



Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en  
Documentatiecentrum

# The socio-economic position and living conditions of Ukrainian refugees

*A first scan of the literature*

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## Summary

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#### A first scan of the literature

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has forced millions of Ukrainians to flee their country. At the time of writing, over one hundred thousand Ukrainian refugees are living in the Netherlands. Covered by the Temporary Protection Directive, the policy for this group differs from regular asylum policy in several areas. Because of the size of the group and the differences in policies that apply to them, it is crucial to understand the living conditions and socio-economic position of Ukrainian refugees in the Netherlands and in Europe.

In the past year and a half, several studies have been published on Ukrainian refugees both in the Netherlands and abroad. In this literature review, we provide an overview of the findings from these studies to date. The studies cover different topics, regions, and methodologies. The focus of this review is on research conducted in the Netherlands, supplemented by European research (both comparative and single-country studies). Together, these studies provide an initial picture of the living conditions and socio-economic position of Ukrainian refugees. Key findings from our scan of the literature can be found on the next page.

The review shows that although current studies offer useful and insightful knowledge about Ukrainian refugees in the Netherlands and Europe, much remains unknown. For example, we still know little about life satisfaction, living and working conditions in the Netherlands, attachment to Dutch society, Dutch language skills, financial situations, social networks, and perceived discrimination. Even less is known about Ukrainian refugees from a comparative perspective. To what extent do the positions of Ukrainian refugees differ across private and municipal residential locations? To what extent does the policy allowing Ukrainian refugees to work directly contribute to their positions and living conditions?

The findings on Ukrainian refugees should be interpreted with caution. Because the group has been in the Netherlands for a relatively short time compared to other refugees, there has been little large-scale representative research so far. Most studies have used small and unrepresentative samples, unless they are based solely on registration data. As a result, the findings presented in this report are primarily preliminary. While this preliminary overview largely addresses the acute need for knowledge about the group, it is also important for future research to apply rigorous research methods to fill knowledge gaps. For this reason, the Research and Documentation Centre (WODC), in collaboration with Statistics Netherlands (CBS), Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR), and the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM), will conduct a large-scale survey based on a simple random sample representing the population of Ukrainian refugees in the Netherlands in autumn 2023.



# What do we know about Ukrainian refugees in the Netherlands?



## How big is the group?

As of October 2023, there are more than **100.000** Ukrainian refugees in the Netherlands. Although most people arrived in the **first three months** after the war began, the group has gradually continued to grow.

## What does the group look like?

The majority of Ukrainian refugees are **women and children**. Additionally, a large proportion is **single, highly educated**, and had **employment** in Ukraine before the war started.



## Where do they stay?

The vast majority of Ukrainian refugees live in **municipal housing arrangements**. Although some Ukrainian refugees live with **host families**, this proportion is shrinking. Compared to other countries, the share of people living in municipal housing is relatively large.

## Do they work in the Netherlands?

The share of employed individuals among Ukrainian refugees is **high**, both compared to other refugees in the Netherlands and to Ukrainian refugees in other countries. However, a large share earns around the minimum wage and is **overqualified** for their jobs.



## Can they make ends meet?

European studies suggest that Ukrainian refugees often **struggle** to make ends meet. Government support remains the most significant source of daily expenditures, but **income from labor** is becoming increasingly important in this regard.

## How is their health?

There are indications that relatively many Ukrainian refugees suffer from **(mental) health issues**. Nonetheless, it appears that few of them use mental health care. European research also indicates relatively **low life satisfaction** among Ukrainian refugees.



## How are Ukrainian children doing?

Children are often in a **vulnerable** position and have endured a lot. Sometimes this leads to **behavioral issues**. European research also suggests that many children have **mental health problems**.

## Do the children go to school?

**Almost** all children of compulsory school age are **enrolled** in Dutch education. In addition to Dutch education, many students also participate in (online) **Ukrainian educational programs**. Parents generally seem to be **satisfied** with the education their children are receiving in the Netherlands.



## Do Ukrainians already speak Dutch?

Ukrainians are **motivated** to learn the Dutch language. In some cases, proficiency in Dutch is **not necessary** for work, leading to a greater emphasis on learning **English**. European research suggests that the majority of Ukrainians have **not yet mastered** the language of their host country.

## Do they have social contacts?

Aside from potential **host families** and **language buddies**, the social networks of Ukrainian refugees seem to consist mainly of **other Ukrainians**. Many refugees already had family, friends, or acquaintances in the host country before the war.



## Do they want to stay in the Netherlands?

**Most refugees hope to return** to Ukraine within a few years, or when it is safe again. Until then, they primarily wish to remain in the country where they are currently staying.

## How sure are we about these findings?

Many studies had to rely on **small and non-representative** samples to quickly meet the need for information about Ukrainian refugees. The WODC is currently conducting large-scale and representative research on this group, which will allow for more definitive conclusions.



Het Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek- en Documentatiecentrum (WODC) is het kennisinstituut voor het ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid. Het WODC doet zelf onafhankelijk wetenschappelijk onderzoek of laat dit doen door erkende instituten en universiteiten, ter ondersteuning van beleid en uitvoering.

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