bokmål*, not in *nynorsk* (New Norwegian) language[46].

17.3.3 Challenges with providing sufficient Norwegian language training

In the survey, we asked respondents from local refugee services to assess selected statements concerning the language training for Ukrainian refugees in their municipality.

Figure 17.14: Please state to what extent you agree with the following statements concerning Norwegian language training (N_{2023}=215; N_{2024}=224).



*Means. Scale: 1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree.

First, the grants for language training for Ukrainian refugees follow a different distribution formula than for other refugees (Hurtigarbeidende gruppe 2023). Figure 17.14 shows that there is overall agreement among the leaders of the municipal refugee services that the government grants for language training for Ukrainian refugees do not cover the municipal costs for providing this service. This is even more pronounced in 2024 than in 2023.

[46] The Norwegian language has two formal written languages; *bokmål* and *nynorsk*.

According to our respondents, their municipalities succeed well in facilitating the refugees' ability to combine work and language training. This is also mirrored in the more reluctant assessment of the importance of not having flexible education opportunities.

Two statements in figure 17.14 address questions about which aspects may challenge municipal capacity to offer Norwegian language training. In many municipalities, the lack of teachers limits the training offered. Some have problems with finding venues that are suitable for language classes, but this appears to be less of a challenge in 2024 compared to 2023. Still, limited availability of classrooms is particularly important in the larger municipalities.

17.4 Summary

The introduction programme for Ukrainian refugees must contain elements like language training, work-oriented elements and parental guidance (for those with under-age children), otherwise, there are fewer obligatory elements for this groups compared to other refugee groups. In this chapter, we have investigated the municipalities' provision and assessment of the introduction programme and language training.

Generally, the municipalities have some leeway in their provision of the introduction programme and language training, and we observe variations in what the municipalities offer. Most offer a full-time introduction programme, and the proportion of municipalities offering a full-time programme is increasing. A larger majority now extend the introduction programme dependent on individual assessment, and not for all. The survey respondents reveal different views with regard to how clear the criteria for extending the introduction programme are, however, more refugee service leaders find the criteria clear in 2024 compared to 2023.

It is not obligatory for municipalities to offer refugees aged over 55 the introduction programme, nor is it obligatory to offer refugees over the age of 67 language training. The municipalities vary widely on these issues. The differences according to municipal size which we have earlier observed in this respect, are less pronounced in 2024.

The past year, the work-related content of the introduction programme has been more pronounced. A little less than half of the refugee services report that they fulfil the expected 15 hours per week of activities related to work and employment, however, relatively few report that they are far away from reaching this goal.

Ukrainian refugees may be offered English language training as part of the introduction programme, but many municipalities do not include it as an option. On average, larger municipalities offer a wider range of content than do smaller municipalities.

Language training is one of the mandatory elements in the introduction programme, but it is also an individual right irrespective of participation in the programme. For refugees with higher education, the right to language training is limited to one year, but the municipalities may provide an additional six months. Most, but not all, municipalities offer more than one year of language training to at least some of the refugees. The main reasons for not offering additional language education are scarce resources and strained capacity.

The flexibility of language training has increased from 2023 to 2024, mainly due to better digital education options. One in five municipalities are using the digital courses offered by HK-dir, and many are considering using it. Those who have experience with the digital courses are generally positive, and many of the refugee services use them primarily as supplements to ordinary training. Critics underscore that language training, particularly spoken language, is better done in person. Moreover, they think the municipalities should get the courses without costs. Some point to the fact that the digital courses are not offered in *nynorsk* (New Norwegian).

18 Cooperation on labour market integration of Ukrainian refugees

In this chapter, we address how municipal refugee services cooperate with other services and actors in their effort to integrate Ukrainian refugees into the labour market. Nav's role and cooperation with Nav is particularly important in labour market integration, and Nav-related topics will be handled more thoroughly than other actors. Barriers for employment are addressed in chapter 19.

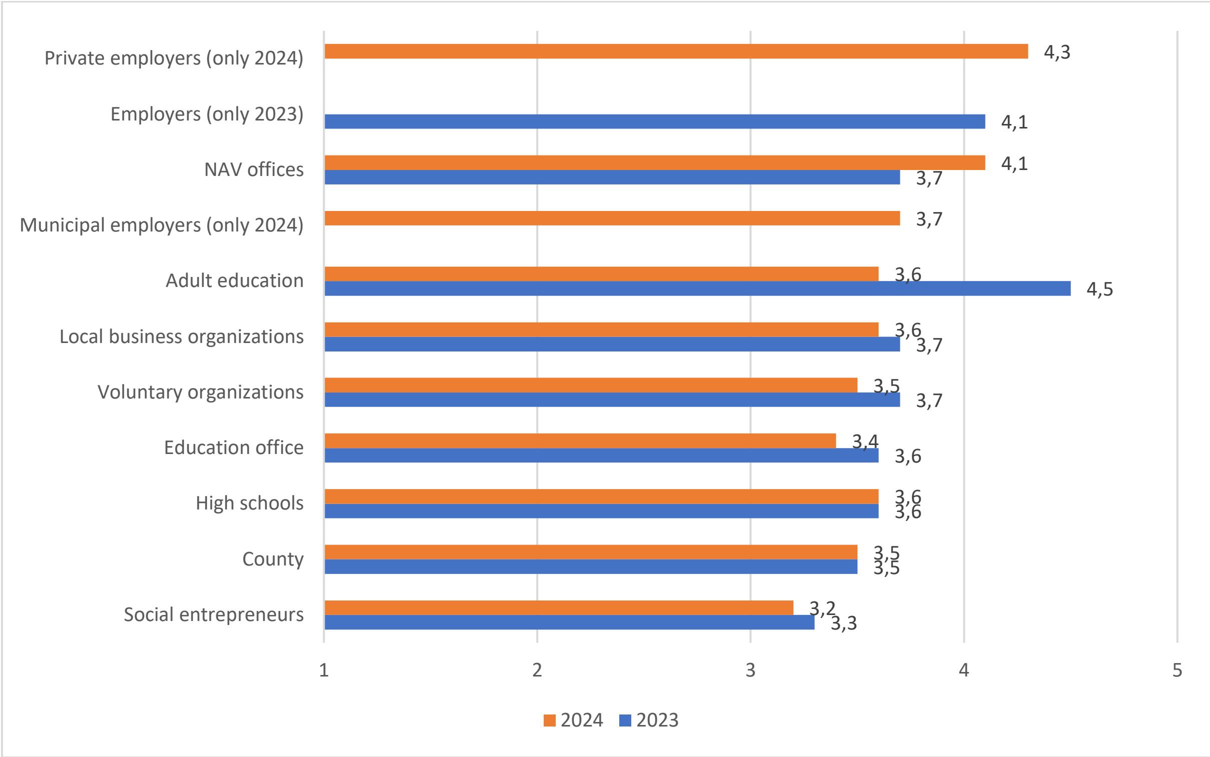
This chapter discusses the following issues:

- How do local refugee services assess their cooperation with relevant actors on education and training of refugees?
- In what ways do the municipal refugee services cooperate with Nav in their efforts to assist Ukrainian refugees to integrate into the labour market?
- How does the organisational structure of the refugee services (within Nav or in a separate unit) influence cooperation between services locally?
- What cooperation challenges vis-à-vis Nav do the refugee services describe?
- What measures does Nav employ to facilitate the labour market integration of Ukrainian refugees?

18.1 Cooperation on education and labour market integration

For Nav, work-related activities are a main task. However, several other actors may also play a role in facilitation of refugee integration in the labour market. These include schools and regional education offices, employers, businesses and their organisations as well as voluntary organisations. We have asked the refugee service offices how they assess the cooperation with relevant actors on education and training of Ukrainian refugees. Since our research in 2023 indicated that it is more challenging getting refugees employed in the municipal sector compared to private enterprises, we have split the 'employer' category in two in our 2024 survey.

Figure 18.1: How would you rate your cooperation with other services on education and training of Ukrainian refugees? (N_{2023}=215; N_{2024}=224).



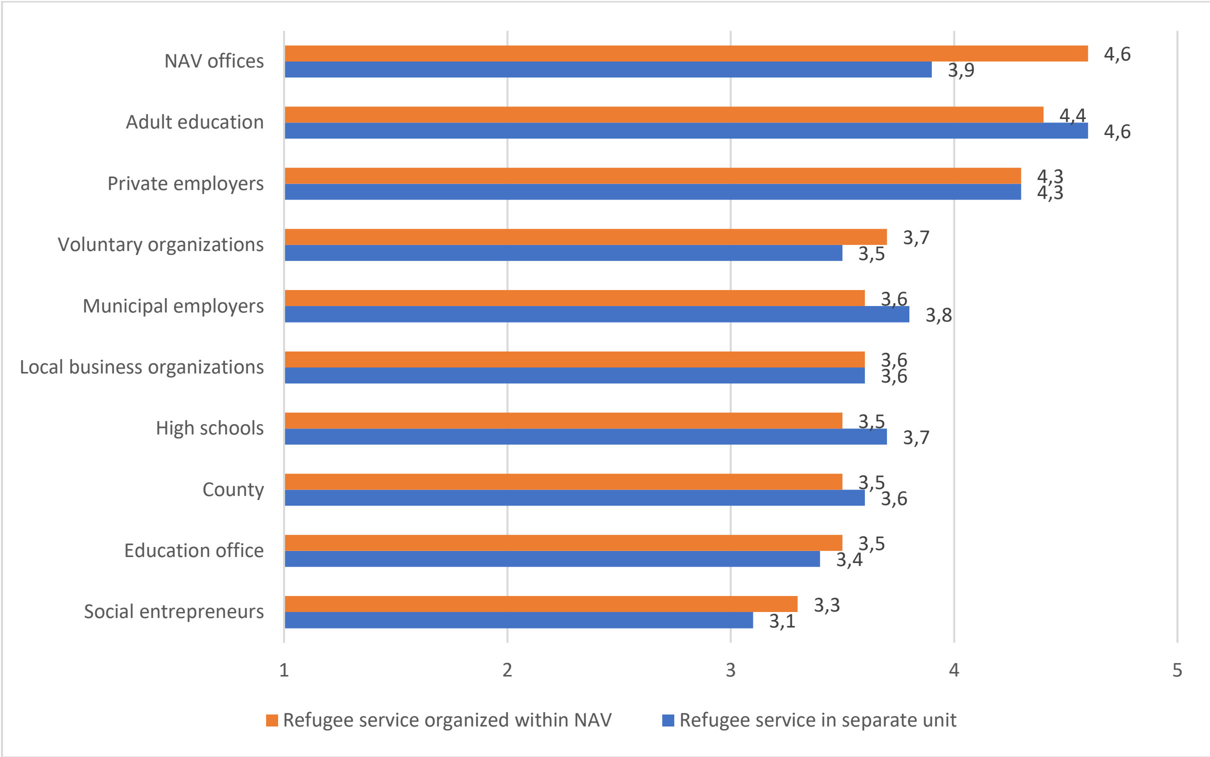
*Means. Scale: 1 = Very bad; 5 = Very good.

The answers, presented in figure 18.1, show great refugee service satisfaction with the cooperation with private employers and Nav offices, with scores above 4 out of 5 (where 5 is ‘very good). Cooperation with Nav offices also increase from 3.7 to 4.1 from 2023 to 2024. Cooperation with municipal employers and local business organisations are also rated positively, along with adult education (*Voksenopplæringa)*[47]. However, adult education receives a much lower score in 2024 compared to 2023. We have not asked more specifically about adult education; hence we do not know why the service receive relatively lower score in 2024. However, in their answers to the open-ended questions, many respondents mention that lack of capacity in adult education is an important obstacle, both for providing extended language education and for integration more generally. Increased funds for adult education are also mentioned when we ask the municipal refugee services what they would need from the state if they were to settle more refugees. Figure 18.1 show that social entrepreneurs receive the lowest score, but it is still on the positive side.

It is interesting to investigate whether refugee service organisation is important for the cooperation assessments.

[47] *Voksenopplæringa is* upper secondary education that is adapted for adults.

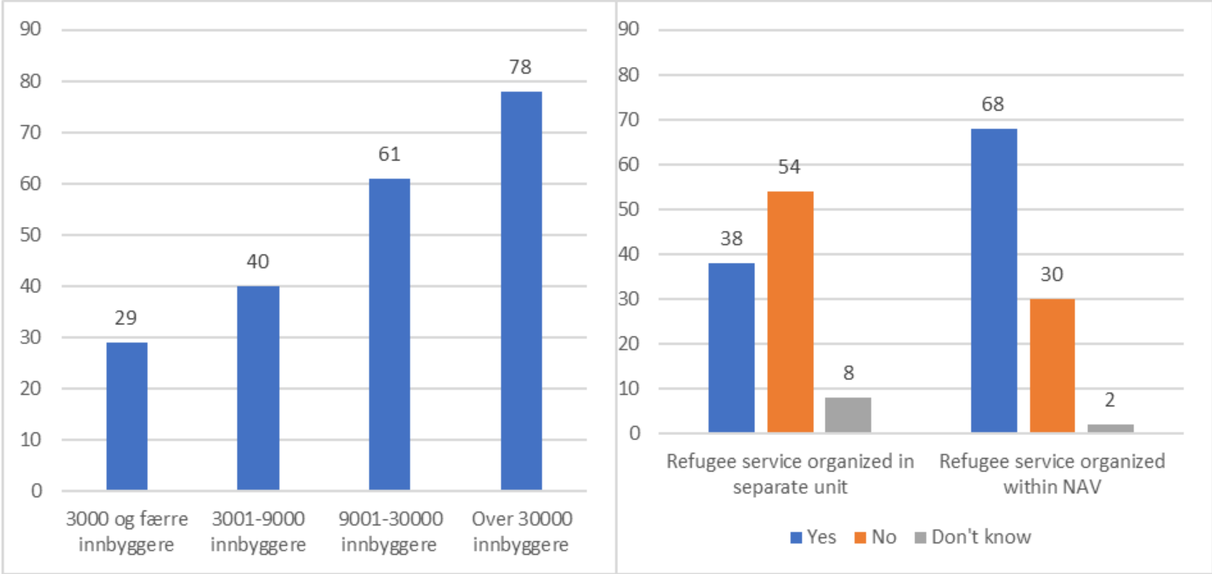
Figure 18.2: How would you rate your cooperation with other services on education and training of Ukrainian refugees? (N=224).



As we can see in figure 18.2, refugee services organised within the Nav system rate the cooperation with other parts of Nav far better than refugee services organised outside Nav. For cooperation with other services, differences are much smaller. The general picture is, however, that refugee services organised outside Nav rate cooperation with other municipal (and county) services somewhat better, whereas refugee services within the Nav system rate non-public actors, like voluntary organisations and social entrepreneurs, better. This could indicate a certain (not surprising) tendency that refugee services organised in separate units within the municipal structure, are more closely linked to other municipal services, while Nav organisation of refugee offices implies a closer collaboration with other parts of Nav. However, the tendency is rather weak.

In some districts, there are local or regional 'job fairs' with the aim of matching employers and refugees. We have asked the refugee services whether there are such events in their area. There are about 50-50% reporting that such job fairs are – or are not – organised in their district. However, job fairs are highly correlated to municipal size and type of organisation.

Figure 18.3: Are there local/regional 'job fairs' with the aim of matching employers and refugees? By municipality size and refugee service organisation (N=224).



*Frequencies, percent.

The left part of figure 18.3 shows that job fairs are highly correlated to municipal size. While almost 80% of the largest municipalities say that there are job fairs in their district, barely 30% of the smallest municipalities say that they have job fairs. Further, the right part of the figure shows that refugee services organised in Nav report far more often that there are local or regional job fairs for refugees. This is partly due to the fact that large municipalities have chosen the Nav option to a greater extent than smaller municipalities.

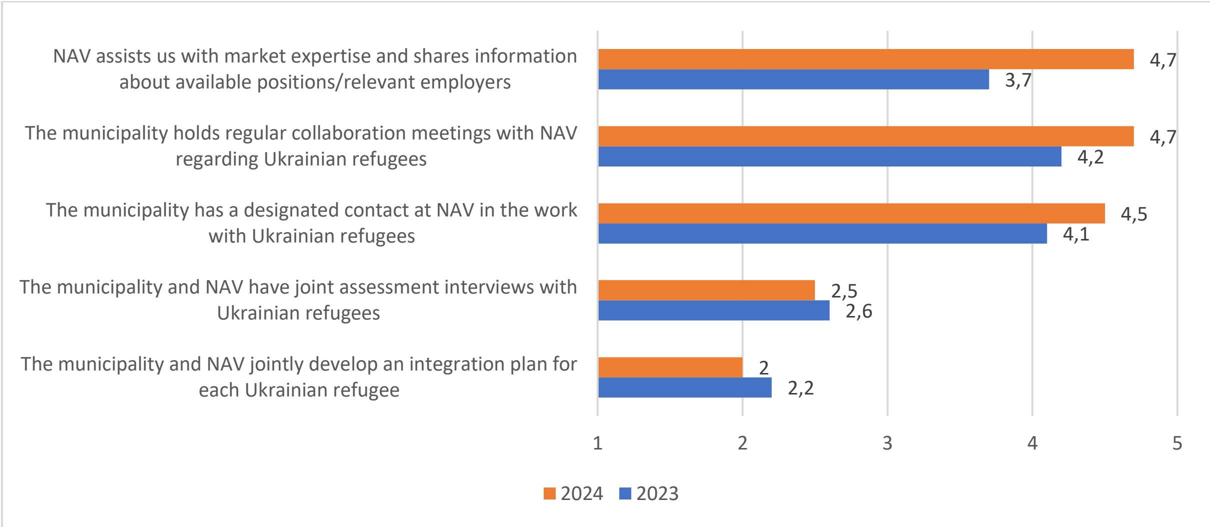
18.2 Nav's role in settlement and integration of Ukrainian refugees

Nav is an important actor in Norwegian welfare service provision, also when it comes to refugees. In many municipalities, Nav has a triple role: as an administrative unit for refugee services, as an entity providing social assistance and other benefits, and as a central actor in helping refugees enter the labour market.

Cooperation between the municipal refugee service and Nav is often crucial for the integration of refugees into the labour market. Our last report (Hernes, Aasland et al. 2023) pointed to great variation among municipalities when it comes to *when* Nav gets involved in the process of refugee integration. We asked the refugee service leaders who were not organised in Nav whether – and how – they cooperate with Nav on the introduction program.

First, we find an increase in the share of refugee offices that have a cooperation agreement between the refugee office and Nav – while 49% had this in 2023, 68% report to have it in 2024. Further, we asked the refugee offices leaders to assess several statements related to 1) their cooperation with Nav, and 2) measures provided by Nav. The general picture is that refugee services rate Nav's activities and measures considerably higher in 2024 compared to 2023.

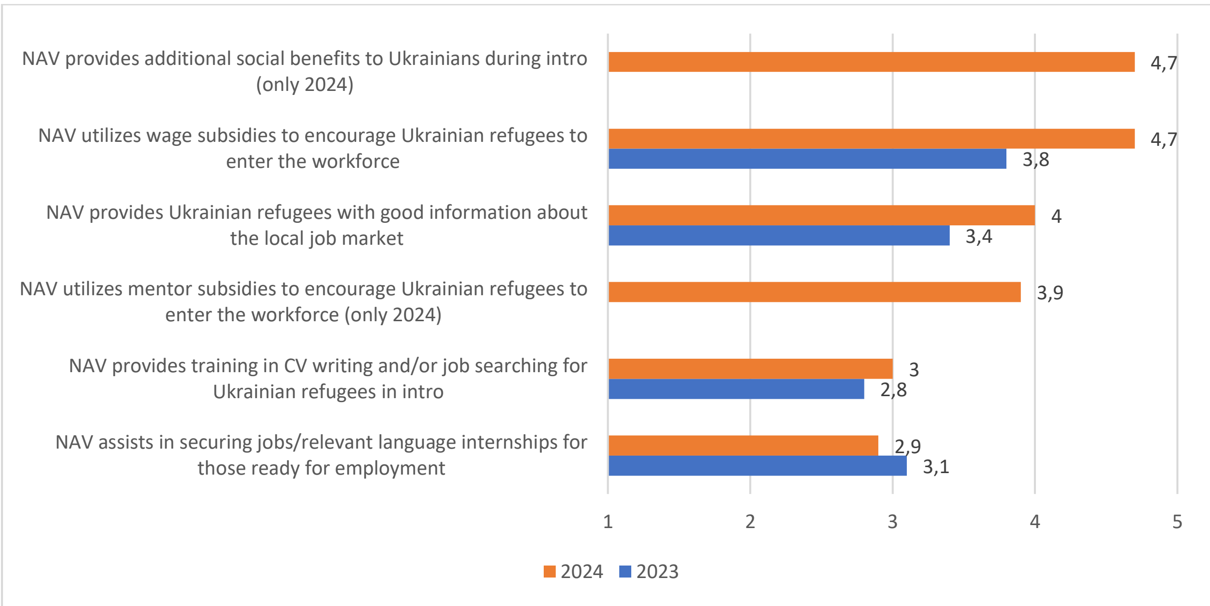
Figure 18.4: Please state to what extent you agree with the following statements about cooperation with Nav * (N_{2023} = 215; N_{2024}=202).



*Means. Scale: 1=Do not at all agree; 5=Fully agree.

Figure 18.4 shows that almost all municipal refugee services report that Nav assists with market expertise and information about available positions and the local job market situation in 2024, and there is a clear improvement from 2023. Further, almost all have regular cooperation meetings with Nav, and it is also very common for the services to have a designated contact in Nav who communicates with the refugee services. Having a designated contact in Nav appears to be important for cooperation, particularly when the refugee service is not part of the Nav office. It is less common that the municipality and Nav have joint assessment interviews with refugees or develop integration plans for individual refugees.

Figure 18.5: Please state to what extent you agree with the following statements about Nav measures* (N_{2023} = 215; N_{2024} = 204).



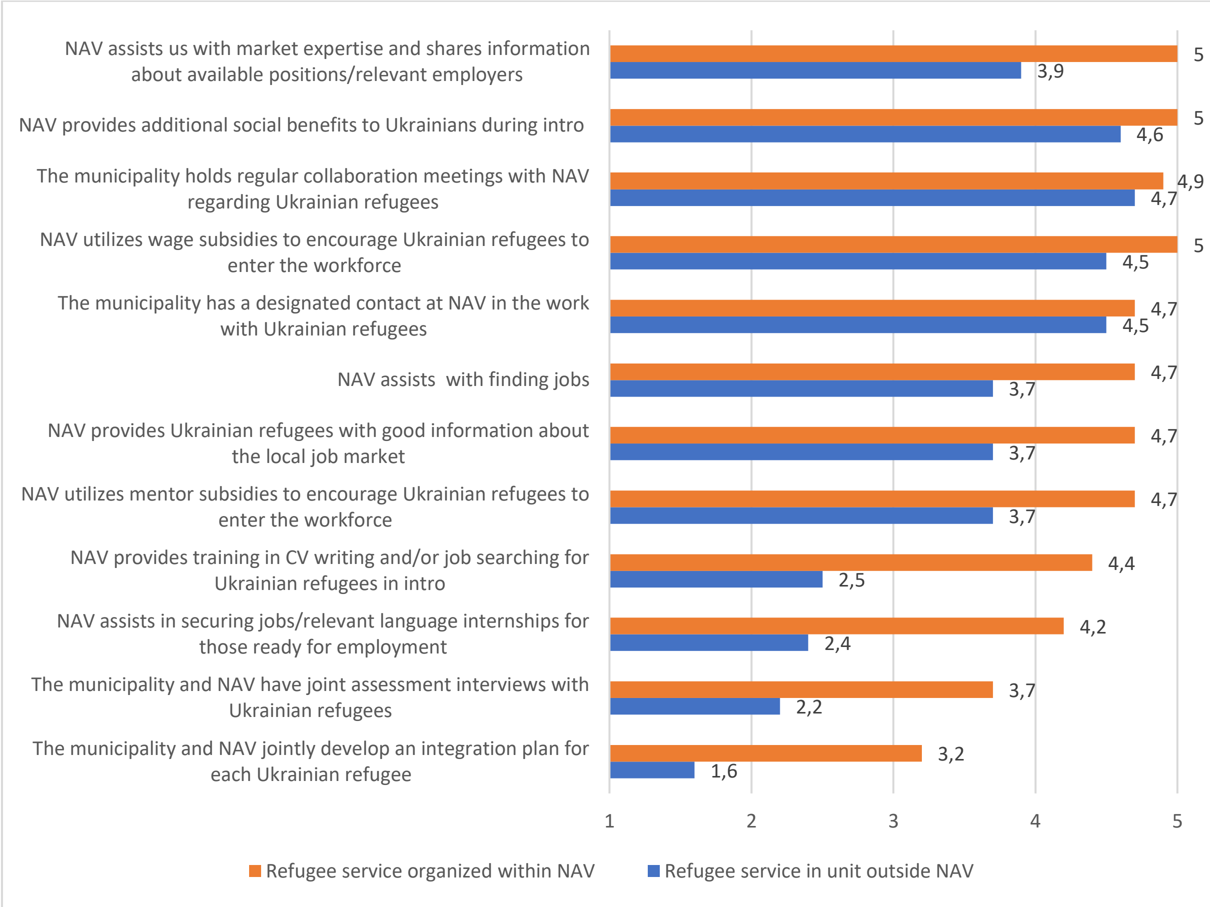
*Means. Scale: 1=Do not at all agree; 5=Fully agree.

Figure 18.5 shows that Nav assists the refugee offices with social benefits when needed. There is generally an improvement for most assessments of Nav measures from 2023 to

2024. There is a clear increase in scores for statements posing that Nav utilises wage subsidies, provides good information about the local labour market, and use mentor subsidies. One reason may be that this year, many Ukrainian refugees have completed the introduction program and are ready for more direct work-related activities, in which they get help from Nav. There are somewhat lower scores for writing CVs/job search and securing relevant work or language practice for those ready for employment (around 3 out of 5).

In section 16.1, we observed that about one in four refugee services are organised within Nav and that two in three services are separate administrative units in the municipality. One obvious hypothesis is that refugee services operating within Nav have a closer relationship with other parts of Nav than do refugee services that are organised differently. Our analysis clearly confirms this hypothesis.

Figure 18.6: Agreement on the statements about Nav, by refugee service organisation* (N = 204).

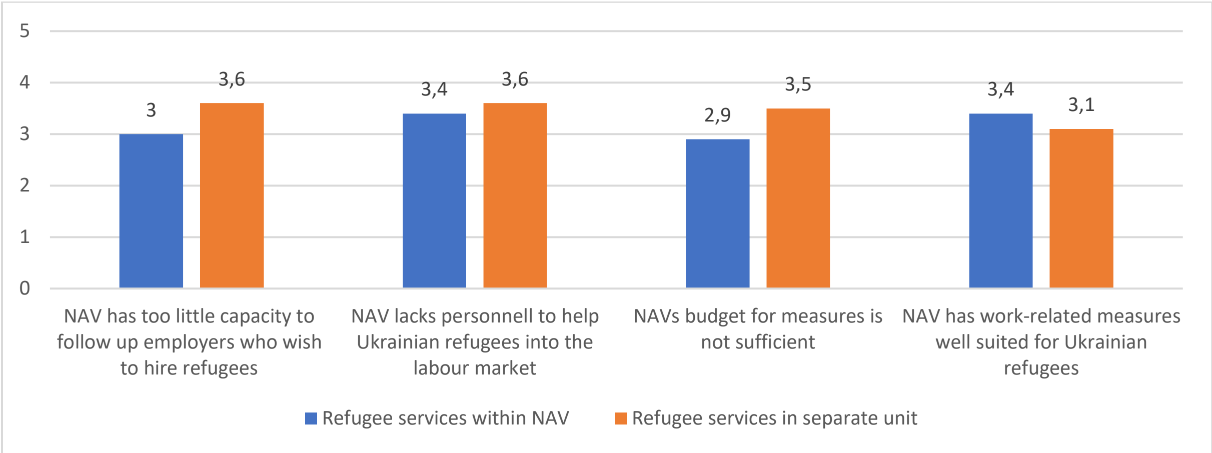


*Means. Scale: 1=Do not at all agree; 5=Fully agree.

Figure 18.6 combines the 2024 scores from all the categories in figure18.4 and 18.5 above to illustrate the difference in cooperation and use of measures for those who have the refugee office organised inside and outside of Nav. It shows that respondents in municipalities where the refugee service is organised within Nav generally rate the various forms of cooperation as better than respondents in municipalities where the refugee service is a separate unit. This could indicate better access to Nav services and measures both for the refugee service and for the refugees in these municipalities.

There are, however, several respondents from the municipal refugee services voicing cooperation challenges with Nav. This is mostly due to capacity challenges in Nav.

Figure 18.7: Please state to what extent you agree with the following statements* (N=204)



*Means. Scale: 1=Do not at all agree; 5=Fully agree.

Figure 18.7 shows some differences in the respondents' assessment of Nav's capacity. Respondents in refugee services that are organised within Nav are generally less inclined to think that Nav has insufficient capacity in its work with Ukrainian refugees. The scores are generally not very high, however. It is also worth noting that a much higher percentage of respondents who work outside of Nav report that they do not know. Nav's role will be assessed further in the next chapter, where we investigate barriers to labour market integration for Ukrainian refugees.

Cooperation between refugee services and Nav – a matter of organisation?

We asked our survey respondents if they had additional feedback on the collaboration between the refugee service and Nav. Some of those who have organised the refugee service within the Nav system either say that the collaboration is good or that the organisation makes it difficult to answer this because they see themselves as part of Nav. Two respondents put it this way:

> Having the refugee service as part of Nav works very well. It ensures proximity to all Nav services, such as the market department with job counsellors and the financial department for economic social assistance.

> The refugee service is a department within the Nav office. We therefore have full access to all employment-focused measures and actively use them when participants are ready. After we started settling Ukrainians, we created a new position that is split 50/50 between the refugee service and social services. Additionally, we have weekly collaboration meetings with those working in social services. The program advisors have regular meetings with Nav's market team, which provides knowledge about the labour market, available positions, and relevant internship opportunities. We are all colleagues within the Nav office and have a low threshold for asking questions or assisting one another.

Some leaders of refugee services not organised within Nav are calling for closer collaboration:

> We would like Nav to take more initiative and responsibility for organising events such as job fairs and other platforms to connect with businesses/employers.

> We miss seeing Nav engaged in long-term refugee work. Whether this is due to heavy workloads, we don't know. Nav has a high staff turnover, making it difficult to maintain continuity in the work.

> We revised the collaboration agreement with Nav in 2022, but so far, we have not managed to hold regular meetings about Ukrainian refugees. A large part of what is outlined in the agreement is not being implemented. The Nav office reports that they lack sufficient funding and staff to follow up on this from Nav's market side.

As we also documented in the 2023 report (Hernes, Aasland et al. 2023), several refugee offices feel they are burdened with extra work because Nav is not readily accessible:

> Centralisation has made Nav less available for direct contact, guidance, and follow-up with its users. For the refugee service, this means we are the ones who have to write applications for social assistance, guide refugees through understanding the Nav system, assist with logging into the website (which is problematic since many Ukrainians cannot get BankID), and read, translate, and explain documents and decisions. Often, the refugee service has to pay for interpreters to translate Nav documents.
>
> In individual cases, it is difficult to reach a caseworker at Nav, and there are barriers such as confidentiality, bureaucracy/case processing, and limited availability or opportunity for user consultations. The increased digitisation presents a major challenge for refugees, as does understanding the decisions made. The refugee service spends significant time guiding, explaining, and assisting with Nav matters because Nav itself is not readily available.
>
> Nav does not take responsibility for refugees while they are in the introduction program, despite having three positions funded by the municipality's integration funds.

Several leaders of municipal refugee services believe that Nav is understaffed and lacks sufficient capacity:

> We find that Nav does not have sufficient capacity to follow up everyone.
>
> We feel that we have good relationships, but the work situation at Nav is extremely demanding. We see that Nav employees are overworked and overwhelmed by the pressure. They don't have measures ready when refugees finish the introduction program, and by that point, the refugee service no longer has tools to assist. Many refugees are left waiting a long time without responses from Nav and without predictability. We also find that many at Nav do not sufficiently understand the level of assistance refugees require.

The general impression, based on respondents' comments, is that there is significant variation in the assessment of collaboration with Nav among refugee services not organised within Nav. Some are very satisfied, while others express significant frustration. Some informants report that the collaboration between the refugee service and Nav has improved over time.

18.3 Summary

In this chapter, we have described some of the most common forms of cooperation between Nav and the refugee service, which comprise regular cooperation meetings, appointing a designated contact in Nav to work with Ukrainian refugees, use of wage subsidies, and provision of information about the labour market and job vacancies. The overall impression is that refugee services are more satisfied with their collaboration with Nav in 2024 compared to 2023.

We hypothesised that organisation of the refugee service with the Nav office, as opposed to being a separate unit, is likely to have a positive effect on cooperation. Our findings confirm this hypothesis. The respondents in municipalities where the refugee service is organised within Nav rate the various forms of cooperation with Nav far better than do other respondents. However, it is important to emphasise that these assessments are merely on the cooperation of Nav and does not assess the quality or results of the measures.

We also identified some challenges in the cooperation with Nav. Some respondents point out that Nav's capacity, particularly when it comes to personnel, has not increased in line with the growing number of Ukrainian refugees.

19 Barriers and opportunities in the labour market

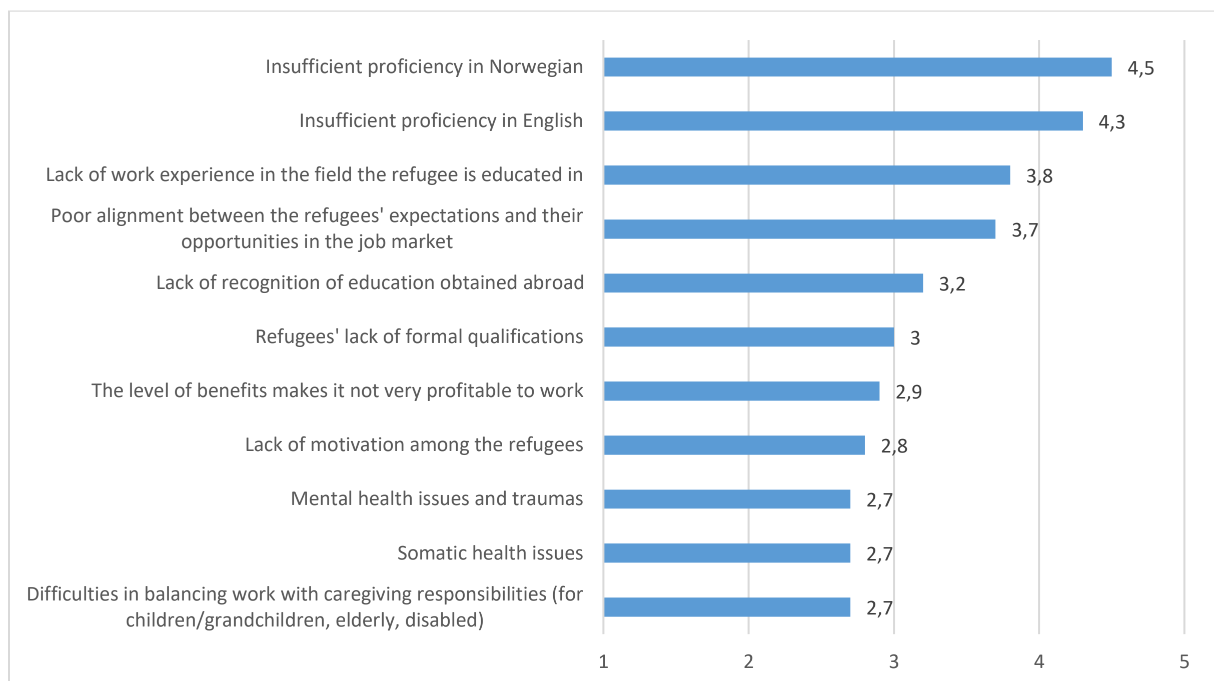
In 2024, more Ukrainian refugees have entered the labour market (see section 10.1). However, for many Ukrainians, the path to entering the workforce is much longer than first anticipated. In this chapter, we ask the following questions:

- What barriers can be identified as hindering the Ukrainian refugees' labour market participation in terms of both individual factors and more local and/or systemic factors?
- What opportunities do Ukrainians represent in their local community?

19.1 Individual factors

What individual factors with Ukrainian refugees as a group do the municipal services leaders perceive to be the main barriers to employment?

Figure 19.1: Barriers to integration of refugees in the labour market, individual factors (N = 224).



*Means. Scale: 1 = Very small extent, 5 = Very large extent.

Figure 19.1 illustrates that respondents perceive the most important barriers at the individual level to be insufficient Norwegian and English language skills (4.5 and 4.3 out of 5 on the scale). This finding is in line with the Ukrainian refugees' own perceptions of what constitutes the main barrier to integration into the Norwegian labour market, as presented in section 10.4.

Lack of work experience and formal (or recognised) qualifications are also seen as barriers to labour market integration, as well as the relation between refugees' expectations and actual opportunities in the local labour market. Motivation challenges, health problems and caregiving responsibilities are seen as somewhat less important.

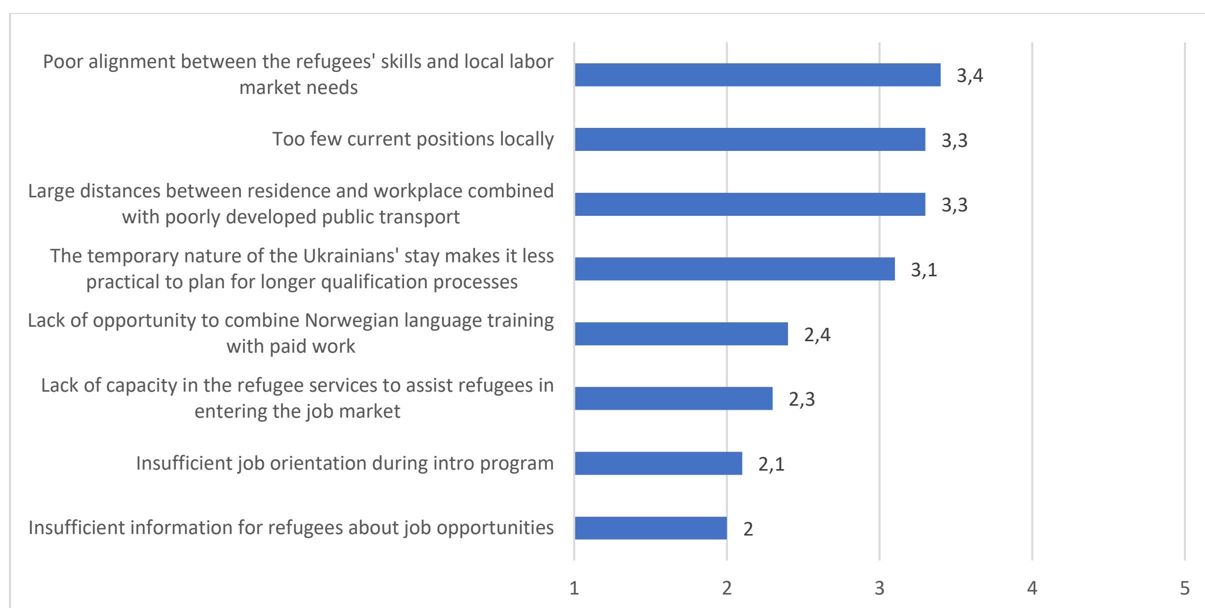
The scores of the different barriers resemble the 2023 scores. In the 2024, survey we also asked the respondents to state their agreement with 'The level of benefits makes it not very profitable to work'. The mean score of this statement is 2.9 on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 means that the level of benefits 'to a very large extent' is a barrier to labour market

participation. 2.9 is a middle range score, both on the scale and among the factors mentioned in the survey.

19.2 Local and systemic factors

Compared with the individual factors, local and systemic factors are, on average, perceived as less important barriers to labour market integration than the individual factors described above.

Figure 19.2: Barriers to integration of refugees in the labour market, local/systemic factors (N = 204).



*Means. Scale: 1 = very small extent, 5 = very large extent.

Figure 19.2 shows that poor alignment between refugees' education and skills on the one hand, and local labour market needs, few available positions locally and long travelling distances from residence to potential workplace, are seen as barriers, with an average score of 3.3-3.4 out of 5. Poor alignment between the refugees' skills and local labour market needs corresponds well with the findings from the analysis of individual factors, where lack of language skills and (validated) formal qualification are identified as important barriers to Ukrainians' local labour market participation. The temporality of the refugees' stay in Norway is perceived as a somewhat moderate challenge for planning longer qualification processes.

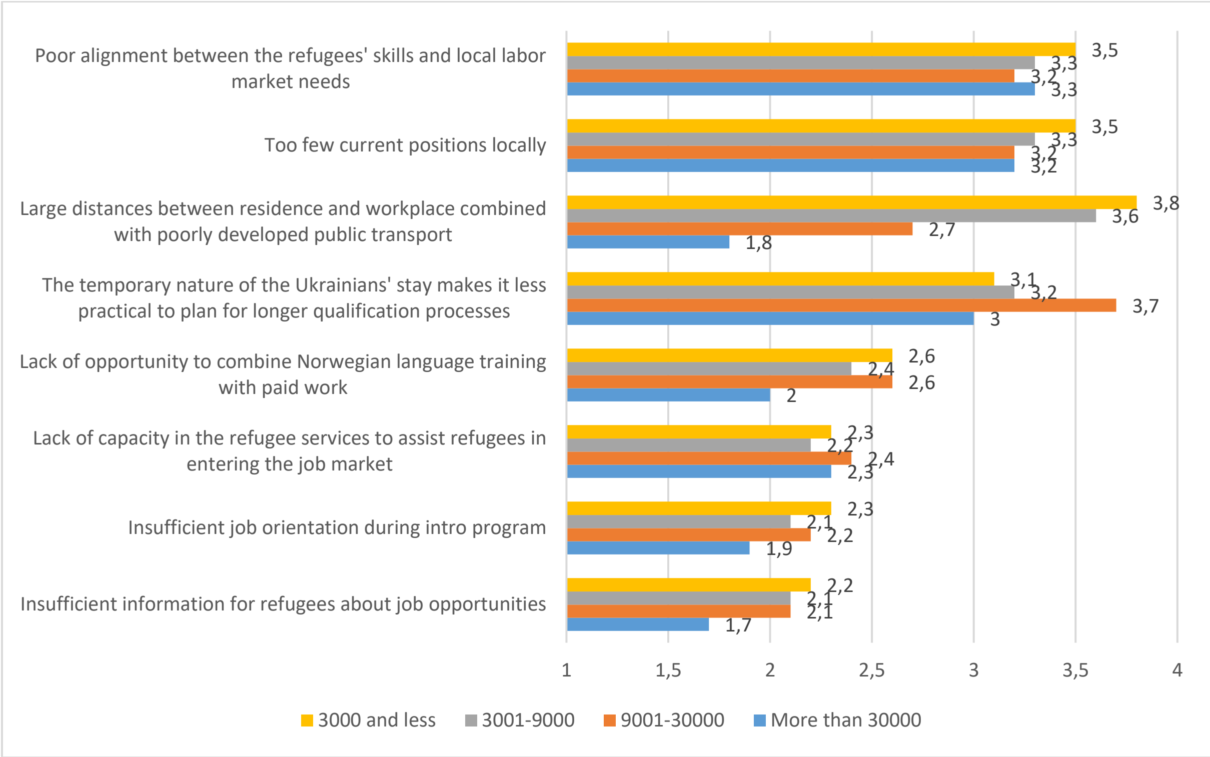
Lack of capacity to assist refugees in entering the job market, lack of opportunity to combine Norwegian language training with paid work and insufficient information have lower average scores.

The 2024 assessments of the mentioned barriers are very much in line with what we found in 2023, with a weak tendency for the respondents to perceive the barriers as less prominent now (Hernes et al. 2023, s. 187). One important exception is the scoring of 'Lack of capacity in the refugee services to assist refugees in entering the job market'. Here the score is considerably lower in 2024 (from 2.7 in 2023 to 2.3 in 2024). This may indicate that local refugee services are less pressed on capacity now, which is in line with what we found in chapter 16.

Barriers depending on municipal size

Some of the local or systemic barriers are closely linked to the population size of the municipality (which, again, is linked to centrality).

Figure 19.3: Barriers to integration of refugees in the labour market, local/systemic factors, by municipality size (N_{2024} = 224).



*Means. Scale: 1 = very small extent, 5 = very large extent.

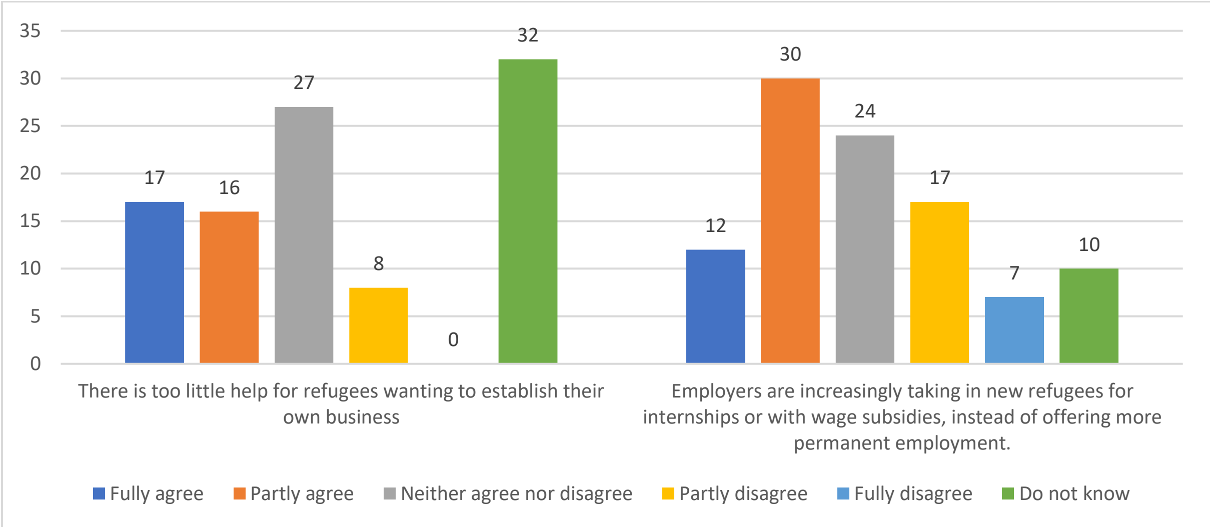
Figure 19.3 shows the statements where we find considerable differences between municipalities depending on size. Large distances between residence and possible workplaces are – naturally – a more prominent problem in sparsely populated municipalities with poorly developed public transport.

Refugee services in the largest municipalities find, to a lesser degree than other respondents, that it is difficult to combine language training and work for the refugees. As we saw in chapter 17.3.2, large municipalities report greater flexibility in their language education, which may make it easier to combine with employment. Respondents from the most populous municipalities are also less inclined to think that the introduction programme lacks work orientation or that the refugees have too little information about job opportunities.

The general picture is that except for geographical mismatches between houses and workplaces in the smaller municipalities, the local/systemic factors have relatively low scores meaning that the respondents do not perceive them as crucial hindrances for labour market inclusion for this group of refugees.

We have asked our informants about their views on two other factors that may hinder refugees from entering the labour market, one about starting a business and one about potential exploitation of Ukrainian refugees as free labour by employers instead of providing permanent employment.

Figure 19.4: Please state to what extent you agree with these statements about barriers to labour market integration N=207.



*Frequencies, percent.

First, concerning help to establish a business. Like in the 2023 survey to the Ukrainian refugees, we find again this year that information about how to start a business in Norway is assessed very low among Ukrainian refugees (see chapter 7.4). This is confirmed by one of three of our informants from the municipal refugee services (figure 19.4). 33% fully or partly agree that there is too little help for refugees wanting to establish their own business. Very few disagree with this statement. It is worth noting that a very large share of the respondents (32%) answer that they do not know, which probably indicates that this is an issue that is seldom present in their daily work. There are more respondents reporting too little information in the smallest municipalities.

Another concern raised in the interviews and survey of Ukrainian refugees was a concern that some employers exploit state subsidies, meaning that they thought that some employers take in refugees as long as their wages are subsidised or for work practice, but replace them with new refugees when the subsidy/work practice period is out. This implies that the refugees only get temporary posts, and no long-lasting connection to the labour market. Our survey data show that there is a certain disagreement on this among the refugee service leaders. 24% fully or partly disagree with the statement on employers taking in new refugees for work practice or wage subsidies instead of offering more permanent employment. 42% answer that they fully or partly agree. The overall impression is that the tendency for some employers to take advantage of the option of short-term engagements, is acknowledged by many refugee service leaders.

Discrimination

Few Ukrainian refugees assess discrimination from employers as a barrier for employment, although there was some increase from the 2023 to the 2024 survey (see chapter 10.4). We also see that this is not posed as a major barrier by the leaders of the municipal services, with a score of only 1.8 out of 5. However, the smaller municipalities report this to a somewhat higher degree than the larger municipalities, with the smallest municipalities reporting an average score of 2.7 out of 5.

The large majority of respondents agrees with the statement that employers are positive about hiring Ukrainian refugees, with an average score of 3.9 out of 5 possible.

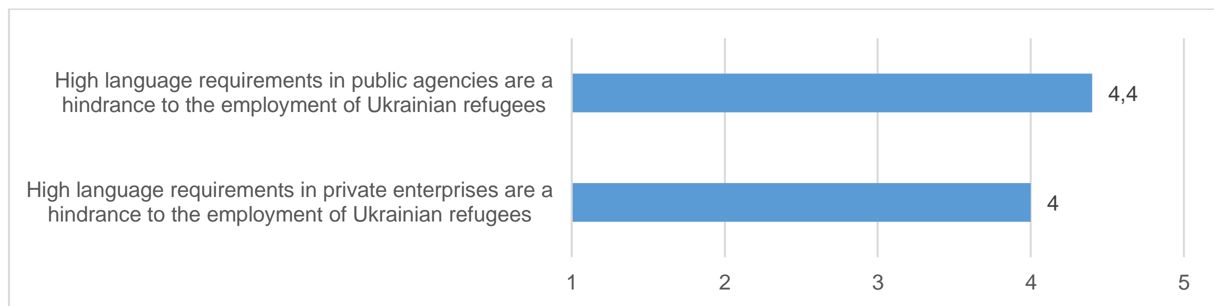
19.3 The municipality as employer

The municipality itself is the main employer in many local communities in Norway, since it is in charge of workplaces such as nursing homes, kindergartens, primary schools, etc. In many municipalities, there is a high demand for labour in some sectors, especially in healthcare. Despite this, it has been documented challenges in getting municipal workplaces to accept Ukrainian refugees (or refugees in general) for work practice placements or regular work.

It would therefore be a win-win situation if more refugees could be employed in municipal services with a lack of manpower. But municipalities often demand formal qualifications, even for jobs such as cleaning. Some sectors, such as kindergartens, set national requirements, whereas in other sectors it is up to each municipality to set the requirements. Municipalities are sometimes perceived to be more bureaucratic and rigid than employers in the private sector, who are described as more open and flexible, and less concerned with formalities (Hernes, Aasland et al. 2023).

Language barriers are treated as an individual barrier earlier in this chapter. But language requirements are also systemic factors, and challenges emerge when high requirements are not met by corresponding qualifications. We have asked our respondents about language requirements in the private and public sectors.

Figure 19.5: Please state to what extent you agree with the following statements (N=224).



*Means and standard deviation. Scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree.

Figure 19.5 shows that local refugee service leaders highly agree that high language requirements are a barrier towards employment in public agencies, including municipalities. Private enterprises are perceived as less demanding, but here too, language is seen as a major barrier for employment. The results are similar to those in 2023.

Cooperation between the refugee service and the municipal HR department

In order to get internship or employment for refugees, the refugee service may cooperate with those responsible for recruitment in the municipality, for instance the HR department. We asked our respondents from the local refugee service whether they cooperate with the HR-responsible in the municipality.

Figure 19.6: Does the refugee service cooperate with the municipal HR department? (N=222)

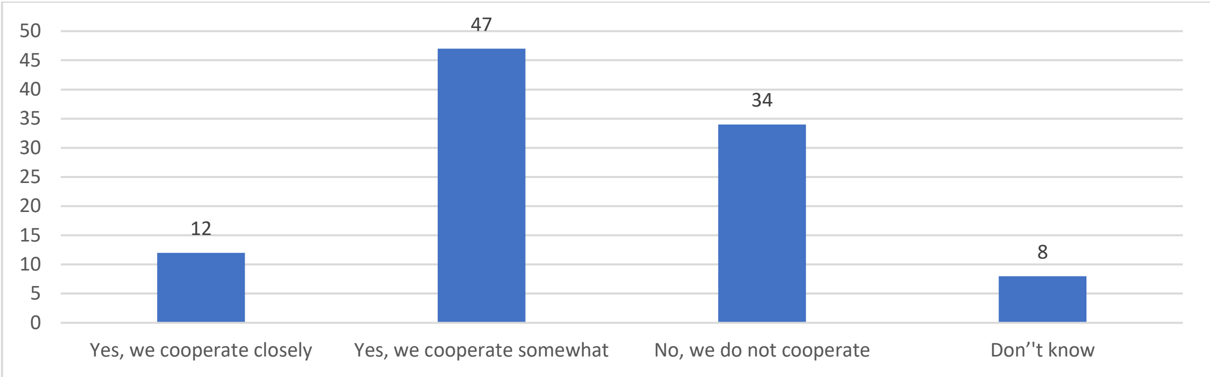


Figure 19.6 shows that a minority of the refugee services – only 12% – report that they cooperate closely with those responsible for recruitment. Nearly half of the respondents say that they cooperate somewhat with the HR department, while one in tree refugee services say that they have no cooperation with HR.

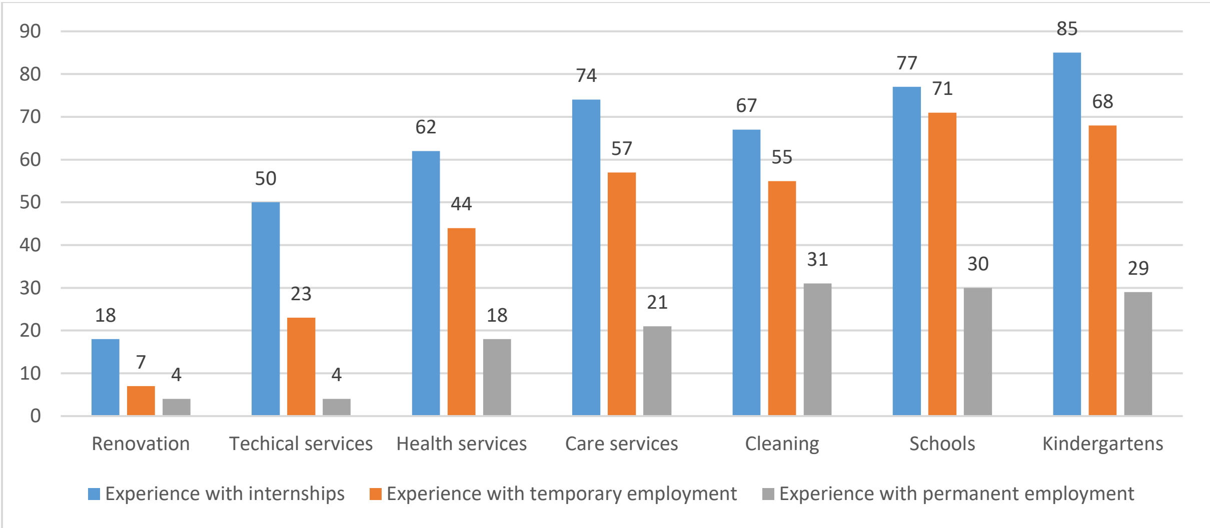
The smallest municipalities cooperate more closely than larger municipalities. While 22% of municipalities with less than 3000 inhabitants say that they do not cooperate, the proportion is twice as high for larger municipalities (41-45% denying cooperation). It is more common that refugee services organised in separate units cooperate with the HR-responsible unit (13%) compared to refugee services organised within Nav (6%).

In which municipal services are refugees employed?

As already pointed out, many municipalities are in lack of personnel in services provided by the municipality. Particularly health and care services, but also schools and kindergartens, often experience recruitment problems. Investing in refugees to make them qualified to fill positions in these services, could prove to be worthwhile for the local community.

We asked our respondents if they have experience with refugee work practice and temporary or permanent employment in their municipal services.

Figure 19.7: Experience with refugee work practice and temporary or permanent employment in municipal services (N=207).



*Frequencies, percent.

Figure 19.7 shows that a majority of municipalities have had refugees in work practice in municipal services: 85% report having had refugees in internship in kindergartens, 77% in

schools, 74% in care services and 67% in cleaning. Health services (62%) and technical services (50%) are also frequently used for work practice.

Temporary employment is also quite frequent. 71% of the refugee services report having had refugees in temporary employment in schools, and 68% in kindergartens. Some of these are probably Ukrainian refugees (some of them with pedagogical qualifications from Ukraine) employed to support refugee children in schools and kindergartens. About 30% report having experience with permanent refugee employment in these two services.

Also, cleaning is popular for refugee temporary or permanent employment, perhaps because these kinds of jobs have low requirements when it comes to languages and other qualifications. When renovation, on the other side, seldom is used as a service for refugee employment, this may be because renovation often is executed by intermunicipal companies, organised outside the single municipality. The same may be the case for some technical services. These services may, however, represent an unused potential for refugee internship and employment.

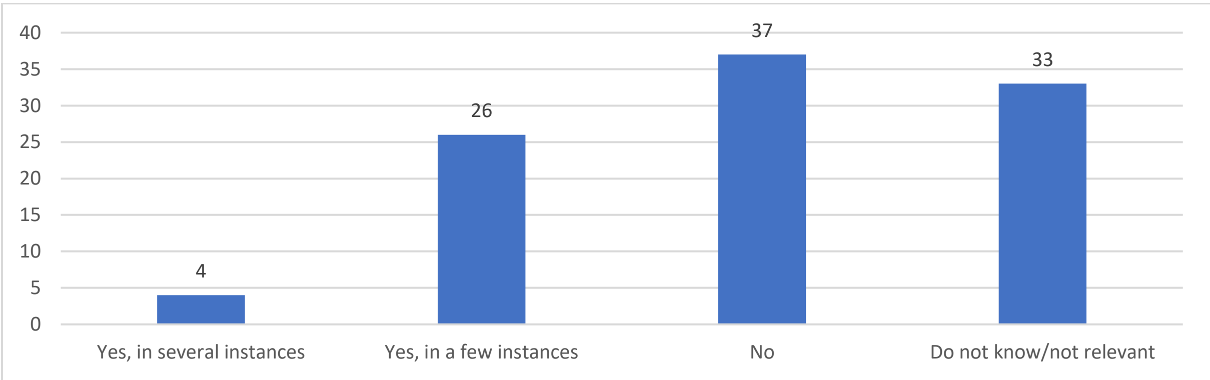
Care services seem to be somewhat more frequently used for refugee employment than municipal health services. Some tasks within care require fewer formal qualifications, which may explain some of the differences. All in all, there appears to be untapped potential in utilising refugees' labour within municipal services, benefiting both the refugees themselves and the municipality.

Exceptions to the qualification principle

The qualification principle is an important rule in Norwegian public sector: the person who has qualifications best fitted to the position, should be employed. There are, however, exceptions to this rule. In an agreement between the Norwegian Association of Municipalities and Regions (KS) and local labour unions in March 2024, rules that municipalities may bypass the qualification principle were established: It would be allowed if it was done for only a few positions, and if it was done for reasons of inclusion of persons who are outside employment, education, and training, as well as individuals with disabilities.[48]

In our 2024 survey, we asked if the refugee service has experience with the municipality making exceptions to the qualification principle to get Ukrainian refugees into employment.

Figure 19.8: Are exceptions to the qualification principle used to hire refugees for municipal services? (N=208).



*Frequencies, percent.

Figure 19.8 shows that 30% of the municipalities have done this in either several or a few instances. About one third says that they do not use this option, while the other third says that they do not know. Formal guidelines for making exceptions to the qualification principle

[48] https://www.ks.no/ks-advokatene/nyheter/mulighetene-for-unntak-fra-kvalifikasjonsprinsippet/

in certain situations was rather newly established at the time of the survey (only half a year earlier). That a large portion say that they do not know implies that there may be more potential for the municipalities in using this option to increase the labour market integration of both Ukrainian and other refugees.

Barriers to labour market integration – in respondents' own words

We asked the respondents in the survey to elaborate on the barriers they face in helping Ukrainian refugees secure employment. Many of the issues mentioned were also highlighted when we asked about challenges related to work practice (see chapter 17.2.1). Language remains the most frequently mentioned factor. Most Ukrainian refugees have limited access to Norwegian language training, and they do not reach a level sufficient for most workplaces.

One issue raised is the need for a certain language proficiency to meet health, safety, and environment (HSE) requirements in the workplace: 'With a high proportion of aquaculture businesses in the municipality, there are strict HSE requirements, where language becomes a challenge and limits the possibility of employment.'

Some respondents claim that many Ukrainians are not particularly motivated to learn Norwegian, and that it can also be challenging to motivate refugees to work:

> Their qualifications, especially their higher education, are not compatible with the requirements of the Norwegian labour market. Unfortunately, for most, it is more realistic to aim for unskilled work during the introduction program. This is difficult for some to understand, and it also affects the motivation of many. Many Ukrainians place great emphasis on classroom-based Norwegian language training, while we believe they will eventually learn more through language practice or other practical use of Norwegian. It is hard for many to understand that taking unskilled work at the beginning is the most important step toward eventually securing jobs that require higher levels of competence.
>
> Many do not understand that they must accept 'any' job. This means they have far too high expectations for their first job. Many prioritise learning more Norwegian over choosing work. A large number have no work experience related to their education.

Some leaders of refugee services note that many Ukrainian refugees have experience from an 'old-fashioned' labour market and do not have a strong understanding of how the Norwegian labour market functions. Therefore, both refugee services and employers are required to provide a lot of guidance about the Norwegian job market.

Better coordination between language training and work is mentioned by some respondents:

> Nav has some qualification measures that are available only once refugees have completed the introduction program, such as language learning and occupational Norwegian in practice through Navigator Competence. The participant must have exhausted their rights to language training in the municipality before this can become an option. We would prefer if this could be available to participants who are nearly or just finished with the introduction program, have secured a job (either full-time or part-time), but need more occupational language training before the employer is willing to commit to permanent employment or a long-term contract.

Some also call for industry-specific courses in the refugees' native languages.

Another barrier mentioned is that the labour market is strained in some areas, with a poor match between available jobs and the refugees' skills:

> We feel that we are approaching saturation in the labour market. The refugees' skills and the skills in demand do not fully align. In our municipality, there are few job openings, and hiring occurs through informal channels. The seasonal labour market also leads to many entering and exiting the introduction program. This makes continuity and progress in the program difficult.

Several mention that their municipality is spread out, and there are large distances to relevant workplaces. Some rural municipalities have found a solution to this problem:

> We live in a rural municipality with limited access to public transportation. It has been crucial for those we have resettled from Ukraine that they have access to a car. Here, we have implemented a scheme that offers interest-free loans to Ukrainians who have an approved driver's license. It is also possible for refugees who do not have a driver's license to apply for a grant to obtain one. This arrangement has allowed more people to access jobs and work practice around the municipality and in the private sector.

One of the respondents believes more should be done at the national level to inspire employers to hire refugees:

> The government, through the prime minister, has repeatedly stated that the state will reach out to employers to encourage them to integrate Ukrainian refugees. It is not very clear to us whether or not this has happened. A strong campaign aimed at employers is needed!

And what facilitates integration?

We have also asked our respondents what could facilitate the integration of Ukrainian refugees into the workforce. Language is mentioned here as well. Many believe refugees need longer and better language training before entering employment.

Many survey respondents say that Nav's tools are crucial for helping some refugees find jobs:

> We see that mentoring and wage subsidies are important tools for employers. It gives many the confidence to take the chance. This applies to both the private and public sectors.
>
> Expanded mentoring is important, possibly using integration grants to pay mentors (e.g., retirees) who can support permanent employees in healthcare, caregiving, and child services. Both sectors are in desperate need of more workers, and current employees are already overburdened. If practice candidates can be paired with an experienced mentor 'included,' it becomes much easier for employers to say yes, and the outcome is often positive for both the participant and the workplace.

As mentioned above, some municipalities have facilitated opportunities for refugees who need it to obtain a driver's license or loans for a car. One leader of a refugee office states that they collaborate with the Red Cross, which provides drivers for practice sessions for those who want to get their license.

Closer follow-up by the refugee service or Nav with employers and interns/employees is also seen as important. Employers with experience working with previous interns who performed well are often willing to take on new refugees.

Several respondents mention that many employers have a positive attitude toward Ukrainian refugees. While some refugee service leaders claim that certain Ukrainians lack motivation to work (e.g. 'Many have different motivations for being in Norway, such as welfare benefits and healthcare), others find that Ukrainians are willing to work, and that the combination of a supportive business community and motivated refugees yields good results:

> A positive business environment and many good matches between existing skills and local business needs. A hardworking group that has been praised for their strong work ethic and determination.
>
> They bring a lot of work experience and are used to working – even in fields outside their formal education. They quickly adapt to processes like job searches, writing CVs, interviews, etc. They have higher education levels compared to other refugees. They are more 'similar' to Norwegians and have a strong desire to be self-sufficient. Many of them are women from a society where it is common for women to work.

Several respondents mention that refugees who are motivated to join the workforce and participate in activities are naturally more likely to find employment: 'Those who learn Norwegian easily, are proactive, and show interest in being out in the community and participating in activities often succeed in connecting with the job market.' One respondent highlights that engaged politicians and a supportive municipal leadership helped several refugees secure work practice or jobs.

Many Ukrainian refugees have relevant education or work experience. If the refugee service or Nav manages to help individuals enter industries where they have skills, they are significantly closer to finding employment. However, two respondents express concern that extensive competency assessments might give refugees false hopes of securing relevant jobs:

> Norwegian language training and/or introduction programs should only be offered in the evenings or on weekends without pay to increase motivation for accepting paid work. More emphasis should be placed on informing refugees about the areas where there is a demand for labour in the region and downplaying competency assessments to adjust expectations.

19.4 Summary

The labour market integration of Ukrainian refugees in Norway remains a challenge. This chapter examines the key barriers and opportunities facing this group in the Norwegian labour market.

Individual factors are seen as the primary barriers. Insufficient Norwegian and English language skills are identified as the most significant obstacles, along with lack of work experience and formal qualifications.

Systemic and local factors, while less influential, still present obstacles. Misalignment between refugee skills and local labour market needs, limited job availability, and long commuting distances are notable barriers. Lack of capacity in refugee services and insufficient information about job opportunities are lesser concerns now compared to 2023. Discrimination from employers is not perceived as a major issue.

Differences emerge based on municipality size. Geographical mismatch between housing and workplaces is a greater problem in smaller, less centralised municipalities. Larger municipalities report more flexibility in combining language training and employment.

Municipalities themselves are potential employers yet face challenges related to integrating refugees into their workforces. Formal qualification requirements, even for jobs like cleaning, pose barriers. Language demands are seen as a larger hindrance in the public sector compared to private enterprises.

Cooperation between refugee services and municipal HR departments is limited, with only 12% reporting close collaboration, but smaller municipalities show higher levels of cooperation. Work practice and temporary employment in municipal services like schools, kindergartens, and care are common, but permanent positions are rarer.

Exceptions to the qualification principle, which allow municipalities to bypass strict requirements for inclusion purposes, are not widely utilised for hiring Ukrainian refugees. Only a quarter of the respondents report using this option in a few instances.

20 Possibilities and challenges in further refugee settlement

Ukrainian refugees have been settled all over Norway, even in the tiniest municipalities and in local communities with no previous experience in refugee settlement. Local refugee services have been upscaled in most municipalities. However, the refugees need a wide range of services in their new community, and there may be several local obstacles and capacity challenges in the settlement and integration of refugees in the time to come.

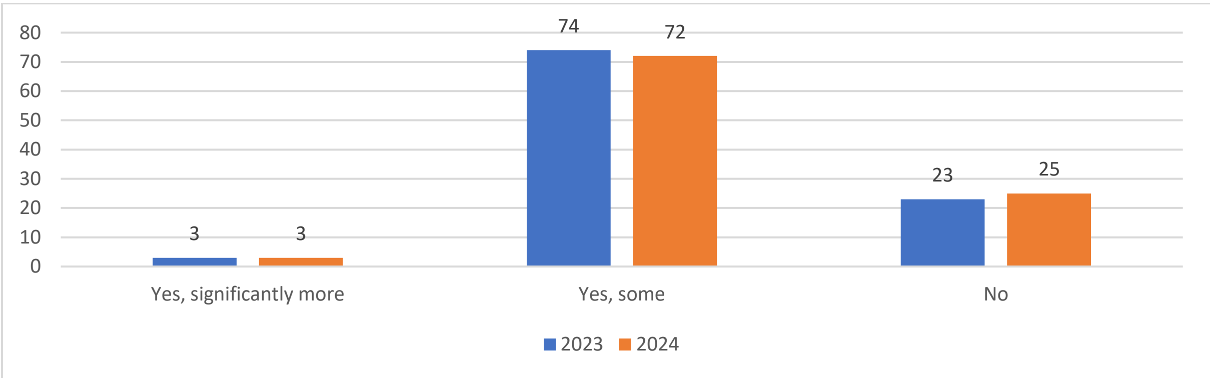
In this chapter we address the following questions:

- Are the municipalities able to settle more refugees than they already have?
- What factors are perceived as the main obstacles to further settlement?
- What would the municipalities need from state authorities to be able to settle more refugees?

20.1 Capacity to settle more refugees?

We asked the refugee service leaders whether their municipality has the capacity to receive more refugees than they already have. Although the municipalities have settled a substantial number of refugees the last year, their 2024 answers are almost identical as in 2023.

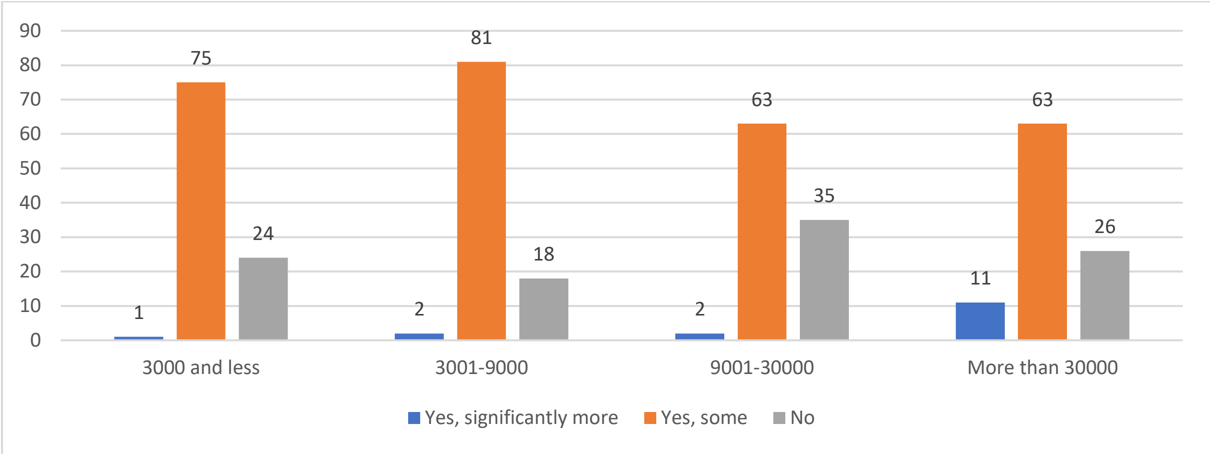
Figure 20.1: Does your municipality have the capacity to settle more refugees? (N=215).



*Frequencies, percent.

Figure 20.1 shows that very few – only 3% – of the respondents report that they can receive significantly more refugees in the future. A little less than three out of four (72%) say their municipality has the capacity to settle some more refugees, whereas one in four (25%) answer that they are not capable of settling more refugees.

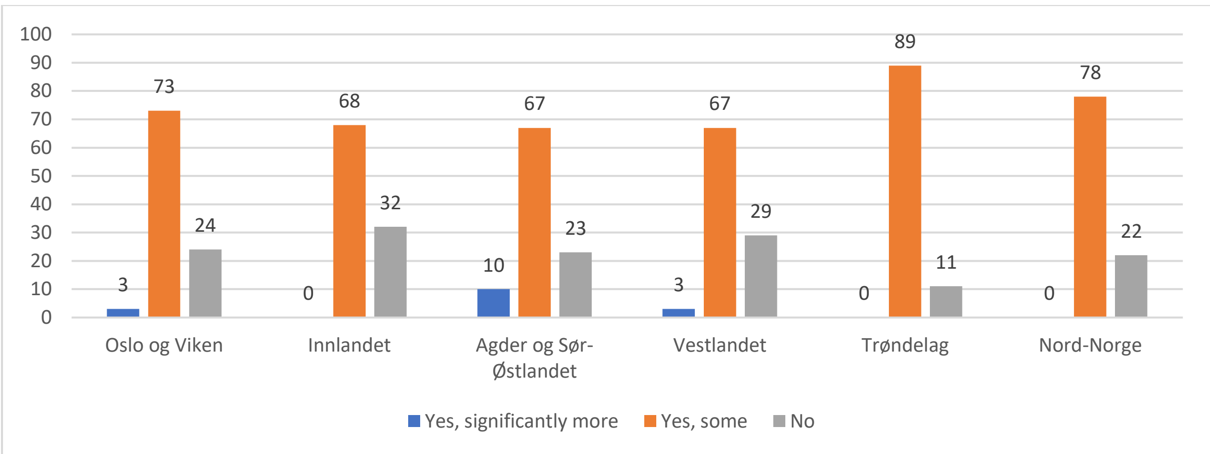
Figure 20.2: Does your municipality have the capacity to settle more refugees, by municipality size? (N=215).



*Frequencies, percent.

Figure 20.2 shows that the capacity to settle refugees in the future is not evenly distributed. Among the largest municipalities, 11% of the respondents report that they have capacity to settle significantly more refugees in the future. The tendency to answer that they are *not* able to receive more refugees, is more pronounced in municipalities with 9000-30000 inhabitants.

Figure 20.3: Does your municipality have the capacity to settle more refugees, by region[49]? (N=215).



*Frequencies, percent.

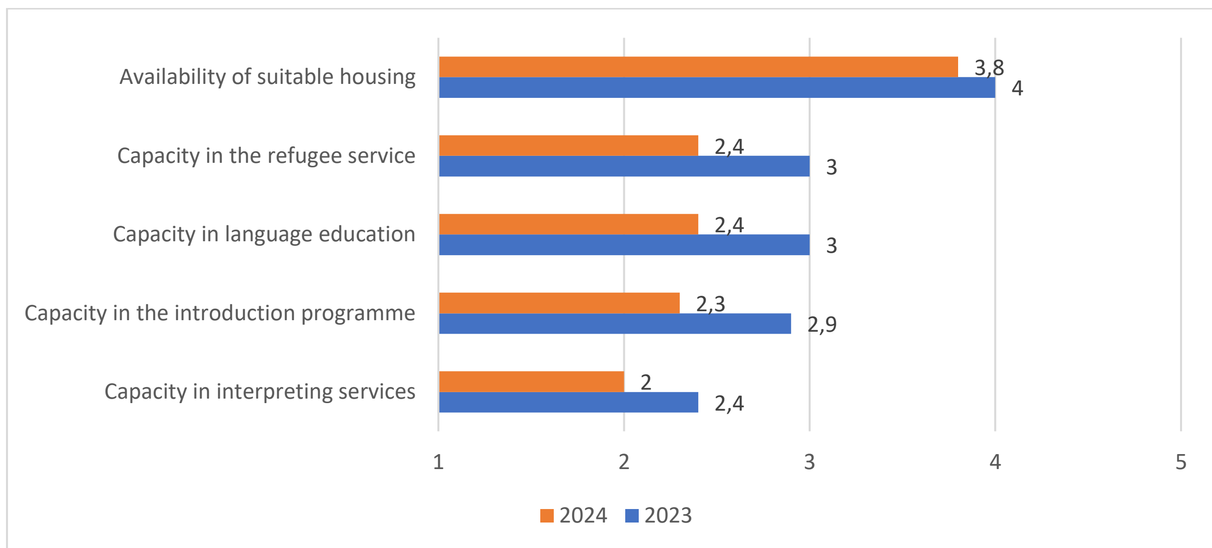
We also observe regional differences in the municipalities' ability to settle more refugees, as seen in figure 20.3. Respondents from Agder and South-East Norway report to a larger degree that they can receive significantly more refugees. Almost 90% of respondents from Trøndelag say they can settle some more, while respondents from Innlandet and Vestlandet more often than others deny that their municipality is able to receive more refugees.

20.2 Barriers towards settling more refugees

The respondents were also asked about issues that challenge further settlement of refugees in their municipality.

[49] In January 2024, the Viken region was dissolved into three counties: Buskerud, Akershus and Østfold.

Figure 20.4: To what extent do these issues challenge the settlement of refugees in your municipality? (initial services/aspects) (N_{2023}=204; N_{2024}=208).

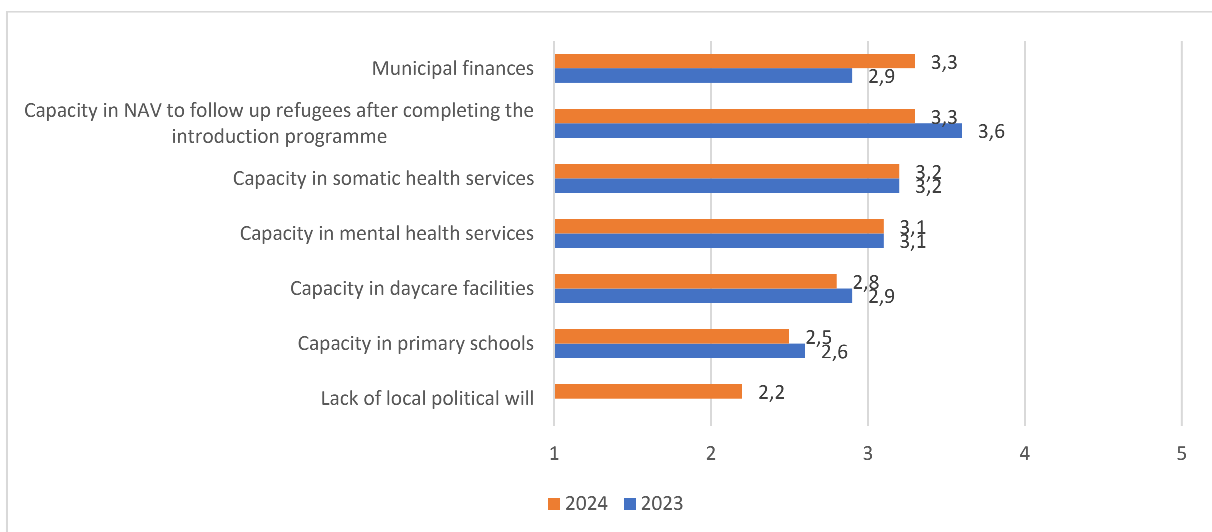


*Means. Scale: 1 = Very small degree; 5=Very large degree.

Figure 20.4 shows that available housing is seen as the main challenge for further settlement. Otherwise, many of the challenges concerning the initial service apparatus are rated less important in 2024 compared to 2023. One remarkable feature is that capacity in the more 'direct' services for refugees seems to be less stretched now than one year ago. The capacity of the refugee service is rated considerably lower, as is capacity in language education, introduction programme and interpreting service. This may be due to the large upscaling of these services the past years. The capacity in language education, introduction program and health services are perceived as a more prominent barrier in the largest municipalities.

Moreover, these services are particularly important in the first period of settlement, whereas other services that fill more permanent needs for the settled refugees are assessed below.

Figure 20.5: To what extent do these issues challenge the settlement of refugees in your municipality? (other services/aspects) (N = 208).



*Means. Scale: 1 = Very small degree; 5=Very large degree.

Figure 20.5 shows the only increase in score for the 2024 survey: municipal finances are perceived as more prominent in 2024 than in 2023. Contrary, although Nav's capacity to

follow up refugees after completing the introduction programme is still an important challenge, the scores are somewhat lower than earlier. Limited capacity in the somatic and mental health services is rated as important challenges in 2024 as in 2023, while there are less challenges with daycare facilities and primary schools.

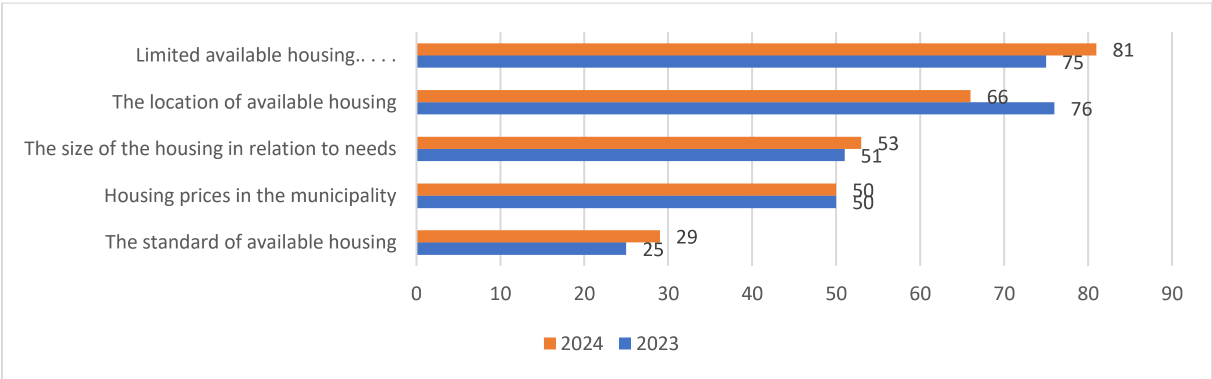
In the 2024 survey, we added a question on whether lack of political will is a barrier for further settlement. There are rather few respondents putting weight on this factor, but 15% report that lack of political will to a very large degree is a barrier in their municipality. 30% answer that it to a certain degree (middle category) is a barrier. 41% find that lack of political will is of minor importance in their municipality, while 15% say that they do not know. There are more respondents from the largest municipalities (17%) answering that lack of political will is an important factor.

20.2.1 Varying housing challenges depending on municipal size

What aspects of the housing situation are important, and how does it differ depending on municipal size?

In this section, we will briefly comment on housing capacity, since almost all municipal refugee service leaders perceive this issue as the most prominent challenge in settling more refugees.

Figure 20.6: What aspects of the housing situation in your municipality pose particular challenges for the refugee service? (N_{2024}=167).

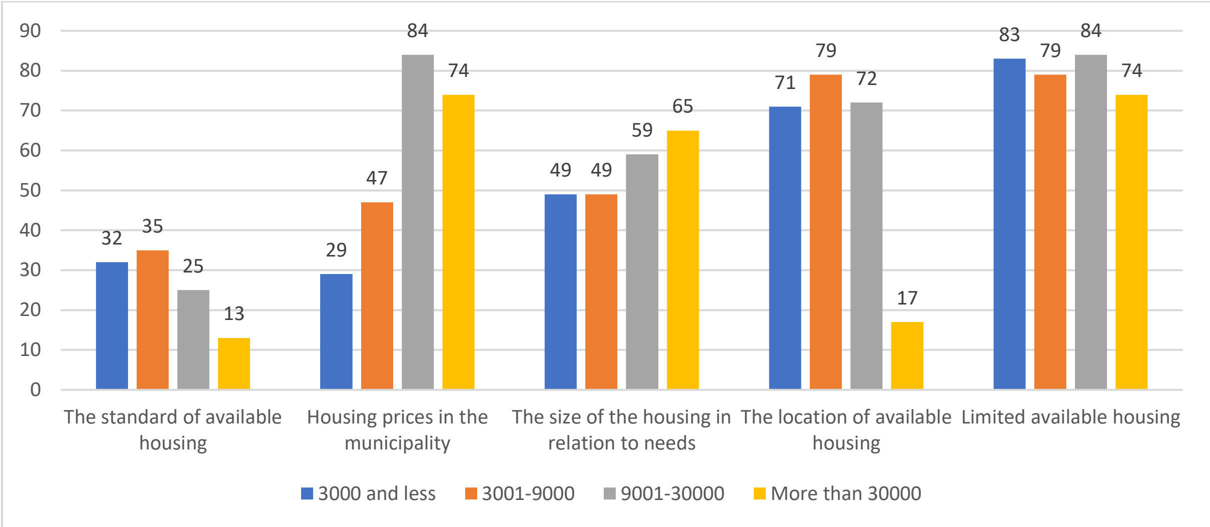


*Frequencies, percent. Only asked respondents reporting that housing to a certain/large/very large degree is a challenge.

Figure 20.6 shows that limited availability of housing is perceived as the largest challenge for further settlement of refugees. More than 80% of the respondents from local refugee services point to this factor. The location of available housing is also mentioned by many, but fewer than in 2023. About half of the respondents mention housing prices and discrepancies between the size of available housing and the refugees' needs.

Further analysis shows that the type of housing challenges differs considerably depending on municipal size.

Figure 20.7: What aspects of the housing situation in your municipality pose particular challenges for the refugee service? (N=167).



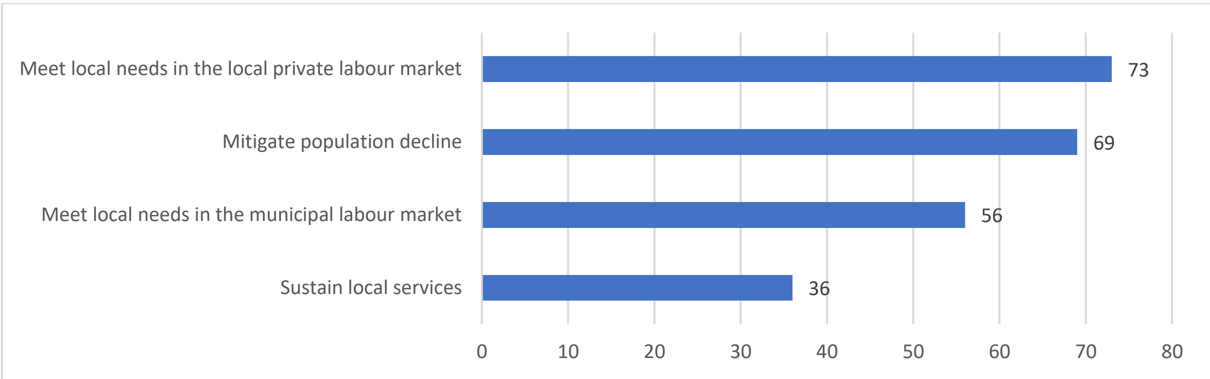
*Frequencies, percent. Only asked respondents reporting that housing to a certain/large/very large degree is a challenge.

Figure 20.7 shows that typically, respondents from larger or more centrally located municipalities are more concerned about housing prices and housing size, while respondents in smaller municipalities tend to emphasise their location. There are no differences across municipal size concerning available housing, as this is ranked high by all municipalities.

20.3 Benefits of refugee settlement for the municipality

We have earlier in this report discussed how refugees may fill positions in the local labour market, and in this way be an important resource for the local community. We have asked our informants from the refugee services how they perceive the possible positive effects of settling Ukrainian refugees.

Figure 20.8: What are the most prominent benefits for your municipality in settling Ukrainian refugees? (N = 208).



*Frequencies, percent.

Figure 20.8 shows that respondents believe that Ukrainian refugees can be a major resource in meeting the needs of the local private labour market (73%) and to mitigate population decline (69%). More than half of the respondents (56%) think that refugees can meet needs in the municipal labour market. Their presence can also contribute to sustaining local services, although fewer respondents consider this to be important. Refugees may, however, play a larger role in sustaining services in municipalities with a scarce population. More than

one third of respondents from municipalities under 30000 inhabitants find that refugees may help to sustain local services. Also, among the smaller municipalities, refugees' role in mitigating the population decline is particularly important. Ukrainian families, particularly refugees with children, are very welcomed as an important contribution to the local communities in many of these municipalities.

20.4 What would the municipalities need from central authorities?

In an open-ended question in the survey, we asked the respondents from municipal refugee services what they would need from the state to settle more refugees. Their answers fill more than 12 densely written pages.

It is important to note that it is refugee service leaders who completed the survey, not top political or administrative leaders in the municipality. As we discuss below, the perspectives of sector or service leaders may differ from those of top leaders, particularly on issues concerning state governance and municipal autonomy. Further, the following description is merely a summary of the challenges and wishes posed by the municipalities in the survey. It has not been NIBR's assignment to evaluate or make recommendations based on these suggestions.

Financial support

Many refugee service leaders point to strained municipal finances and the need for increased financial support, and more predictable financial support, from the state. Some highlight the need to strengthen all municipal services. Ukrainian refugees are of all ages and with service needs much like the regular population, and hence they need all kinds of services. Several respondents mention the need for building better capacity in mental health services and in schools and kindergartens. Some also need support to pay for high dental service costs.

Some mention financial issues concerning refugees moving to other municipalities or going home. They argue that the municipality where they first settled should keep the grants for some time, because it takes time to reduce the services built up to refugees leaving. This will reduce the risk for the municipality and ensure personnel and stability in the municipal refugee work. One respondent demands a clarification of the rules on this point, emphasizing that the original municipality is entitled to the integration grant if there is no agreement on auxiliary settlement in a new municipality.

A couple of informants point to challenges that are more pronounced in the rural areas in Norway, and propose a differentiated grant system, where rural municipalities get higher grants to cover transport costs, work-related measures and support to establish workplaces.

Refugees not being able to work

One topic that is mentioned by many refugee service leaders is the need for increased grants for refugees not being able to work due to age, disabilities or health, as this group represents a heavy burden for the municipal finances. One of the informants writes:

> A state guarantee must be introduced to step in if refugees become long-term dependent on social assistance. As it stands, municipalities face a very high risk by settling refugees on the scale that the state desires.

This group consists party of elderly refugees with no pension rights, partly of younger people with disabilities or other health issues. One of the service leaders says:

> We would like income security for pensioners/refugees above working age. It is challenging to get refugees over 60 years old into employment. Under the current system, they will remain on social assistance as long as they are here. The municipal leadership wishes for a state pension scheme to be established for this group.

Several informants mention challenges with providing disabled refugees with necessary services and appropriate housing. As it is now, their municipality will not be able to settle refugees with extensive health issues. They demand both increased grants and better cooperation with the state:

> It is not possible, for example, to secure housing for these individuals in the private sector, and care homes/institutional placements are far from being covered by subsidies. To be able to settle these individuals, better arrangements must be introduced.

Some mention the need for better assessment of the individual refugee's health and service needs before settlement, so that the municipalities can be better prepared to settle refugees with special needs:

> We might be able to settle more individuals with special needs if they were thoroughly assessed before we were tasked with settling them. When there are significant needs, we need time to plan and staff appropriately before they arrive; we cannot quickly increase staffing or establish services on short notice after settlement. I understand there is pressure on the reception system, but we need better quality assurance of information before settlement, particularly regarding who has access to a car.

The topic of older and disabled refugees was not very present in the data from 2023. Our impression is that this is an increasing challenge for the municipalities.

Housing challenges

Earlier in the chapter, we documented that many municipalities struggle to find houses for the refugees they are asked to settle. Also, in the open-ended question on what they will need from the state, housing issues are emphasised. Lack of houses and high hiring costs are perceived as particularly difficult, and financial support for the municipality to facilitate building and refurbishing of houses are mentioned by many. One suggests that the state establishes a national system for production of modules for basic houses.

Long distances and transport

Informants from rural municipalities with long distances between houses, municipal center and potential workplaces, need financial support to establish better public transport or arrangements for the refugees to get a driver license and cars. Public transport is the responsibility of the county, and some municipal refugee services suggest increased budgets for the counties to provide better transport.

(More) targeted settlement

Some respondents want the state to better coordinate settlement of refugees based on each individual's competence, and what kind of competence is needed in different municipalities and regions:

> Refugees should be assessed more thoroughly before placement to ensure they are settled in locations that maximise opportunities for employment, access to a driver's license/car, and proximity to specialised healthcare services for those in need.

Related to targeted settlement, is also the question of schools for youngsters. Some informants are concerned about the school situation for teenagers and call for better support for 16-18-year-olds in high school. One of the refugee service leaders suggests:

> Rural municipalities should not settle families with children older than 6th-7th grade, as the family needs time to settle in and feel secure in a new country before having to send their eldest child to live away from home to attend high school.

Work-related measures

Many of the comments to the open-ended survey question are about measures to get more refugees into work. This is a topic that is more pronounced now than in the 2023 survey. Our respondents mention the need for strategies to inspire employers to take in refugees:

> Establish a simple subsidy scheme for employers who accept refugees for work practice and work training. They need a financial incentive.
>
> Courses for employers wanting to take in refugees after ending their introduction programme.
>
> 'Employment grants' for municipalities employing refugees in permanent posts.
>
> Work specialists dedicated to refugees.
>
> Development of industry-specific courses in various fields to replace any missing internship opportunities starting from the fourth month.

Strengthening of Nav is mentioned by many, particularly personnel to increase Nav's ability to support refugees into the labour market, but also to make Nav able to follow up cooperation with refugee services.

Predictability and issues concerning the timeframe for Ukrainian refugees

Several refugee service leaders mention the need for more predictability in the settlement of refugees. They find that taking in refugees is quite risky for the municipalities, which may have to scale up and down their services on short notice according to the number of arrivals. They demand greater stability in the financial support:

> We need more predictability. As it stands, a significant number of the Ukrainian refugees we settle choose to return to Ukraine or move on to other countries in Europe shortly after arriving in the municipality or after completing the introduction program.

Some highlight that municipalities invest considerable resources in housing and furnishing, only to have these accommodations left unused when some decide to leave. Other refugee services are concerned about the future:

> With record-high settlement numbers for the third year in a row, the state must assure municipalities that they will receive financial assistance for scaling down settlement capacity when the time comes.

There are respondents criticizing the many changes in national regulations of Ukrainian refugees the past years. This implies uncertainties both for the refugees and for the municipalities. They find it challenging to follow all the changes and wish for greater stability. The respondents report that they put a lot of effort into answering hearings, change information materials and follow-up refugees according to new regulations.

How to handle Ukrainian refugees in the future seems to be a disputed topic among the refugee service leaders. One respondent demands: 'Change the law from temporary to permanent protection. That would make it easier to work with Ukrainians'. Others want tightening of the existing regime:

> Stricter welfare schemes for refugees with collective protection, to ensure that introduction benefits, social assistance, and other financial support do not become so lucrative that they lose the motivation to make an effort to find a job or work for their income.
>
> More individualised processing of residence permit applications to provide the public with assurance that the refugees we accept are truly in need.

20.5 Summary

Since 2022, local refugee services have been scaled up in most municipalities. However, refugees require a wide range of services in their new communities, and there may be several local obstacles and capacity issues in further refugee settlement.

Very few municipalities report the capacity to receive significantly more refugees than they already have. Around 70% say they can settle some additional refugees, while 25% cannot accommodate more. Capacity varies by municipality size and region, with larger cities and those in Agder and South-Eastern Norway reporting somewhat greater capacity.

The primary challenge is the availability of suitable housing. Other key issues include municipal finances, Nav's follow-up of refugees after the introduction program, and limitations in health services. Municipalities report somewhat fewer capacity challenges related to their own refugee services, language training, and interpretating in 2024 compared to 2023.

Municipalities see several benefits to refugee settlement, notably that refugees can fill labour needs in the private and public sectors, as well as help counter population decline. Smaller municipalities emphasise refugees' importance for sustaining local services.

Municipalities call for increased financial support, especially for refugees unable to work (e.g. elderly and persons with disabilities). They also desire more predictability in refugee placements and better collaboration with the state on settling refugees with special needs. Further, they request state measures to incentivise employers to hire refugees and improve transportation solutions in rural areas.

In summary, Norwegian municipalities face a mix of capacity constraints and service delivery challenges in accommodating additional refugees, while also recognizing potential benefits for their communities. Targeted state support and coordination appear crucial for addressing these issues.

Part 4

Current and future challenges, opportunities and dilemmas

21 Current and future challenges, opportunities and dilemmas

In the previous chapters, we have separately mapped and analysed the perceptions and experiences of the Ukrainian refugees and of the municipal refugee services with regard to a number of topics. In this final chapter, we aim to synthesise our findings across topics and data sources to discuss some of the most prominent challenges, opportunities and dilemmas.

21.1 Challenges, dilemmas and future prospects for a diverse group

In the fall of 2023, Norway received more refugees from Ukraine than all its Nordic neighbours combined. As a result, Norwegian authorities introduced several measures aimed at limiting the large influx. Among these measures were significant restrictions on Ukrainians' ability to make short visits to Ukraine, tighter regulations on financial support, and an enhanced emphasis on expectations that Ukrainians should quickly enter the workforce and that their stay in Norway is only temporary. Which impact have such measures had on Ukrainians' living conditions and outlook on life in Norway?

Our study shows that the restrictions have not significantly affected Ukrainian refugees' satisfaction with the reception in Norway or their experience with the Norwegian reception system. The vast majority of Ukrainian refugees rate their interactions with Norwegian national and local authorities very positively. Ukrainian children have, as a rule, integrated well into the Norwegian school system. Further, very few Ukrainian refugees now report that they want to return to Ukraine after the war. However, this does not mean that Ukrainian refugees do not face challenges related to both the ongoing war in their home country and adapting to a life in Norway with an uncertain duration.

Further, Ukrainian refugees make up a diverse group, with different life situations and aspirations. The strong desire to secure employment, highlighted in previous reports, has led to varying results. The interviews and survey from 2024 reveal that some have found jobs that align with their education and qualifications and have secured a perspective for a permanent residence permit through work visas in the future. On the other hand, some refugees have taken on jobs that do not match their previous experience but are happy in these roles. Others view work as merely a means to survive and often switch between temporary jobs. Some refugees who successfully completed the introduction programme are still struggling to find employment in their municipalities, relying on state social support. Meanwhile, elderly refugees have acknowledged their difficulties in integrating into the Norwegian labour market. Many Ukrainian refugees are still arriving in Norway and just embarking on their integration journey. This underscores the need to view this group as increasingly diverse, which calls for flexible approaches and policies to address these differences effectively.

21.1.1 Temporary perspective and thoughts about the future

In the 2023 report, challenges accompanying the temporary status for Ukrainian refugees was an emerging issue. However, the insecurity concerning the temporary status arise as an even more prominent topic in the interviews with and survey of Ukrainian refugees this year, influencing motivation and strategies for their integration in Norway. We also see that the refugees to a larger degree hypothesise and explore different alternatives for ensuring a more secure status in Norway, including plans to transition to a work visa if, or when, they

fulfil the criteria for such a visa. Compared to the collective temporary permit, a work visa has two benefits: 1) residence time on a work visa counts as residence time for permanent residence, and 2) persons who have a work visa are not targeted by the restrictions on visits back to Ukraine, that those who have a collective, temporary permit are subject to.

Overall, we see that as time passes, a higher share of those who have arrived in Norway want to stay even after the war ends. Particularly families with children want to stay in Norway. They are very satisfied with the Norwegian education system and worry about the consequences of yet another uprooting for their children with a potential return.

We find that with residence time in Norway, more people are determined to stay. However, we also find that a larger share of those arriving more recently were even more determined to stay in Norway, which may be surprising at first glance. One plausible explanation is that those who have arrived more recently (in 2023 and particularly in 2024) have made a more deliberate decision to flee and move to Norway than those who fled in the initial period with a more long-term perspective. We also see low trust in the political system in Ukraine, and the survey and interviews raised several concerns with regard to the situation in a post-war Ukraine.

We also see that almost half of the respondents now report that they have their partner in Norway and only 6% have their husband/wife in Ukraine. Moreover, many Ukrainian refugees in Norway worry about how they will be received by the community in Ukraine if they return after the war, which makes some more hesitant to return. Some interviewees have noted a growing tension in Ukraine between those who fled and those who remained.

21.1.2 Life under a dual pressure

Both interviews and survey data from 2024 reveal that Ukrainian refugees are caught under 'dual pressure', receiving conflicting signals from both Ukraine and Norway. In 2022, Ukrainian authorities conveyed a clear message: 'You need to save yourselves,' while Norway welcomed refugees 'with open arms.' By 2024, however, the situation has grown more restrictive in both countries. Ukraine is calling for new recruits for the frontlines and has introduced legislation to expand mobilization efforts (Deineko & Hernes 2024). Ukrainian authorities have made it clear that they need their population to defend and rebuild the country. Meanwhile, Norwegian authorities has explicitly tried to minimise the influx of Ukrainian newcomers with the policy restrictions introduced during the last year. Although Ukrainian refugees generally perceive Norway's restrictions with some level of understanding, many feel that the initial 'freedom of choice' provided by collective protection has gradually eroded, as various aspects of that freedom have diminished over time. Maintaining connections with Ukrainian social circles – whether work-related, educational, or personal – becomes increasingly challenging over time. At the same time, for many Ukrainian refugees, finding employment in Norway is neither an easy nor quick process for various reasons, not least due to the post-traumatic experiences and existential insecurity linked to the ongoing war, which affects every Ukrainian family.

Ukrainian refugees have different ways of tackling the challenges of uncertainty – while some of them become more and more focused on building a life in Norway and see their future here, others choose to maintain "a double life" between Ukraine and Norway. However, the greatest pressure falls on children and youth, who, according to survey results, are often compelled to follow education in both countries simultaneously. The long-term outcome – whether it will lead to double inclusion or double exclusion – remains an open question.

An additional source of pressure for Ukrainian refugees is the ongoing situation on the frontlines in Ukraine, compounded by the uncertain future for the country, particularly in relation to the potential consequences of the 2024 US elections. Every day of Russia's full-scale invasion brings more loss and grief to Ukrainian families, regardless of whether they are inside or outside of Ukraine. Meanwhile, the ability to sustain living conditions in areas

near the frontlines becomes increasingly difficult. 'Will I have someone or somewhere to return to?' – this was a question frequently raised in our interviews with Ukrainian refugees this year. For some of the interviewees, the answer was already 'no'.

21.2 Pressure and challenges evolving through the reception and integration system

As mentioned, Ukrainian refugees have overall been overwhelmingly satisfied with their reception in Norway, even though the Norwegian reception system has experienced almost three years of record-high numbers of arrivals. Despite this positive overall assessment, the process has been challenging for the Norwegian reception and integration services that have had to quickly adapt to the new arising challenges. The yearly studies of municipal services from 2022 to 2024 tells a story of how the pressure and challenges with reception, settlement and integration into local communities have evolved in the Norwegian reception and integration system. While the main pressure was on the initial reception capacity and settlement process in 2022, upscaling the municipal integration services was the most prominent challenge in 2023. In 2024, we find that the reception and integration services have been upscaled and stabilized to a larger degree, but the prominent challenges now are related to the general service apparatus and more long-term solutions combined with a continuing temporary perspective of the Ukrainian refugees' stay in Norway.

As many of the initial challenges with reception and settlement have been addressed and normalised somewhat, two emerging concerns are more prominent in this year's survey of municipal refugee services.

First, the last 2.5 years, the focus has been on upscaling the capacity to accommodate for the record-high number of new arrivals. With the temporary perspective for Ukrainian refugees' stay in Norway, along with prognoses estimating a lower number of arrivals for 2025, several municipalities now raise concerns about what a potential down-scaling of the municipal services would imply. They propose that the state should assure municipalities that they will receive financial assistance for scaling down settlement and integration capacity when the time comes.

Another concern which was emphasised strongly in this year's survey is the question of national financial support for refugees who will not be able to work in Norway, e.g., elderly and persons with disabilities or health issues. While the national policy development the last year mostly has involved restrictions for Ukrainian refugees and work-orientation of the introduction programme for this group, several municipalities stress the need for more financial support to municipalities to ensure a continuing municipal willingness to settle those refugees who (most likely) will not be integrated into the labour market.

21.2.1 Clear work-oriented turn, but not without challenges

The 2024 survey to Ukrainian refugees and the municipalities both illustrate how the introduction programme has become more work-oriented, in line with the new regulations introduced by the government in February 2024. For example, there has been an increase in the share of Ukrainian refugees who report to have work practice and other work-related measures as part of their programme among more recent cohorts. Further, there is an increase in persons who have shorter programmes (six month or less) and fewer municipalities operate with automatic prolongments without an individual assessment. The newly introduced work-oriented regulations also included requirements for minimum 15 hours a week of activities related to work and employment. Although just under half of the refugee services report that they fulfil the expected 15 hours per week as of now, and equally many say they are almost able to meet the expectations. Only 10% are not able to fulfil the expected 15 hours per week.

A challenge reported in the 2023 study was that the criteria for extending the introduction programme were unclear for the municipal employees. However, the 2024 survey shows that there is greater clarity in 2024 than in 2023 on the issue of extension of the introduction program. Similarly, in the 2023 interviews with Ukrainian refugees, a recurring challenge was the uncertainty about potential prolongments of the introduction programme and what would happen after the programme. However, in this year's round of interviews, this was no longer portrayed as a crucial issue.

Overall, our study indicates that municipalities to a large degree have acted to work-orient the programme in line with the new government intentions. However, the implementation has not come without challenges, both from the perspective of the municipalities and the Ukrainian refugees.

The Ukrainian refugees are very divided in their opinion of particularly work practice as an integration measure. For many, it has been a path to employment (directly or indirectly), and those who got work practice in line with their previous qualifications were often very positive. However, many also express their dissatisfaction with work practice, particularly if they experience that they are not able to practice Norwegian, or if the prospects of employment afterwards were absent. Some also highlight that the early work-orientation of the programme (from the fourth month) reduces the opportunity to learn sufficient Norwegian which they deem necessary to get employed. Although the Ukrainian respondents are very divided on this question, several respondents and interviewees have the impression that some employers exploit work practice placements to get free labour.

With the increased work-focus in the new regulations from February 2024, the municipalities are obligated to intensify the work-oriented measures, with work practice being one of the core components. Combined with record-high numbers of introduction programme participants – where almost all are in the target group of shorter work-oriented introduction programmes – the municipalities have increased their search for employers to provide work practice. The municipalities report that the high number of arrivals have made it challenging to find enough work practice placements and that the market is saturated. Further, according to the leaders of the refugee services, the primary concern raised by employers when it comes to accepting refugees for work practice is language skills, particularly when the refugees are supposed to get work practice from the fourth month of the introduction programme. Refugees with poor Norwegian or English skills are seen as placing too great a burden on the workplace and its permanent staff. Several respondents believe that it is too early for refugees to enter work practice after only four months in the introduction program.

When municipalities have to search for a high number of work practice placements to fulfil national regulations, it increases the challenge of securing the potential for learning and development of each individual refugee. Thus, the risk is that in the effort of obtaining enough work practice placements, what the individual refugee will gain from the placement (regarding whether it is a suitable environment to practice Norwegian, learn relevant skills etc.) becomes secondary to fulfilling national requirements. This study has not been designed to evaluate the new work-oriented regulations of the introduction programme, but both the implementation and effects (both short and long-term) of this policy change should be evaluated in future studies.

The interviews and survey of the Ukrainian refugees also show that expectation management is crucial. Although work practice ideally should be an arena for practicing and developing the refugees' Norwegian language skills, work practice may provide valuable experience and recommendations even if it is not possible to practice Norwegian at the respective workplace. For example, it may provide the refugee with experience in the Norwegian labour market and a recommendation letter from a Norwegian employer that may come in handy in future efforts to search for jobs in Norway. However, if the refugee's expectation is that the work practice should lead to employment (at that workplace) and be an opportunity to practice and develop their Norwegian, disappointment will arise. In these

cases, expectation management, and explaining the benefits of getting experience with and recommendations from Norwegian employers could be emphasised.

21.2.2 The municipality as an employer

The study shows that there is unexploited potential for the public sector (and particularly municipalities in need of workforce) to include Ukrainian and other refugees into their workforce, this goes for work practice placements as well as regular employment. Most municipalities – and particularly smaller municipalities – believe that Ukrainian refugees can be a major resource in meeting the needs of the local labour market and to mitigate population decline.

It would therefore be a win-win situation if more refugees could be employed in municipal services with a lack of manpower. However, municipalities often demand formal qualifications and high Norwegian language skills, even for jobs such as cleaning. Our analysis shows that among those Ukrainians who had found employment, about two thirds had found jobs in the private sector, and only one third in the public sector. Those working in the public sector also more often have temporary contracts.

In our study, municipalities highlight challenges that they encounter in their effort to incorporate refugees into their workforce, be it work practice or regular employment. Several municipal refugee service leaders have the impression that there are greater challenges in finding work practice placements or employment within the municipal than the private sector. Some emphasise that the municipal services fail to see the potential benefits of having refugees in their workforce. The importance of political anchoring and signals – that this should be a priority across the municipal services – is highlighted as important for getting the regular municipal service apparatus on board.

Irrespectively of political will, formal requirements do constitute barriers for employment in the public sector, particularly the qualification principle which states that the person who has qualifications best fitted to the position, should be employed. Two elements are important in this regard. The first is whether formal requirements are set too high for municipal positions, particularly concerning standardised language requirements – which are often automatically set at B2 level – without an individual assessment of what language requirements that are actually needed for the specific job. Second, while the qualification principle has been a real barrier for making exceptions for hiring refugees in the municipal services, KS and the local labour unions entered a new agreement in March 2024, outlining rules for when municipalities may bypass the qualification principle (limited to a few positions, and with the aim of including persons who are outside employment, education, and training, as well as individuals with disabilities). This agreement was relatively new at the time of our data collection. Although 30% of the municipalities report to have already used this exception, our study implies that there may be more potential for the municipalities in using this option to increase the labour-market integration of both Ukrainian and other refugees.

21.2.3 Challenges of entrepreneurship and self-employment

Before arriving to Norway, 20% of the Ukrainian respondents in our survey were self-employed. However, only 5% have tried to set up their own business in Norway, and only 1% report to be self-employed. Like in 2023, information about how to start a business in Norway is ranked the lowest of all services, and there is a call for better and more information about how to start a business in Norway. Still, there are two clear obstacles: Ukrainian refugees report examples of being discouraged from starting their own business from public servants. The reason given to the Ukrainian refugees is that it is too difficult to start a business in Norway. It is important to emphasise that these recommendations may be based on these public servants' experiences with challenges (and failures) other refugees have met in their endeavour to start their own business in Norway. Second, the temporary perspective of the

Ukrainian refugees' permits is also a highly relevant factor in this regard. Most often, starting a business is a long-term investment, which may collide with the temporary and uncertain perspective of Ukrainian refugees' stay in Norway.

21.2.4 New reception and integration challenges with an increase of arrivals of (unaccompanied) teenagers

While the Norwegian authorities' prognoses for the total number of refugees for 2025 is lower than for the three preceding years (UDI 2024c), a 20% increase in the resettlement of unaccompanied minor refugees is expected (IMDI 2024b). The analysis based on UDI data shows that there has been a significant rise in the share of male teenagers (particularly those aged 16–17 years) arriving after 2023. This increase may be interpreted in connection with the age limit for serving in the Ukrainian military which is 18 years. Thus, it may be plausible to assume that those aged 16–17 years move from Ukraine (both with and without their family) while it is still legal for them to leave the country (as there are travel restrictions for most male Ukrainians between 18–60 years).

Based on the Ukrainian parents' assessments, our study shows that while the younger children have less challenges with the social integration and Norwegian school system, Ukrainian teenagers face more challenges. With the temporary permits, this group (and their parents) face dilemmas concerning whether they should prioritise Ukrainian or Norwegian schooling, because different choices may influence if they will be eligible for higher education in Norway and Ukraine. Unaccompanied minors may face additional challenges due to a common lack of support networks that could assist them in their social integration.

It is important to emphasise that this project solely builds on data based on adult Ukrainian refugees, and only indirectly investigate the challenges and perspectives of Ukrainian children and teenagers in Norway. In light of the temporary perspective and with the increased arrivals of Ukrainian teenagers, more research about their – and in general, Ukrainian children's – social integration, mental health, educational dilemmas and challenges, is essential.

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