



# Needs Assessment of LGBTIQ Displaced Ukrainians in the EU

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## Executive Summary

While the nearly eight million refugees who have fled Ukraine since Russia's invasion on 24 February 2022 have mostly been welcomed in receiving countries, concerns mount regarding the treatment of those who are also members of the LGBTIQ community. As a result of their sexual orientation and gender identity and/or expression (SOGIE), LGBTIQ refugees are exposed to unique vulnerabilities during displacement such as harassment, marginalization, violence, and denial of services. Their protection needs are likewise unique, requiring tailored responses and targeted assistance.

This report presents the main findings from a needs assessment survey of LGBTIQ displaced Ukrainians in the EU. The assessment was undertaken between September and October 2022 as a follow up to a separate assessment conducted by ORAM investigating the needs of organizations and groups providing services to LGBTIQ displaced Ukrainians. While that assessment proved fruitful in providing insight into the operational needs of those organizations, ORAM also highly values the perspectives of the affected population in question. Therefore, the purpose of this assessment was to collect primary data directly from LGBTIQ displaced Ukrainians seeking refuge in the EU through a human-centered approach to solutions development which engenders inclusivity and self-representation. The overall aim is to center their input and feedback in the design of targeted long-term solutions addressing the unique needs of this community in response to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

### Key findings:

- 1) Future migration plans:** The majority of respondents intend to remain in their current country while the conflict is ongoing rather than out-migrating, and eventually return to Ukraine once it is safe to do so. This shifts the focus to local integration initiatives such as local language acquisition to improve employment and integration outcomes.
- 2) Centralized LGBTIQ information source:** Respondents across the EU report difficulties locating and accessing vital LGBTIQ-specific information and resources in their chosen locales, resulting in a lack of knowledge of organizations operating in the area, what services are on offer, and how and where to access them. This has led to difficulties finding community and safe spaces, exacerbating mental health challenges and feelings of isolation.
- 3) Long term housing:** The need for stable long-term housing is increasing in urgency as the situation protracts. Respondents varyingly report rapidly approaching emergency shelter occupancy deadlines, dwindling patience and shifting attitudes amongst private hosts, and a shortage of available housing units all amidst a general backdrop of soaring cost of living and perceived waning political support.
- 4) Improved employment opportunities:** Since all of the respondents intend to remain outside Ukraine while the conflict drags on, and fears mount regarding cost of living, an increasingly flooded job market, and the future of government subsidies, the majority desire stable jobs offering wages beyond entry level.



## Methodology

The purpose of this needs assessment was to better understand the challenges unique to the LGBTIQ minority within the broader Ukrainian displacement context. To this end, primary data was sought in their first-hand experiences and perspectives. To accomplish this, a qualitative approach in the form of semi-structured interviews was chosen for its flexibility in encouraging participants to more fully elaborate on their experiences. Questions were organized into themes of housing, employment, social and legal support, healthcare, education, local integration, and migration. Content analysis and thematic coding were additionally employed to analyze the transcripts for emergent themes. Interviews were conducted remotely via WhatsApp, Telegram, and Zoom. Six required interpretation, which was provided confidentially by staff of the LGBTIQ service organization assisting the respondent in question, as well as an ORAM volunteer, and the rest were conducted in English.

The needs assessment's final sample size totaled **32** respondents in **9** EU member states. Participants were recruited through consensual referrals from LGBTIQ organizations and by snowball sampling.

**Limitations:** Due to the nature of snowball sampling, by which many of the respondents were referred directly by other respondents, the data set does not represent a wide age range. The majority of respondents were aged between 19-28.

| Country        | Number of Respondents |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| Czech Republic | 5                     |
| France         | 3                     |
| Hungary        | 4                     |
| Italy          | 3                     |
| Netherlands    | 3                     |
| Poland         | 5                     |
| Romania        | 2                     |
| Slovakia       | 4                     |
| Spain          | 3                     |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>32</b>             |



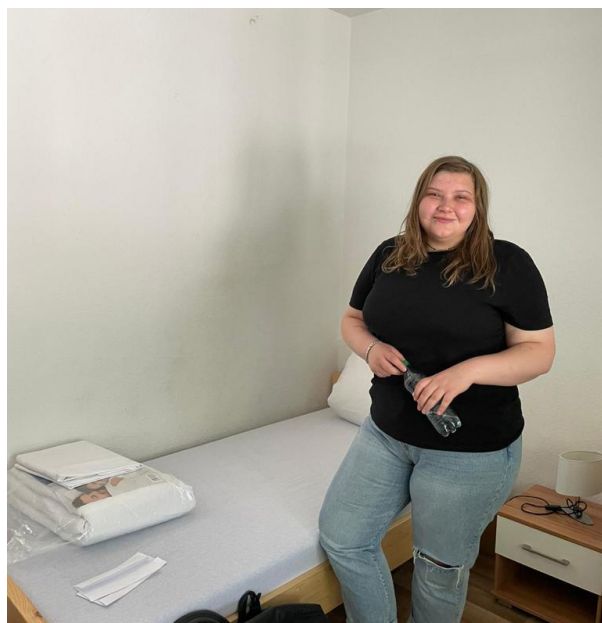
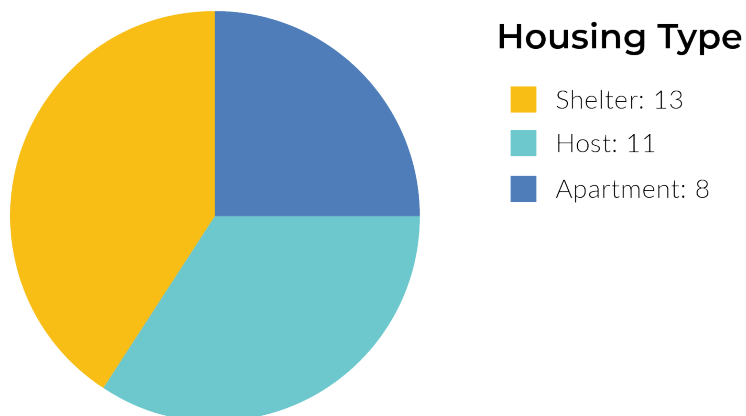
## Results of survey by category:

### Housing:

***“At first we stayed at my dad’s boss’s apartment in Warsaw, but after a month she asked us to leave. Now we are in the shelter, but the final day is next month. We have some money saved, but finding a flat is almost impossible.”***

Of the 32 respondents, 13 were living in shelters, 11 were living with hosts, and 8 were renting their own private apartments or sharing apartments with either locals or fellow Ukrainians. 10 respondents reported finding and securing housing through friends or social media group chats, 16 through refugee and LGBTIQ service organizations, and 6 online. While 3 respondents reported experiencing occasional difficulties with flat mates or their landlord for political reasons pertaining to challenges associated with the high volume of displaced Ukrainians in the EU, only 1 reported experiencing harassment due to their SOGIE.

Stable long-term housing emerged as the primary concern among respondents. This was due to a variety of factors including rapidly approaching shelter occupancy deadlines, shifting attitudes among hosts, high cost of living, shortage of available units, fears around dwindling government subsidies, and a general desire for rootedness.



Notable example: One lesbian couple in Slovakia explained that while LGBTIQ acceptance is marginally better there than in Ukraine, structural barriers remain. Landlords will only rent one bedroom apartments to families, and since notions of traditional family values remain entrenched, queer families are forced to rent two or three bedroom units at far higher prices. Additionally, energy bills by and large run through property management which calculates rates based on occupancy, making it very difficult for one person to simply sign a lease then secretly let their partner live with them. With energy costs soaring and winter approaching, landlords and property managers are making more frequent site checks.



Employment:

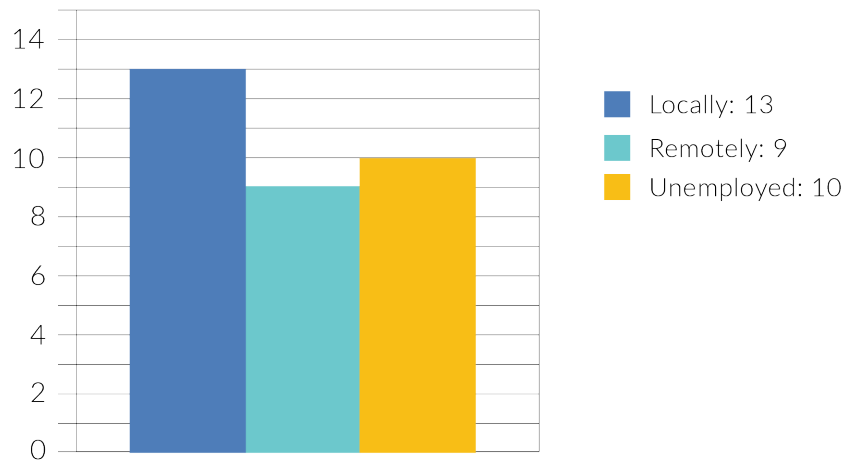
*“I have two master’s degrees and speak four languages, but not Romanian. So, in Bucharest, the only work I can find is in a factory or washing dishes.”*

Of the 32 respondents, 13 were employed locally, 9 had remote jobs with Ukrainian companies, and 10 were unemployed. All 9 remote workers were working for their same employer as before the war, and only 2 of the 13 locally employed had managed to find jobs in their field. Of the 10 unemployed respondents, 8 were actively seeking work.

Employment emerged as a source of anxiety among respondents for a variety of reasons. Those working remotely expressed concern over the plummeting value of the hryvnia against European currencies, and the effect this was having on their salary in relation to local cost of living. Also of concern was job security in the sense of the mere future survival of their employer. For the respondents employed locally, similar concerns centered around the relatively low wages associated with the types of jobs available to them. Eight of the locally employed respondents reported that, while attaining employment was relatively easy owing to the assistance of local organizations, employment agencies, and word of mouth, lack of knowledge of the local language limited their prospects to entry level positions in which English was usable. For the unemployed, the future of state financial assistance was of central concern. This was especially the case for one of the respondents residing in Spain who spoke neither Spanish nor English, is in her 50s, and according to her lacks the technical skillset required for most types of remote work.

Notably, none of the respondents reported facing any employment-related difficulties due to their SOGIE, either during the job search or in the workplace. However, it is important to note that with the exception of the 3 respondents in the Netherlands, the other 10 locally employed actively conceal their SOGIE while at work.

Employment Status



## Social and Legal Support:

None of the 32 respondents reported any major issues accessing social and legal services across the EU. Beyond the standard registration procedures required for all displaced Ukrainians, to date none of the respondents have needed additional services. The issues reported were bureaucratic in nature, such as long delays processing paperwork, long queues at government offices, and general confusion over the process on the part of both the respondents and occasionally officials due to frequent policy and procedural changes.

## Healthcare:

***“We went to four different clinics before someone could help my partner. They kept sending us to different places, and everyone said we were in the wrong place. I think I finally understand Kafka now that I am here (in Prague).”***

Issues relating to healthcare included system navigation, psychosocial support, and language interpretation. All 32 respondents reported challenges understanding and navigating the local healthcare system. A lack of clear information and guidance were cited as primary causes for this, often leading to confusion, prolonged and fruitless Google searches, and being redirected to numerous different departments by equally uninformed healthcare staff.

24 respondents were receiving or had previously received psychosocial support. Of these, 16 were receiving services locally, while 8 were attending online sessions with professionals in Ukraine. All of the respondents in Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary reported long wait times, sometimes upward up two months, for their first session.

Language interpretation for medical and psychosocial services was a consistent issue. Medically-qualified interpreters were rarely available, forcing some respondents to conduct sessions in English despite limited technical proficiency. Two respondents in the Czech Republic reported being turned away from therapy services for not providing their own interpretation.

Notably, aside from occasional “funny looks”, none of the respondents reported facing difficulties relating to their SOGIE in healthcare contexts. Two trans men who had not yet begun transitioning reported extreme anxiety accessing healthcare, resulting in ultimately concealing their gender identity from doctors.

## Education:

None of the 32 respondents planned to attend university in the foreseeable future. They had either completed their studies prior to the survey or had chosen not to continue pursuing their studies under the circumstances. Of all the respondents, only 1 lesbian couple in Slovakia had a child, and reported no difficulties enrolling her in school.

## Local Integration and Future Migration:

***“It is better for us here (in Bratislava),  
but I miss home will go back as soon as I can.”***

Interestingly, with one single exception (in Amsterdam), all of the respondents wish to return home to Ukraine when it is safe. In the meantime, only 2 respondents intend to relocate to a different country (a lesbian couple in Slovakia are planning to move to Amsterdam), while everyone else intends to stay put for the duration.

Issues of local integration revolve mainly around language. Since all of the respondents intend to remain outside Ukraine while the conflict is ongoing, which could potentially be months or years, the focus has shifted to local integration. While most respondents report being able to more or less get by with English in day-to-day life, the practical value of learning the local language is high in terms of access to better paying jobs, more easily navigating systems, and the ability to make friends. Language courses are widely available, but generally only up to the B1 level.

Notably, harassment and discrimination on the streets or in everyday life based on SOGIE were only reported by 2 respondents in Hungary and Czech Republic. Though, interestingly, the assailants were fellow Ukrainians rather than locals. With the exception of the 3 respondents in the Netherlands and 1 in France, the majority reported either not generally “presenting as LGBTIQ”, or after displacement having taken the decision to purposely conceal their SOGIE when in public. Two respondents in Prague reported harassment based on their Ukrainian nationality rather than SOGIE, though perpetrated by Russians rather than Czechs.

**Migration Plans**

