BULGARIA

SOCIO-ECONOMIC INSIGHTS SURVEY 2024

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

CONTRIBUTIONS

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Acknowledgements
This document has been delivered under the provisions of an agreement between the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and Global Metrics Ltd. The report has been prepared by a team led by Radostina Angelova (Executive Director) and Gabriela Yordanova (Research Director) and consisting of Pavel Perpeliev, Marina Popova, Desislava Bankova, Desislava Ilieva, Dimo Getsov, Milena Terziyska, Joanna Nacheva, Ema Dimitrova and Iordan Iossifov.

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The full anonymised dataset of this survey is available on the UNHCR Microdata Library.

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the United Nations or UNHCR. Any errors are the author's own.

CONTENT

INTRODUCTION 4
OBJECTIVES 4
METHODOLOGY 4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 6
RESULTS AT A GLANCE 10
DEMOGRAPHICS 11
- Characteristics of individuals 11
- Respondents' profiles 11
- Household and Population Characteristics 11
- Geographical Coverage 12
- Area of Residence 12
- Arrivals/Length of Stay in Bulgaria 12

PROTECTION 14
- Legal and Civil Status, and Documentation 14
- Specific Needs/Difficulties 14
- Child Protection 16
- Gender-Based Violence (GBV) 17
- Safety and Security 19
- Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) 20
- Priority Needs 22
- AAP – Satisfaction with Aid Workers BehaviourEconomic Capacity 23
- Economic Capacity 29
- Vulnerable Groups 31
- Share of Households with Vulnerability 34
- Information Regarding Services 36

EDUCATION 37
- Attendance/Enrolment 37
- Language Acquisition 42

SOCIO ECONOMIC INCLUSION AND LIVELIHOOD 43
- Education Profile 43
- Current Employment. Challenges for Finding Work 44

HEALTH 46
- Access to Health Care 46
- Child Health 47
- Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) 48

ACCOMMODATION 49
- Expenditure and Security of Tenure 52

SOCIAL COHESION 53
- Relationship between the Refugee and the Host Communities as Perceived by the Refugees 54
- Dynamics of the Relationships between the Refugee and the Host Communities 55
- Reported Experienced Behaviour or Attitudes Perceived as Hostile 57
- Forms of Perceived Hostility 58
- Assumed motivation for perceived hostile behaviour 59
- Social Cohesion: Concluding Remarks 61

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Bulgaria has provided protection to a significant number of refugees fleeing deadly conflicts and seeking asylum, safety and better future through inclusion and integration. Bulgaria has made efforts in establishing safe protection centres and developing various programmes to assist and integrate persons in need of international protection into the society. In order to provide the necessary resources and support, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), together with other UN agencies and various partners, conducted a study to identify the main barriers and needs faced by the refugees who seek safety in Bulgaria. The survey was conducted by agency for social research and analysis Global Metrics and financed by UNHCR.

OBJECTIVES

UNHCR commissioned this Socio-Economic Insights Survey (SEIS) to obtain up-to-date information on the displacement patterns, needs, intentions and coping mechanisms of the refugees, including international protection applicants and those granted humanitarian status. The SEIS is an essential interagency tool for planning and prioritization, decision-making and needs-based programme design.

The main purpose of the SEIS is to support the Refugee Response Plans (RRP) coordination and to facilitate planning among key humanitarian actors by providing updated information on multi-sectoral needs and priorities of refugees. Results of the SEIS will be used by all stakeholders under the RRP to understand the evolving situation, mitigate risks, address vulnerabilities, and advocate for funding from donors.

This report covers the following topics:

- Demographics;
- Protection;
- Education;
- Social Economic Inclusion and Livelihoods;
- Health;
- Accommodation;
- Social cohesion.

METHODOLOGY

The SEIS is a collaborative process that identifies the most pressing refugees' needs across various sectors. Comprehensive and accurate data is gathered to guide the planning, implementation, and evaluation of programmes and interventions aimed at addressing these needs. The SEIS aligns with the Multi-Sector Needs Assessments conducted in 2023 to produce comparative results over time:

- The needs of refugees in Bulgaria, focusing on the in-country refugee population;
- The level of socioeconomic integration and access to national support systems;
- Service gaps and refugees' priorities for the coming year;
- Changing trends in the refugees' needs.

This SEIS was conducted among third-country nationals who are in need of international protection in Bulgaria and have been granted or have applied for international protection. It reviews, among other, protection, health, including mental health, basic needs and food security, as well as livelihood and integration.

The survey was implemented through face-to-face interviews with a digital questionnaire. Thus, the information is obtained by self-reporting. Furthermore, the data collection had a municipal quota, proportional to the

number of refugees living in the municipalities (according to data provided by the Bulgarian authorities). As this process did not include a true randomization procedure, the information presented here is indicative, not statistically representative.

The survey questionnaire pertains to both:

- the individual, and
- the household (HH) needs

of third-country nationals who are seeking international protection in Bulgaria, or who are beneficiaries of international protection.

POPULATION

Refugees and asylum-seekers living in reception centres and in private accommodation in Bulgaria.

DESIGN

Household interviews

DATA COLLECTION

From 14 November to 20 December 2024 by enumerators in service with Global Metrics Ltd.

SAMPLE SIZE

N=352 HHs covered; obtaining information for 613 individual HH members:

- 65% living in collective sites (incl. reception centres)
- 35% living outside of reception centres

GEOGRAPHIC COVERAGE

Interviews were conducted in 5 administrative districts in Bulgaria. The highest number of interviews were conducted in Sofia city (62%), where most refugees live. The second one is Haskovo district (33%). The other locations are Sliven (3%), Stara Zagora (1%), and Sofia Province (1%).

SAMPLING AND REPRESENTATIVENESS:

Purposively selected (geographical coverage, different accommodation types), but not statistically representative. The findings and results are indicative.

LIMITATIONS:

- Data collection during the winter under poor weather conditions and pre-holiday days in December most likely affected the sample;
- Lack of comprehensive data on population locations, and difficulties interviewing out side of collective sites and distribution points;
- Sensitivity related to protection and income questions, therefore, large non-response rate and less reliable data;
- Respondent bias: certain indicators may be under-reported or over-reported due to the subjectivity and perceptions of respondents.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A significant proportion of persons in need of international protection share concerns about their living conditions. The most frequently mentioned living-conditions challenges encompass:

- insufficient privacy;
- insufficient hygiene;
- lack of separate showers and/or toilets;
- insufficient provision of hot water;
- improper conditions to cook and/or store food properly;
- sense of insufficient/lacking protection;
- insufficient temperature regulation/inability to keep warm or cool, etc.

There are also vulnerable groups of refugees with specific needs who require targeted assistance, services and support.

Demographics. Around 77% of respondents are men, respectively - 23% are women. The largest age group is 18-34 years (77%). 85% of the respondents are nationals of Syria. 73% of respondents self-identified as of Arab descent and 22% as Kurd. 74% of the respondents state that their household consists of a single person. The largest surveyed population is the age group of people between 18 and 34 years old (56%), among whom men predominate. There is a pregnant or breastfeeding woman in 4% of all households. The share of people with disability level 3 and above is 5%. Elderly people are 1% of all household members, 30% of the surveyed population are children.

Legal and Civil Status. Approximately 64% of households report they have applied for international protection and are waiting for a decision, while other 33% have been granted international protection or humanitarian status in Bulgaria. This survey also includes a small sample of community members who have recently gained citizenship in Bulgaria (2%), as well as ones who do not have any current legal status in Bulgaria (0.3%), although they fall within the scope of the refugee definition. 70% possess documents proving a written arrangement for their accommodation, and other 11% have only verbal confirmation. Nearly 15% do not have any arrangement or are unaware of any. The majority admit that they are not aware of the available support services in the area they live in. Around 34% declare that they have no document, such as a national ID/ or passport issued by their country of origin, a family book or a birth certificate.

Child protection. According to the SEIS data, a quarter of households have children. In 4% of all households there is a pregnant or lactating woman and infants - in 5% of the households. 30 percent of the surveyed population is composed of children. Many of the parents/ guardians have concerns about the safety of boys and girls under 18 in the areas where they reside. The main worries about the boys relate to psychological abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse. Similar anxieties are expressed about girls, with the fear of sexual violence being significantly more pronounced.

Safety and security. Those inhabiting centra/ dormitories, shared apartments or houses feel somehow unsafe or very unsafe more often than those living in separate apartments or houses.

For women, the most serious security and safety concerns are related to:

- violence threats,
- verbal harassment,
- fear of being deported,

- sexual harassment, and
- violence or being robbed.

For men, the top security and safety concerns relate to:

- being deported,
- being robbed,
- being detained by the police,
- being threatened with violence, and
- having their identity documents seized or confiscated.

Education. About 7% of the surveyed population, corresponding to roughly 15% of the individuals aged 3-24, attend Bulgarian educational institutions. The proportion of those who are not engaged in the education system among those aged 11 and over is visibly increasing. The overwhelming majority of young refugees over the age of 15 remain practically completely outside the Bulgarian education system. The male respondents between 15 and 24 years are practically not attending a Bulgarian educational institution. Among the most frequently cited reasons for not attending an educational institution in Bulgaria are the language barrier and the lack of information on how, where and when enrolment in the educational system takes place. Some 12% of the respondents report that not to attend is a family/household decision or do no specify a particular reason.

Socio Economic Inclusion and Livelihood. Almost 70% of working-age respondents (15-64 years) have primary and secondary education. Primary education graduates are the largest subgroups among both the male and the female respondents, with the proportion of men (49%) exceeding the respective proportion of the women (37%). The largest share of working-age individuals (40%) had been employed before they arrived in Bulgaria. Of the working-age population (between 15 and 64 years old), more than a half, 52%, are currently employed or are looking for work. 28.1% of the young people (16 to 24) are NEETs (not in education, employment or training). The majority (68%) of the surveyed population has found work through social contacts (previous work contacts, friends, etc.). The most common difficulties in finding work are related to not knowing the local language. For only 1% of the refugees (15 and 64) discrimination is a problem when starting working in Bulgaria. The largest share of working household members are employed in the construction sector (41%).

Local language. The majority of the respondents, do not understand the language of the host country. Only about 16% of the interviewed refugees, aged 12-64, believe that they can generally understand Bulgarian. Around 55% believe that language training would help them to improve their financial situation and to benefit from opportunities available in Bulgaria. Nearly 48% emphasized their lack of knowledge of the local language as the main difficulty they face in finding a job. About 22% put language courses among their top three priorities. The language barrier stands out as the leading reason (22%) for children not attending educational provisions (school/kindergarten/nursery) as well as a recognized difficulty to access general health care services and specialized mental-health and psychosocial-support services.

Employment. Approximately 52% of the refugees who participated in the labour force, 38% are employed and 14% are unemployed. Approximately 48% of the refugees are outside the labour force. Approximately 28% of young people aged 16-24 were not in education, employment, or training (NEETs). Around 27%

of households stated that their income in the last month was due to full time employment and another 11% from part time employment. However, the highest proportion of households (53%) admit that they have not had any income in the last 30 days. Among those in work overall, around 47% admit to being employed significantly or somewhat below their level of skills or qualifications. Securing employment and livelihood is highlighted as the highest priority need for 58% refugee households.

Income and Economic Capacity. Only 10% report that they can now afford more goods and services compared to their first months in Bulgaria. 51% of the respondents reported that their ability to afford goods and services remains the same compared to their first months in Bulgaria. However, the same households report that both now and previously they have experienced deprivation and that their income is insufficient for food and basic needs. Other 32% confirm that they can now afford even fewer goods and services than they could initially. Around 55% of refugee households who have found asylum in Bulgaria stress that their income is generally not enough to live on. Another 27% state that their income is sufficient for food but not for regular unities, medication, and new clothes. The overwhelming majority of the respondents with no income in the last 30 days are from single-person households, male up to 34 years of age. Extremely low proportion of households rely on income provided by UN/INGOs funding or social protection benefits by the Bulgaria government. The survey also showed that households with a bank account or an account at a formal financial institution are residing in private apartments or houses outside of the reception centres. Practically almost all who are accommodated in a collective site (reception centres) do not have a bank account.

Coping strategies. A significant proportion of refugee households have adopted at least one coping strategy related to food deprivation, such as relying on less preferred or lower-priced foods or reducing the portion size of meals or the number of meals eaten per day. Also, a significant proportion have been forced to spend savings or buy food on credit or seek loans to provide for their livelihoods.

Priority Needs. The priority needs of the refugee households are employment and livelihoods support (58%), accommodation (44%), legal status in Bulgaria (31%), need to repay debt (23%), and language courses (22%). They are particularly important for vulnerable groups - households with unemployed people, with a chronically ill member and households in need of elderly care. Other vulnerable groups are households with a person with a disability and households with children. In addition to the above-mentioned needs, households with person with a disability prioritize the need for healthcare services. Within households with children, there is a need for baby items and feeding support for babies and children under 2 years.

Health. Access to health services is identified among the top six priority needs for the refugee households. 21% of the refugee household members have experienced a health problem and needed an access to health services. Nearly 39% of them, however, were unable to obtain the needed healthcare, mainly due to:

- lack of knowledge of where to go,
- unavailable services (the needed specific medication, treatment or service were unavailable),
- financial barrier,
- language barrier,
- lack of health insurance in Bulgaria.

Only 41% of households confirm that every household member has a health insurance. Another 41% say they do not have it and 18% do not know if they have it.

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support. 27% have felt upset, anxious, worried, agitated, angry, or depressed in a way that it affected their daily functioning in the past month. This issue was experienced equally among both men and women and was significantly more common among the unemployed then the employed. However, only 21% have tried to seek assistance to address this problem. The main form of support that has been sought is psychotherapy and/or counselling.

Accommodation. The majority of households in the sample live in collective sites, normally reception centres in Bulgaria (65%), other 24% live in separate apartments or houses and 8% share accommodations with others. In general, those residing in collective sites do not have enough income for food, while those living in private apartments are more likely to have enough income to cover basic needs. Nearly 64% of the households do not pay for their accommodation, in most of the cases (57%) the accommodation is being paid by the government, a NGOs, etc., 6% is subsidized by employer and 1% is hosted free by local family. 28% of the households pay all their accommodation costs. Among those living in a place other than a collective site, only about a third confirm that they pay their rent on time, while 28% pay late each month, due to hardship. Approximately 59% of households live in uncertainty about how long they could stay in their current accommodation. Around a third of the households do not experience any problems regarding living conditions in their accommodation. For the remaining households, the most common problems include insufficient privacy (38%), cleanliness of the room (36%) and lack of separate showers and/or toilets (31%).

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

DEMOGRAPHICS

32% Female

68% Male

1.7 HH Size

5% of refugees have a disability

Age breakdown

16% of households with a chronically ill member

PROTECTION

- **64%** applied for international protection and waiting for a decision
- **43%** with challenges in accessing information
- **9%** reporting that the household experienced hostile behaviour or attitudes from the local population since arriving to Bulgaria

EDUCATION

- **15%** of the household members aged 3-24 enrolled in Bulgarian educational institution
- **43%** planned to be enrolled their children in a school/ kindergarten/nursery in Bulgaria for 2024/2025 second semester
- **28%** aged 16-24, NEETs (not in education, employment or training)

EMPLOYMENT

- **38%** Refugees employed
- **14%** Refugees unemployed
- **53%** Employed refugees are engaged in informal work, lacking official contracts

ECONOMIC INCLUSION

- **53%** Households without income
- **70%** Of the families adopt negative coping strategies to meet basic needs

HEALTH

- **8%** having health problem but not able to access healthcare services
- **27%** reporting feeling so upset, anxious, worried, agitated, angry, or depressed that it affected their daily functioning
- **59%** received MHPSS support

ACCOMODATION

- **65%** households living in shared accommodations or collective sites
- **28%** families paying late the rent every month due to financial difficulties
- **9%** families under pressure to leave their current accommodation

PRIORITY NEEDS

97% Households with one or more priority needs

01 **58%** Employment

02 **44%** Accommodation

03 **31%** Legal

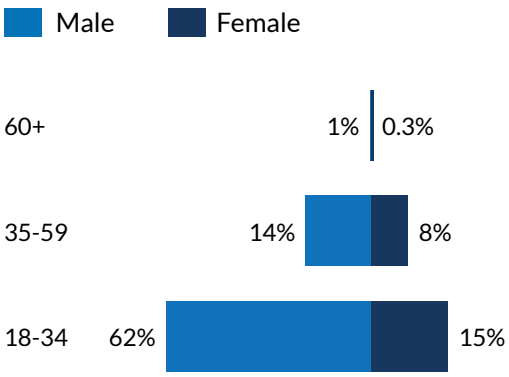
DEMOGRAPHICS

CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIVIDUALS

Respondents' profiles

The survey includes approximately 74% female and 26% male respondents. The most represented age group (53%) are respondents at the age of 35-59. Almost all respondents report having Ukrainian citizenship (99.5%).

Graph 1: **Respondents by Gender & Age** N=600



HOUSEHOLD AND POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

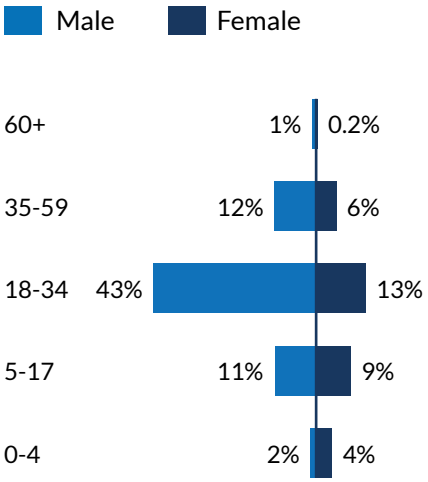
Just under 74% of respondents state that their household consists of just one person, approximately 7% indicated that they live in a two-person household, the same proportion noted that they are part of a three-person household. Only 4% of all respondents are part of households of four or more people. The average number of members per household is 1.7 people.

Approximately 6% of household members are in the lowest age group - between 0 and 4 years, almost 20% fall in the range 5-17 years. The largest group in the surveyed population (56%) is the one encompassing the 18–34-year-old, among whom males predominate. 43% (n=264) of all males in the households fall into this group.

A quarter of households have children and 16% have a member with a chronic illness. There is a pregnant or lactating woman in 4% of the households; there are infants in 5% of the households. it is reported that the woman has the leading role in 21% of the households, and there she is involved in making the important decisions. The share of people with a disability level of 3 and above is 5%. Elderly persons constitute 1 percent of all household members, 26 percent of the study population is composed of children.

1.7 Average HH size	**25%** HHs with Children
% of HHs with a chronically ill member **16%**	% of all HHs with a Pregnant or Brestfeeding Woman **4%**

Graph 2: **Household members by Age Group and Gender**



21% Female Headed HHs	**5%** HHs with Infants
30% Children Refugees	**1%** Older Refugees
5% Individuals with Disability Level 3 or Above	

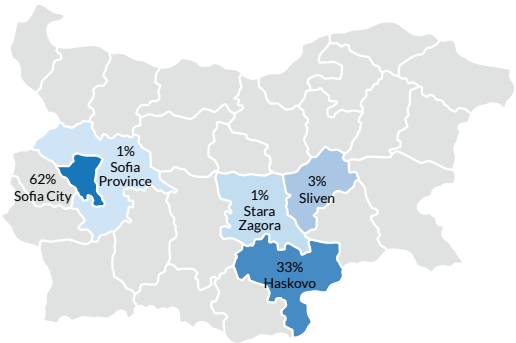
HH sample: 352, covering information for 613 individuals

GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE

Area of Residence

The majority of respondents were interviewed in the district in which they lived. The distribution is as follows:

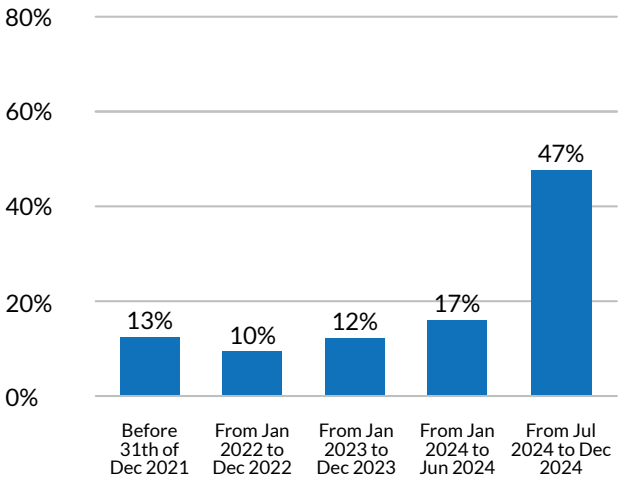
Most interviews were conducted in Sofia city (62%). A third of the interviews (33%) took place in the district of Haskovo, where the Harmanli reception centre is located. Approximately 3% of the interviews were conducted in Sliven district, just over 1% in Stara Zagora district, and the smallest share took place in Sofia district (1%).



Arrivals/Length of Stay in Bulgaria

Ongoing conflicts and instability in the Middle East have led to a surge of refugees seeking safety. The survey shows that there has been a noticeable increase in refugee arrivals in Bulgaria in the second half of 2024. The war in Gazza, the fall of Bashar al-Assad's 24-year regime in Syria, the Kurdish conflict and the clashes in northern Syria have been a catalyst for refugee waves. Often in conditions of protracted displacement, refugees rely on support for asylum, safety and socio-economic inclusion.

Graph 3: **Period of arrival**
N=613



Among the population surveyed, the highest share of refugees arrived in Bulgaria in the last six months (47%) of 2024. Around 72% of refugees arriving between July and December 2024 were men aged 18-34. In terms of gender, new refugee arrivals in the last six months have been male to female in a ratio of 4:1. The majority of them arrived undocumented, only 14% had a national ID card.

About a quarter of school-age children arrived in the last six months, and they represent about 5%

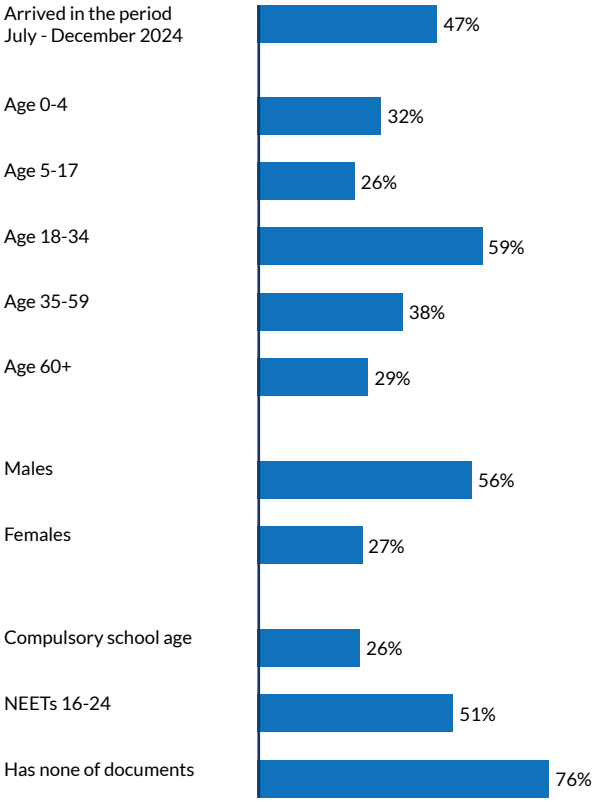
of the total study population and about 10% of new arrivals.

Practically just over half (51%) of the NEETs aged 16-24 have arrived in the last 6 months, while the other 22% - in the first half of 2024.

Among the refugees who participated in the survey, the percentage of arrivals in the first half of 2024 is significantly lower (17%).

Only 9% of those who arrived in the first half of 2024 do not have any identity document. 18–34-year-olds and young people of school age (5-17 years) are most represented among the refugees who arrived before the first half of 2024.

Graph 4: **New Arrivals - refugees arrived in the period July - December 2024 in Bulgaria as proportion of all refugees per category (row %)**
N=281

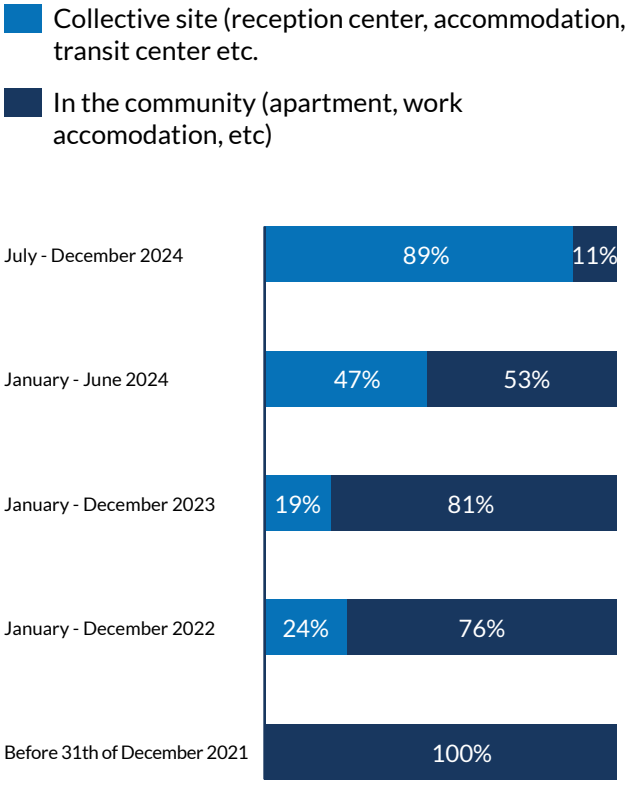


An overwhelming majority of households of the newly arrived in the last 6 months are placed in reception centres (89%), while only one in ten households have the option of living in a self-sufficient accommodation.

The accommodation breakdown of the refugees who arrived in the first half of 2024 is broadly balanced between collective (reception centres) and independent dwelling in the private housing market (53% independent accommodation vs. 47 collective one).

The vast majority of the refugees who arrived in Bulgaria in 2023 or earlier have already got their own housing (apartment, house, work accommodation, etc.).

Graph 5: **Period of arrival vs. Type of accommodation**
N=352

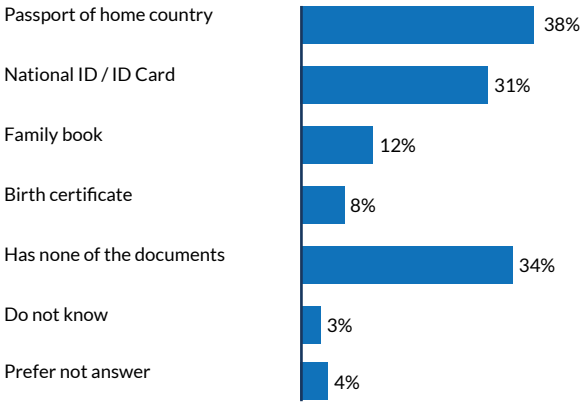


PROTECTION

LEGAL AND CIVIL STATUS, AND DOCUMENTATION

Approximately a third of the refugees or asylum seekers in Bulgaria do not have documents such as a passport or an identity card issued by their country of origin, a family book or a birth certificate, also, due to protracted displacement and failure of state mechanisms during prolonged armed conflict in countries of origin. The highest proportion of those without documents (45%) is observed among those aged between 18 and 35. The proportion is just under 23% in the age group between 35 and 59. It is also noticeable that the proportion of undocumented men is approximately twice as high as that of women (42% vs. 18%), while at the same time there are approximately twice as many male refugees as female refugees.

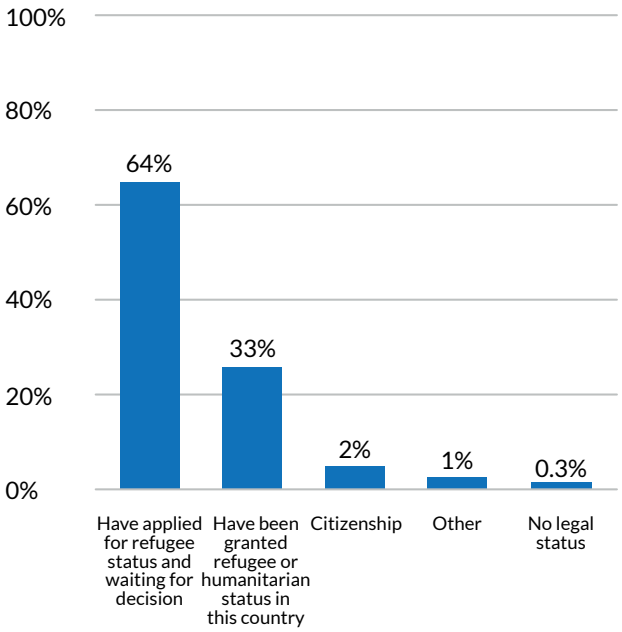
Graph 6: **Does this individual have the following documents?**



47% of those with a passport issued by their country of origin have a national ID/ID card.

Lack of documentation could be a barrier to access to various health services. 51% of people who were unable to get the needed health care did not have any of the mentioned documents. 37% of the refugees without any of these documents still managed to receive health care. The share of those who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status in Bulgaria is 33%.

Graph 7: **Legal status in the country**

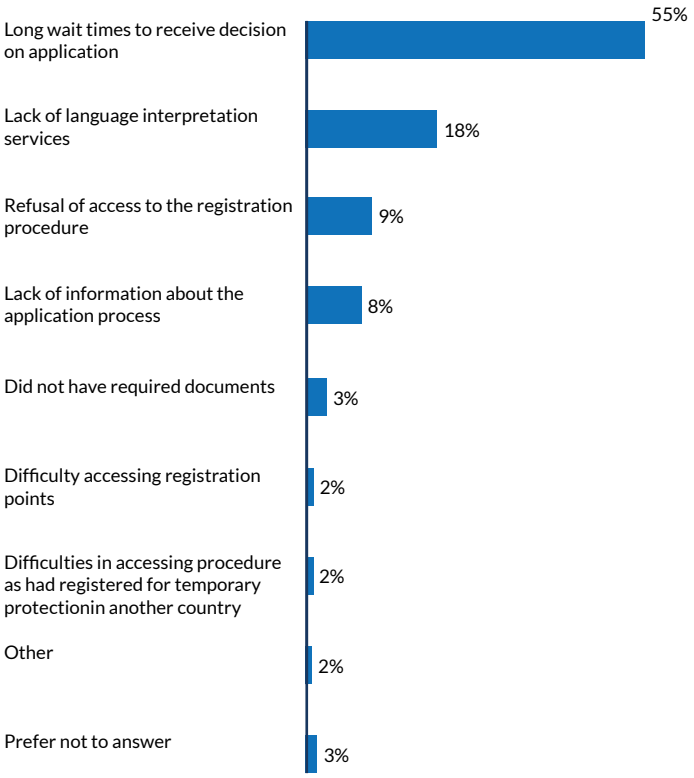


The legal status of persons in need of international protection strongly influences their socio-economic situation. 68% of those waiting for a decision on their international protection applications report that their household income is currently insufficient to ensure sufficient provision of food. This issue is reported by 32% of those with granted international protection or humanitarian status. No such cases are observed among former refugees who acquired Bulgarian citizenship.

19% experienced difficulties during the application process

Approximately a fifth of the refugees experienced difficulties while applying for international protection or humanitarian status. The main problem faced by applicants is the long wait times to receive decision on application.

Graph 8: **What was the main difficulty you experienced during the application process?**



18% report lack of language interpretation services as a difficulty during the application process.

91% had no changes in family composition / civil status since your departure from home country

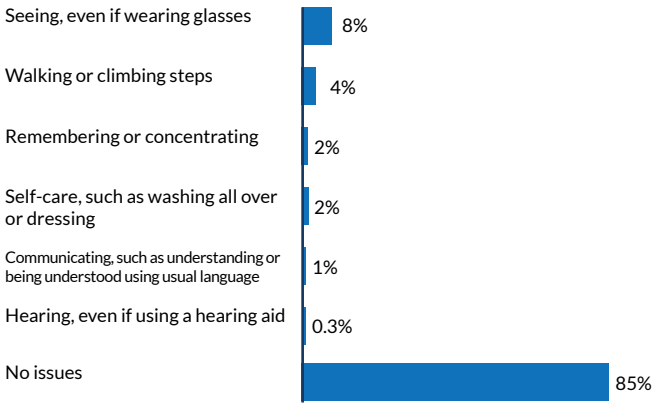
(e.g. birth of a child, marriage, divorce, death of a family member)

Some of the refugees went through major personal and family changes. 9% experienced alteration in the family composition, 5% became parents, 2% married and just over 1% divorced after leaving their country. Less than 0.5% indicate that they had a family member who died. In general, registering such events was not accompanied by challenges: just 7.4% indicate experiencing reporting difficulties, but without specifying the nature of the encountered difficulties.

SPECIFIC NEEDS/DIFFICULTIES

15% of the respondents reported suffering from specific needs and health difficulties.

Graph 9: **Does individual have difficulty with any of the following?**

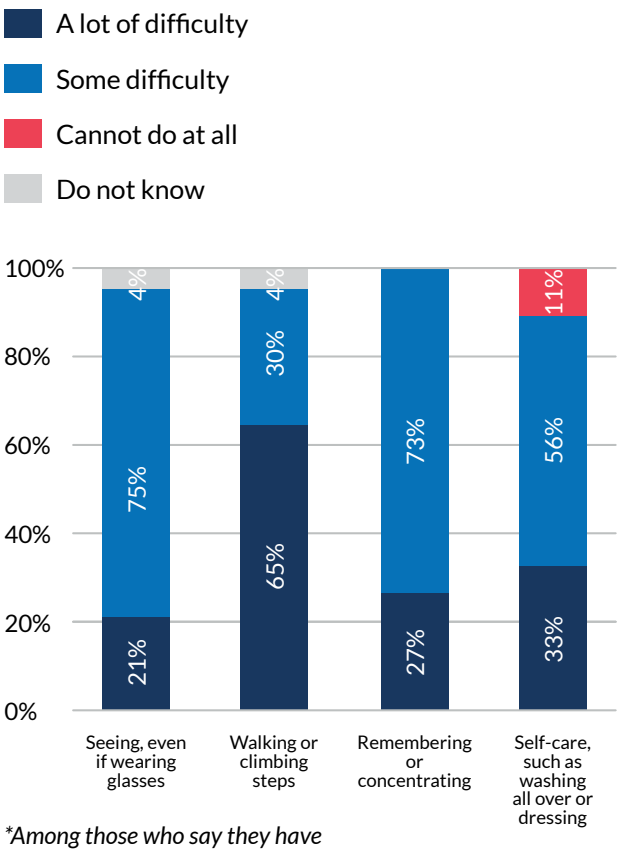


The lack of more serious diseases can be attributed to the fact that the majority of the refugees are young (between 18 and 34). This age group is 56% of all refugees in Bulgaria. While refugees under 60 account for less than 2% of the country's total, they account for half of those experiencing health problems, with around 30% unable to climb or walk-up stairs. Children, aged 5 to 17, also rarely face health problems (7%). Most often the issues faced by

children are related with sight problems (even when wearing glasses) (4%) or communication problems (2%).

It is noticeable that every fifth refugee who struggle to read even with glasses has a serious sight condition.

Graph 10: **Would you say…**



**Among those who say they have trouble seeing, even wearing glasses, and have trouble climbing stairs*

65% of the refugees with problems related to walking or climbing steps state that this poses a lot of difficulties for them.

While only 2% are unable to look after themselves, it should be noted that 11% are unable to manage at all, and around a third experience a lot of difficulty.

CHILD PROTECTION

Many refugee-parents express concerns about the safety of their children in the neighbourhoods where they live. The main concerns for boys relate to psychological abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse. For girls, similar concerns are expressed, but the fear of sexual violence is significantly more pronounced.

27% have no concerns about girls

Graph 11: **Three most serious risks faced by girls under the age of 18**
Top 3

25% have no concerns about boys

Graph 12: **Three most serious risks faced by boys under the age of 18**
Top 3

Interestingly, there are slightly more parent-refuges of girls than of boys who have no safety concerts (27% vs. 25%). Women are significantly more likely to be anxious about children's safety, while men are less likely to have such worries or to be aware whether children in their area are in danger. The data show that twice as many men as women do not have any of the aforementioned concerns.

It is also noteworthy that concerns about children are also prevalent among people who feel safe walking alone at night. Naturally, the respondents who describe the relationship between refugees and the local population as very good are much less concerned about their children: around 45% of them indicate that they have worries about girls and boys under 18.

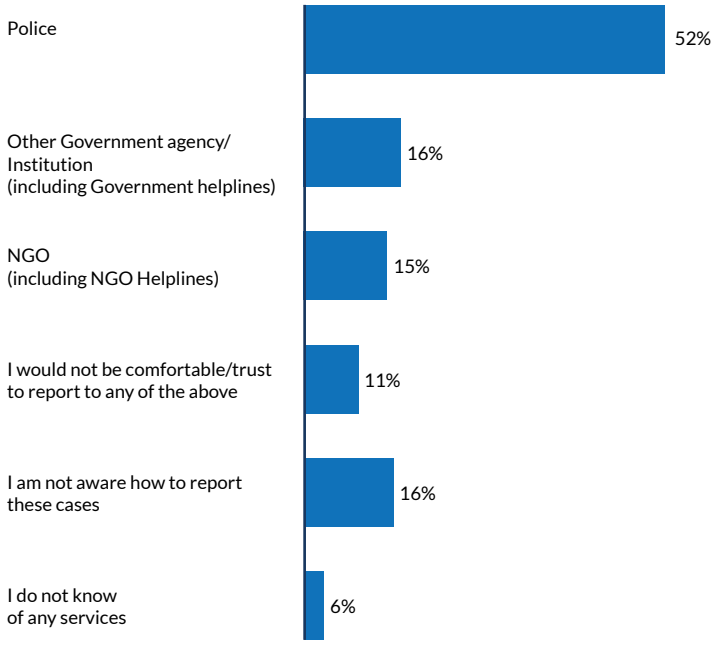
Worsened mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of boys under 18A is a concern shared by 9% of the parents whereas 10% of the girls' parents are worried by an increased risks of their separation from the family and or placement into residential facility. Concerns about possible violence in the children's home were shared extremely rarely (around 2%).

There is a relatively high proportion of refugees who would not be able to report a case of violence, exploitation, or neglect of children in their community. Nearly 30% would not be able to report potential violence because they:

- are not aware of how to do so (16%),
- would not feel comfortable reporting (11%), or
- are not familiar with the designated services that are responsible for such cases (6%).

Just over half of refugees would report to the police if they witnessed a case of child abuse and approximately a third would report to either other government agencies and institutions (16%), or to NGOs. Women are more likely to be unfamiliar with the reporting options and more likely to feel uncomfortable reporting a case of violence, exploitation, or neglect of children.

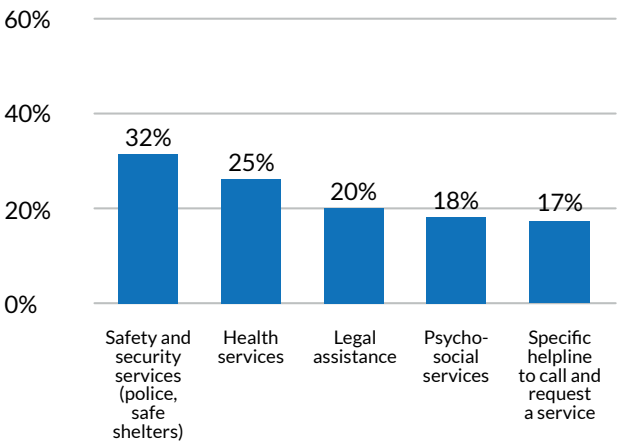
Graph 13: **Who would you feel safe and comfortable to contact to report a case of violence, exploitation, or neglect of children in your community?**



GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)

Awareness about available services to help in cases of gender-based violence is an important to ensure safety among refugees and asylum seekers in the country. The survey shows that safety security and protection services (police, safe shelters) are the most familiar. Approximately every third respondent is able to provide guidance to a person affected by gender-based violence on how to contact the respective services.

Graph 14: **If someone in your community is subject to gender-based violence and asks for your help, would you be able to tell this person about the following services in this area?**

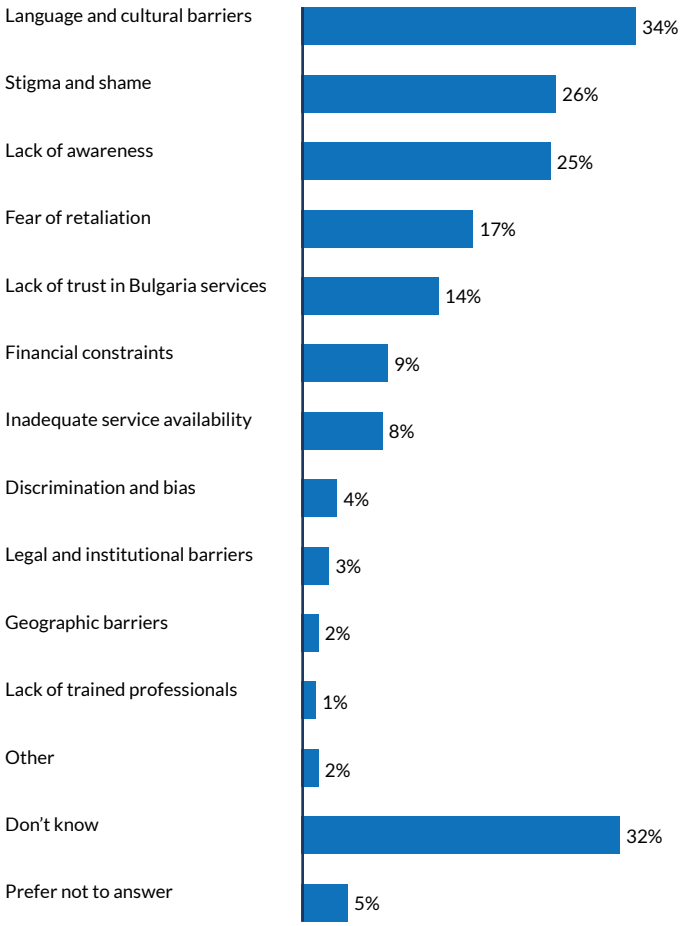


More refugees are aware about the health services that can be reached in cases of gender-based violence than about legal aid and psychosocial support options. Specific helplines are the least known support service. Women are more likely to be familiar with these services. The proportions of men (18%) and women (20%) who know about possible psychosocial services are very similar, while women take a slight lead among the respondents familiar with legal aid options (24% vs. 19%).

Only a third of refugees who feel comfortable contacting the police in a case of child abuse would refer a victim of gender-based violence to the safety and security services, (includes the police). This finding suggests that while refugees are most often familiar with these services, they need to be further informed and reassured about various situations where their assistance might be conducive.

Given that women are more often targets of gender-based violence, the overview of the women's most common safety concerns and the services they might seek support for is not surprising. The respondents who are concerned that women might be victims of domestic violence would most often refer a victim of gender-based violence to legal support (83%) and a specific helpline (83%). Those concerned that women might be victims of sexual violence would most often refer a victim to safety and security services (57%). Every second respondent with concerns that a refugee woman may be a victim of physical harassment know how to refer a person to safety and security services.

Graph 15: **What do you perceive to be the main barriers that survivors could face when trying to access GBV services?**
(respondents can provide more than one answer)

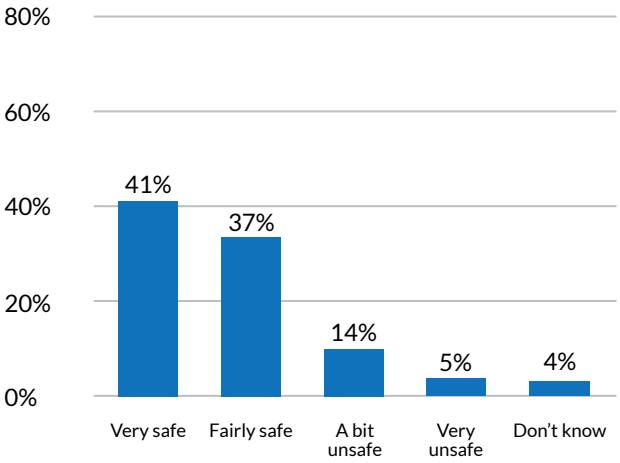


The language barrier remains the main obstacle to contact GBV support services. Stigma and lack of awareness are the next commonly reported barriers. Men are more likely to be unable to identify a specific obstacle (40% vs. 9%), and those who do identify an obstacle predominantly believe that language is a barrier to accessing services. Women, on the other hand, are more likely to attribute lack of access to gender-based violence services to stigma, shame and lack of awareness, in addition to the language barrier.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

The majority of refugees and asylum seekers feel safe when walking alone in their neighbourhood in the evening. However, approximately one in five say they feel a bit unsafe (14%) or very unsafe (5%). There was no statistically significant difference in the responses of men and women. However, it is noticeable that those living in collective sites (24%) and in shared apartments or houses are more likely than those living in separate apartments or houses (4%) to feel a bit unsafe or very unsafe.

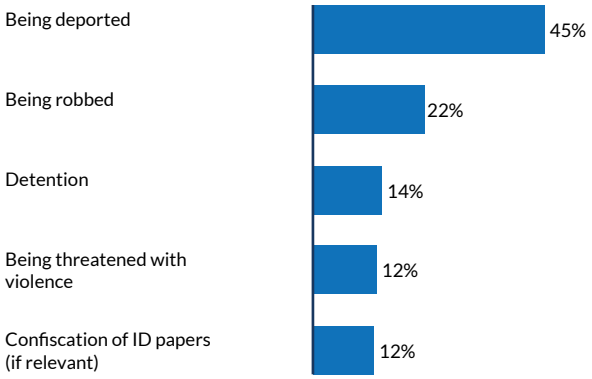
Graph 16: **How safe do you feel walking alone in your area/neighbourhood after dark?**



While a large proportion of refugees and asylum seekers indicate that they themselves feel safe walking in their neighbourhood in the evening (78%), they believe there are some safety and security concerns in general.

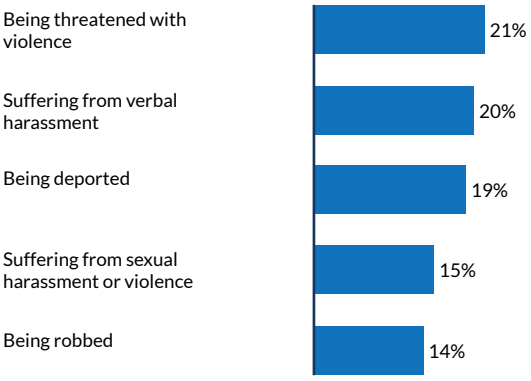
31% have no concerns about women

Graph 17: **Main safety and security concerns for men**
Top 5 (respondents can provide more than one answer)



21% have no concerns about men

Graph 18: **Main safety and security concerns for women**
Top 5 (respondents can provide more than one answer)



Physical and verbal violence are the main concerns about women, with fear of deportation also frequently reported (19%). Fear of deportation, on the other hand, is much more widespread concern about men. Approximately every second respondent indicates concern about the chances of the male refugees to remain in the country. Another common fear is the possibility of being robbed (22%).

The survey among this group of refugees indicates that the main concerns are expressed for men by male respondents (71%) while women worry both for male and female security but to a different express. Those women who express concern about female security are 64%, for male security concern express 46% of women. Only 46% of male respondents express concerns about women in the community.

Concern that men could be deported is significantly higher among men (51% vs. 15%). Just over 55% of men who have applied for refugee status and are awaiting a decision share such concern. The proportion remains high (43%), too, among men who have been granted refugee or humanitarian status in the country.

Women's biggest concern regarding men's safety is that they may be robbed (21%). Men are significantly more likely than women to fear that they may be trafficked (23% vs. 4%) and more likely to believe that they could be subject to threats of violence (31% vs. 20%).

Those placed in reception centres have such concerns more often. The fear of deportation of men in need of international protection is strongest among those living in reception centres (53%) and decreases by half among those living in private apartments or houses.

ACCOUNTABILITY TO AFFECTED POPULATIONS (AAP) AND PROTECTION FROM SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE (PSEA)

25% received any aid in the last 3 months

Every fourth respondent has received some kind of assistance in the last three months. Refugees who have not received support are significantly more likely to rank the need for employment among the top three priority needs for their household (61% vs. 48%). Refugees who have not received support were also more likely to need to acquire legal status in the country (33% vs. 21%). It is also noteworthy that approximately every forth respondent who has not received support in the past three months places paying off debt her/his household's priority need. The proportion of refugees and asylum seekers who have not received support in the last three months and are also under pressure to leave the place where they are hosted is 9%.

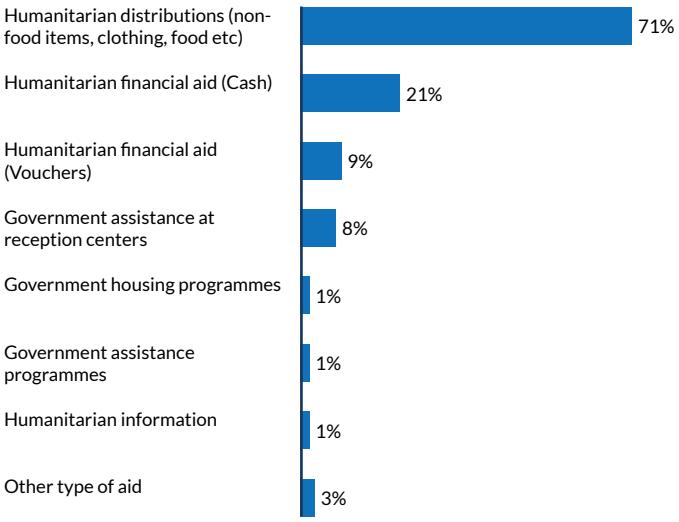
Among those living in separate flats or houses, the proportion receiving support is the highest (47%). Those living in a collective site who have received support in the last three months are around 20%. The situation is similar for those living in flats or houses shared with others.

Those who have received support in the last three months (25%) have most often received humanitarian distributions (non-food items, clothing, food etc.). Just over 20% have received humanitarian financial aid (cash).

Financial support in the form of vouchers has been received by 9%, with the same proportion receiving government assistance at reception centres. Significantly fewer respondents

received government housing programmes (1%) and government assistance programmes (1%).

Graph 19: **What type of aid did you receive?**
(respondents can provide more than one answer)

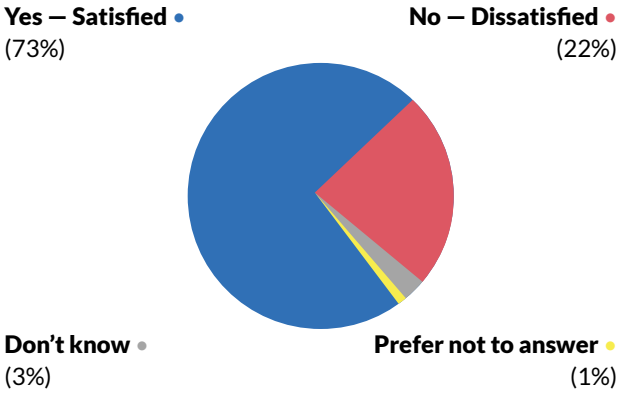


Financial support in the form of vouchers has been received by 9%, with the same proportion receiving government assistance at reception centres. Significantly fewer respondents received government housing programmes (1%) and government assistance programmes (1%).

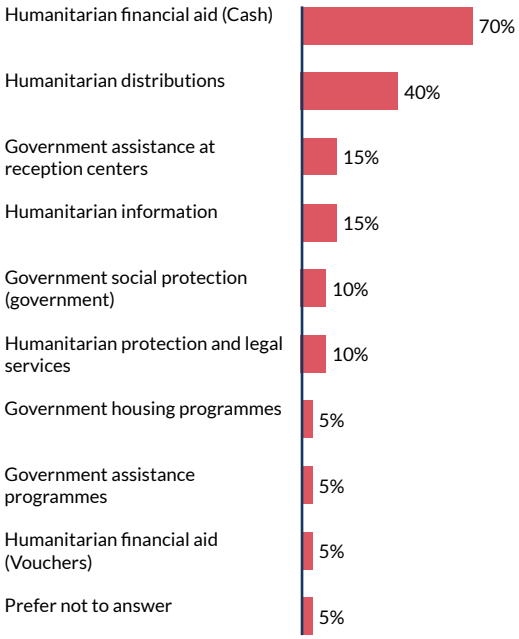
Nearly 75% of those who have got support in the last three months are satisfied with what they have received. Dissatisfaction is reported by 22% of the respondents, with humanitarian financial aid (cash) most frequently cited as unsatisfactory. The humanitarian distributions is the second most often named type of support that has been considered not to be satisfactory (40%).

32% of men have received humanitarian financial aids (cash) and 69% are not satisfied with them. Among women, the proportion who received such support is 14%, but the same

Graph 20: **Are you satisfied with the aid you received in the last 3 months?**

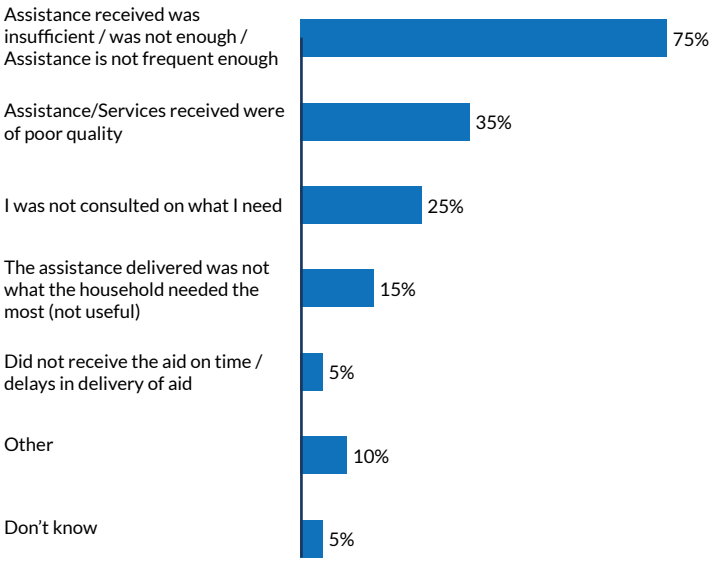


Graph 21: **What type of aid were you dissatisfied with?**



level (71%) of dissatisfaction persists. 23% of the men are commonly dissatisfied with government assistance at reception centres, while no such attitudes were observed among women. Overall, men are significantly more likely to say that a particular type of support is not satisfactory.

Graph 22: **If you were not satisfied, why were you not satisfied with the aid received?**
(respondents can provide more than one answer)



The main reason for dissatisfaction with the received services is that what was provided was not enough or not often enough (75%). A bit over a third of those who has received support in the last three months rate the quality as poor. For 25% the reason for their dissatisfaction is that they were not consulted about what they needed. It is relatively less likely that the support has not been what the household needed or received in a timely manner. Men and women were relatively unanimous in ranking the most serious reasons for dissatisfaction.

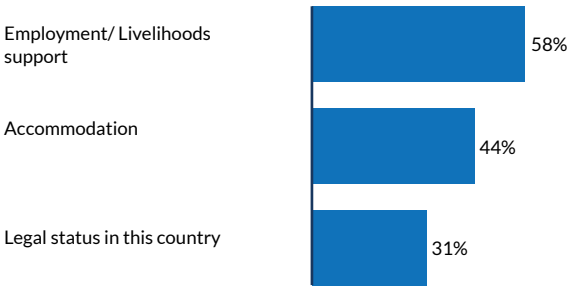
Nearly half of those living in separate flats or houses have received support in the last three months (47%), with the majority being satisfied with the help they got (90%). A bit over 19% of the respondents living in collective sites have received support, but they are significantly more likely to be dissatisfied with it (39%).

PRIORITY NEEDS

The refugee's priority need are employment and livelihood support, accommodation and their legal status in the country.

Those who focused on employment are more likely than others to admit that they have used coping strategies in the last 30 days.

Graph 23: **What are currently the top three priority needs of your household**
(respondents can provide more than one answer)



The refugees ranking accommodation as their leading concern are most often refugees or asylum seekers living in collective site (65%). Under 23% of their peers living in separate apartments and houses prioritise accommodation.

Slightly over 80% of the respondents underlining the importance of their legal status indicate that they have personally applied for international protection and are waiting for a decision.

The proportion of refugees and asylum seekers who prioritise debt repayment is worth noting: 23%. Over a fifth of the respondents (22%) identified language courses as their household's a priority need. The proportion needing health services was 12%. Under 10% of the respondents stated priorities such as need of essential goods e.g. food (8%) and medication (6%).

Refugees granted international protection or

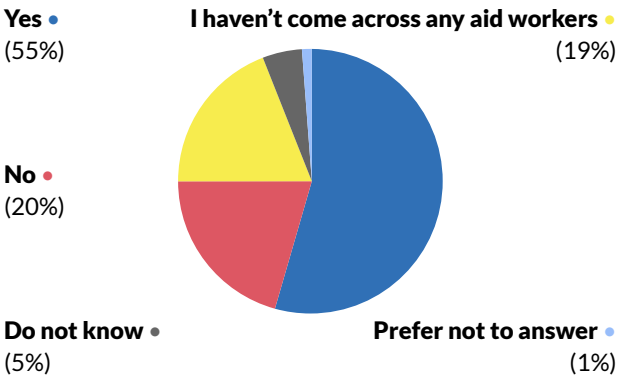
humanitarian status are more likely to need accommodation compared to those who have applied but are still waiting for a decision (53% vs. 41%). The opposite trend is observed with regard to the need for employment or livelihoods support. Those awaiting a decision on their status are more likely to need employment or food support.

Prompt support measures are essential since over 81% of those in need of accommodation have used stress, crisis or emergency coping strategies. Among those in need of employment or livelihoods support, this proportion was 74%, and among those declaring legal status as a priority need: 63%.

AAP – SATISFACTION WITH AID WORKERS BEHAVIOUR

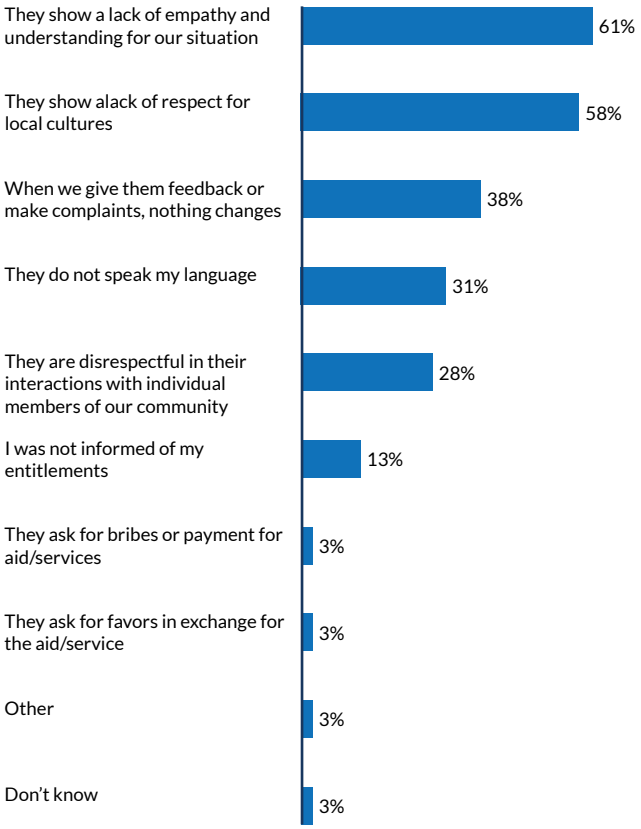
Around 75% of refugees and asylum seekers have had contact with aid workers in their area. However, nearly a fifth of them indicate that they and their family members were not satisfied with the services they received.

Graph 24: **Are you and other members of your household satisfied with the way aid workers behave in your area**



The refugees did not report as a main reason for the dissatisfaction incidents related to corruption (soliciting bribes or favours in exchange for the support they got offered). In the majority of cases, the dissatisfaction was associated with disrespectful treatment and lack of empathy. Nearly 40% of the respondents state that their complaints have resulted in nothing. Just under a third report that the aid workers did not know their language. Men are more likely to be dissatisfied with the way they are treated (25% vs. 6%).

Graph 25: **If you and other members of your household are not satisfied with the way aid workers behave, what are the reasons?**
(respondents can provide more than one answer)

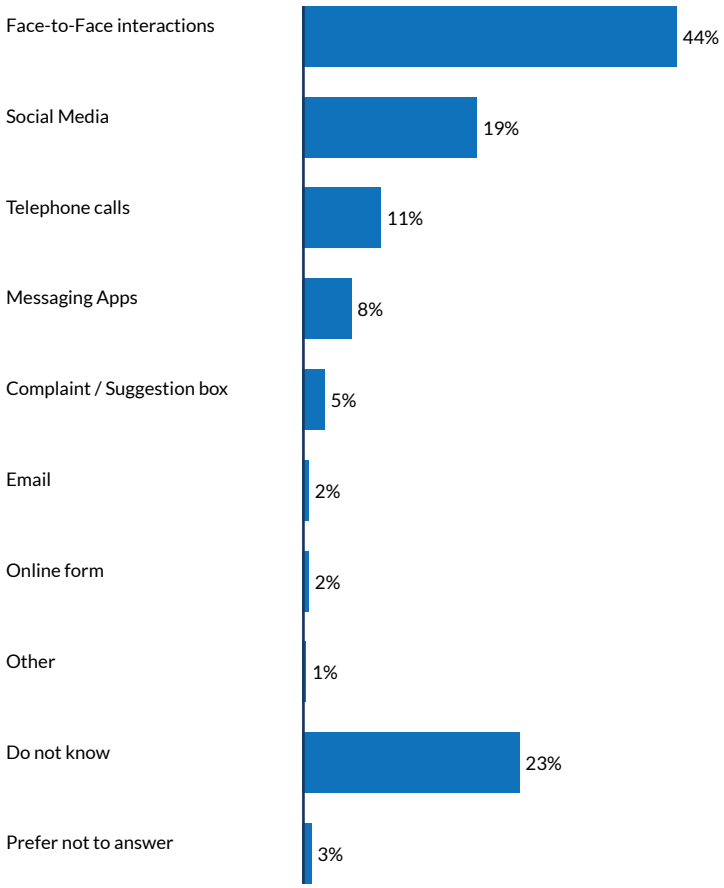


The majority of the respondents do not know where to report inappropriate behaviour by an aid worker. Notably, nearly 80% of those dissatisfied with the services provided by the aid workers do not know where to report

inappropriate behaviour. This is most prevalent among the dissatisfied by the language barrier in receiving support (82%) and among those who felt not informed about their entitlements (89%). Those who felt that workers were not respectful (79%) and not empathetic enough to their situation (77%) are also unaware of the complaint procedures and channels.

63% do not know where to report if they experience/observe inappropriate behaviour from an aid worker

Graph 26: **How would you prefer to provide feedback to aid organisations about the inadequate behaviour of aid workers and other sensitive issues, including request for sexual favours in exchange of assistance and abuse**
(respondents can provide more than one answer)



Most refugees and asylum seekers prefer to report in person rather than via an app, social media or phone. This preference might result from perceived lack of understanding about their situation and lack of knowledge about which institutions might be contacted in such a situation.

The high proportion of those unable to indicate how they would prefer to give feedback on inadequate behaviour to organisations that provide support is notable, too. Yet, the respondents who preferred this answer are mostly the ones who have not experienced inadequate treatment. The respondents subjected to inappropriate treatment who gave that same answer is just 1%.

One-third of the respondents who state that they do not have enough income for food do not know how they would prefer to answer. Among them, roughly half report that they have been subjected to inappropriate behaviour.

ECONOMIC CAPACITY

55% of the respondents highlight that the income of the households who have found asylum in Bulgaria is generally insufficient to feed themselves. The majority of respondents who gave this response are:

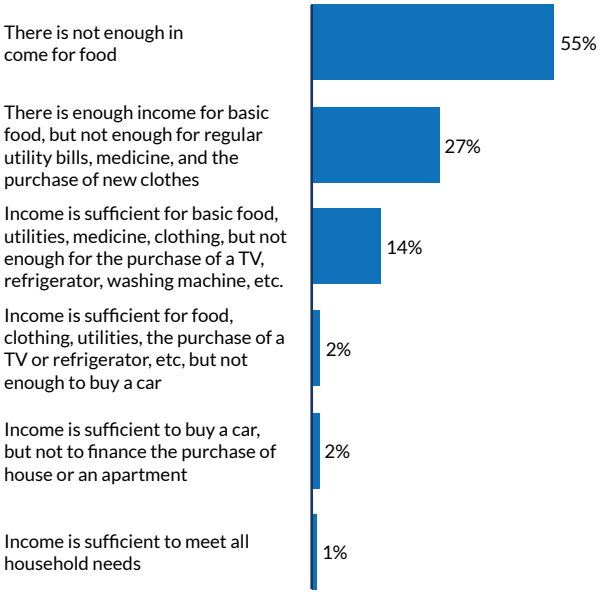
- from single-person households,
- males aged 18-34,
- with no income in the last 30 days.

About 27% of refugees who have been granted protection in Bulgaria state to have enough income for basic food, but not enough for regular utility bills, medication, and the purchase of new clothes. These are mostly those who have full-time or part time employment in Bulgaria (less than 30 hours per week).

Overall, roughly one-fifth of refugee households report having an income that is sufficient for basic food, utilities, medication, and clothing. Among them about 14% indicate that income is sufficient for basic needs, but not enough for the purchase of a TV, refrigerator, washing machine, etc.

Only 1% regard their income as sufficient to meet all their household needs.

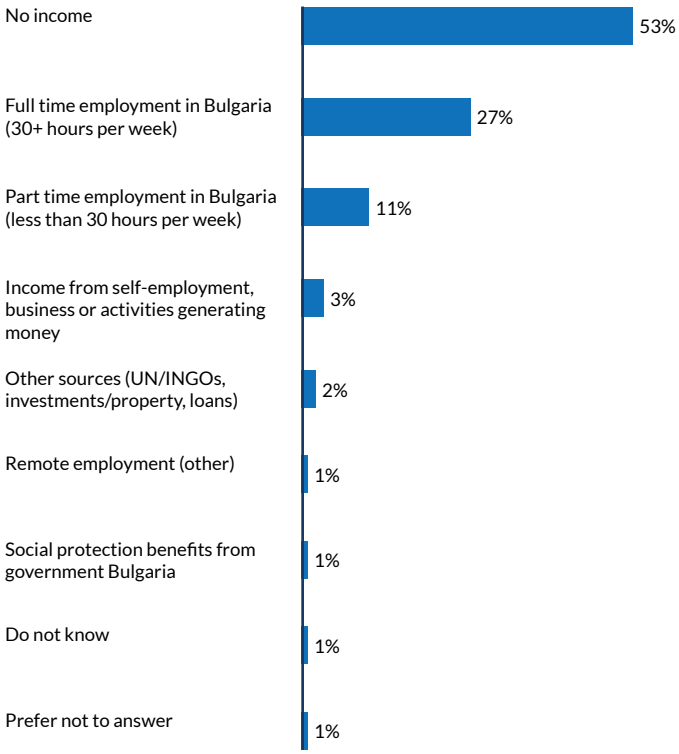
Graph 27: **How would you assess the overall income level of your household?**
N=352 Households



The households, in the last 30 days, report income from:

- full-time employment in Bulgaria - about 27% (n=96),
- part time employment - 11% (n=39),
- self-employment (business or activities generating money) - about 3% (n=12).
- funding from other sources (UN/INGOs, investments/property, loans) – about 2%; (n=8),
- remote employment - 1% (n=3)
- social protection benefits from the Bulgarian government - 1%; (n=3).
- no income - (53%, n=188); single-person households with males aged 18-24 respond most frequently this way.

Graph 28: **What are the sources of your household income in the last 30 days, or since arrival if it was less than 30 days ago?**
N=352 Households



The average net income from full-time employment is 1700 BGN. We should take this information carefully as more than half of the households who have income from full-time employment do not report the exact amount.

The vast majority of refugee households receiving their income from part-time employment (less than 30+ hours per week) (n=39), indicate the that they had an income of up to 1000 BGN (n=27). This group does not exceed 8% of the surveyed population. The average net income from part-time employment is 735 BGN.

The proportion of households whose monthly income is from self-employment, business or activities generating money (n=12) represents no more than 3% of the survey population.

About 1% (n=3) report receiving social protection benefits provided by the Bulgarian government. This support encompasses accommodation allowance and child or family benefits. However, respondents do not indicate a specific amount.

No more than 2% (n=8) of the total survey population report income from other sources, including UN/NGOs, investments/property, loans. Other examples of sources encompass:

- transfers from relatives or friends outside of the country of origin,
- transfers from relatives or friends from the country of origin, and
- cash assistance from humanitarian organizations.

The proportion of respondents reporting household's monthly income from remote employment is markedly low (n=3), no more than 1% of the survey population and not information about specific amounts is provided.

Respondents reporting household's debts to entities in Bulgaria approximate 22% (n=78) of the total survey population; of them, slightly more than the half, report a debt of more than BGN 1000.

Debts owed to households in their country of origin vary with majority of household representatives reporting different amounts in various currencies. Nearly 60% (n=211) have reported having debts before leaving their country of origin.

SOCIAL ECONOMIC INCLUSION

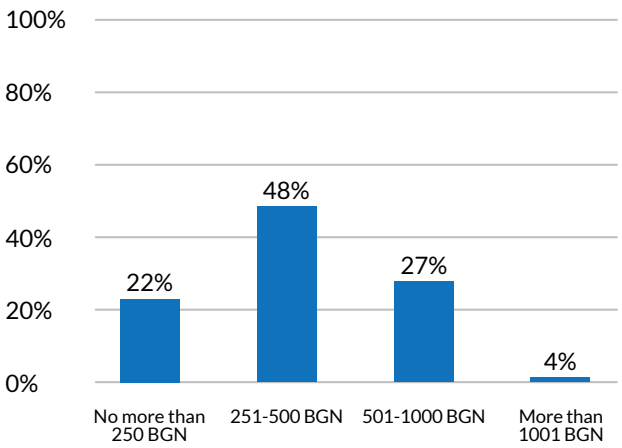
Expenditures in the past 30 days

About 80% (n=280) of the refugee households in Bulgaria provide information on the amounts spent on food in the last 30 days.

On average, a refugee household spends around 400 BGN on food in the last month (NB: at the time of the data collection). Most report food expenditure between 250 and 500 BGN.

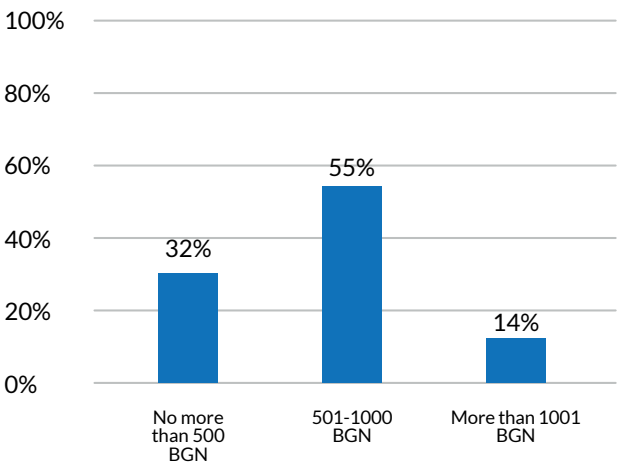
Respondents from refugee households who had been without income for the past 30 days more often stated that they had spent no more than 250 BGN on food, while those with full or part-time employment were able to spend between 250 and 1000 BGN.

Graph 29: **During the past 30 days, what amount did your household spend in BGN on food items**
N=280



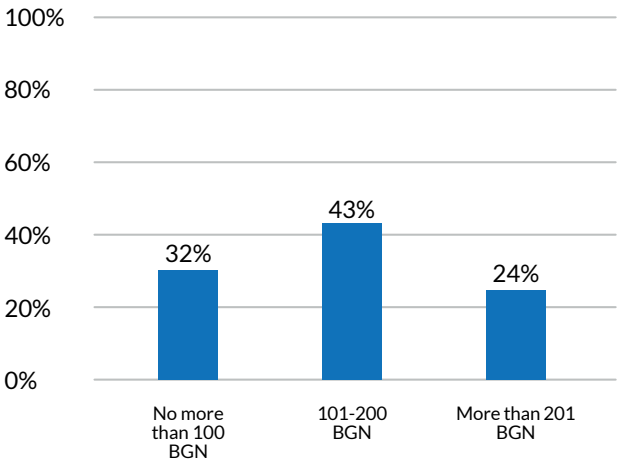
About 30% (n=104) of the refugee households in Bulgaria report accommodation costs in the host country, Bulgaria (rent, mortgage, etc.). The average amount spent on accommodation (rent, mortgage, etc.) approximates 700 BGN.

Graph 30: **During the past 30 days, what amount did your household spend in BGN on accommodation in Bulgaria (rent, mortgage, etc.)**
N=104



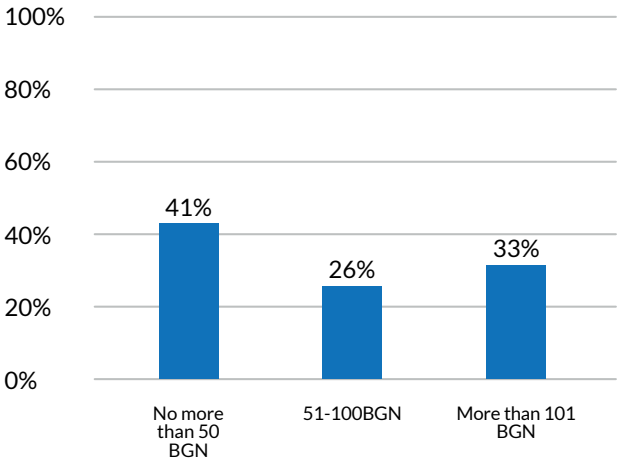
On average, refugee households who had found asylum in Bulgaria have spent approximately 190 BGN on utility costs (e.g. electricity, water, gas) in the last month.

Graph 31: **During the past 30 days, what amount did your household spned in BGN on household bills (incl. electricity, water, gas, etc., in addition to rent)**
N=99



The average expenditure on medication and health products, is around 70 BGN. Approximately 43% (n=153) of the households report this type of expenditure. Among those who responded, one-member households are more likely to have monthly expenditure on medication up to 50 BGN and households with two or more members are more likely to have monthly medication expenditure above 50 BGN.

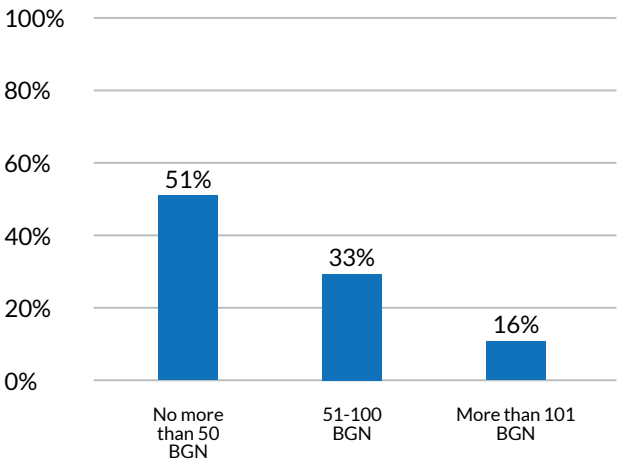
Graph 32: **During the past 30 days, what amount did your household spend in BGN on medicine & health products?**
N=153



The average monthly household expenditure on hygiene products is around 80 BGN, the most frequently occurring response being 50 BGN.

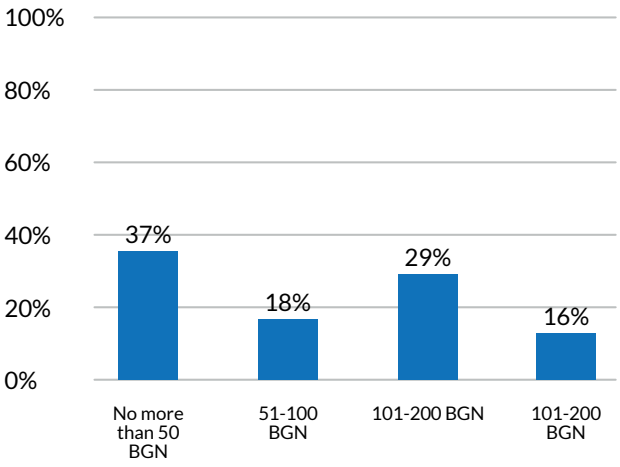
The average monthly household expenditure on communication services (internet, mobile phone bills, phone calls, etc.) is around 45 BGN. The most frequent answer, mainly referring to one-person households with men aged 18-34 is 20 BGN and general the expenditure of one-person households in is up to 50 BGN. Monthly expenditures on internet, (mobile) phone bills etc., over 50 BGN are predominantly made by families with two or more members.

Graph 33: **During the past 30 days, what amount did your household spend in BGN on communication (internet, mobile phone bills, phone calls, etc.?**
N=302



The refugee households' monthly costs for transport, alcohol, cigarettes, entertainment and similar expenses approximate 140 BGN.

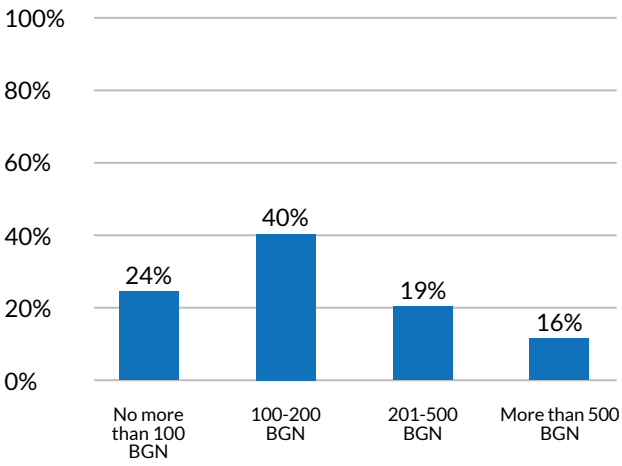
Graph 34: **During the past 30 days, what amount did your household spend in BGN on other (including transports, tobacco, alcohol, entertainment & any type of other expenses)?**
N=223



Expenditures in the past 6 months

A low proportion of households are willing to share information on cost for health services (excluding medicine) in the last 6 months. No more than 19% (n=67) give an answer to the question: "During the past 6 months, what amount did your household spend in BGN on health services (excluding medicine)?" The ones who respond to it most frequently mention the amount of BGN 200.

Graph 35: **During the past 6 months, what amount did your household spend in BGN on health services (excluding medicine)**
N=67



No more than 9% (n=32) of the survey population of refugee households are willing to share information about formal and/or informal debt repayment in the last 6 months. Approximately 44% (n=14) of those who respond, owe an amount up to (including) BGN 1000; the remaining 56% (n=18) owe an amount over BGN 1001.

Only 8% (n=29) of the survey population report spending on education in the past 12 months. Among these respondents, the quoted amounts average 750 BGN. No significant statistical

difference is observed between single-member households and families with two or more members with respect to this indicator.
Only 11% (n=39) estimate the proportion of spending in the last month with respect to the percentage of the expenditures funded by credit. An average subjective estimate made by the respondents amount to 60%.

ECONOMIC CAPACITY

The vast majority of households do not have a bank account or an account at a formal financial institution. Only 12% (n=42) of households report having such accounts. Respondents from households with two or more individuals are more likely to have an account than individuals forming a single-person-household.

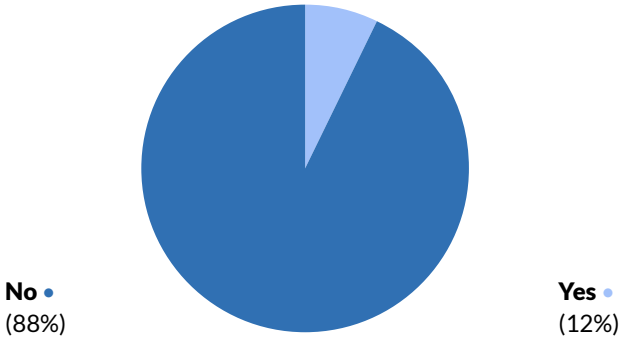
The majority of households having accounts live in separate apartments or houses. Virtually all respondents accommodated in collective sites (reception center, accommodation center, etc.) do not have bank accounts.

The majority of households not having enough income for food do not have a bank account or an account at a formal financial institution either.

Among households with an account, there is a significantly lower proportion of those who have had to implement coping strategies to reduce basic needs.

51% of respondents report that their ability to afford goods and services remains the same compared to their first months in Bulgaria. These are more often households reporting that their income is currently insufficient for food and households reporting that their income is sufficient for food and basic needs but insufficient for regular utility bills, medicine, and the purchase of new clothes. It should be reminded, though,

Graph 36: **Do you currently have a bank account or account at a formal financial institution in Bulgaria, either by yourself or with someone else?**
N=352

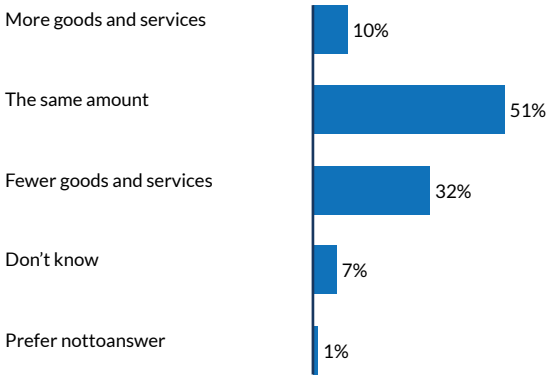


that the 47% of the respondents arrived in the last six months before the survey took place.

Around 32% of the respondents believe they can now afford fewer goods and services than they could originally.

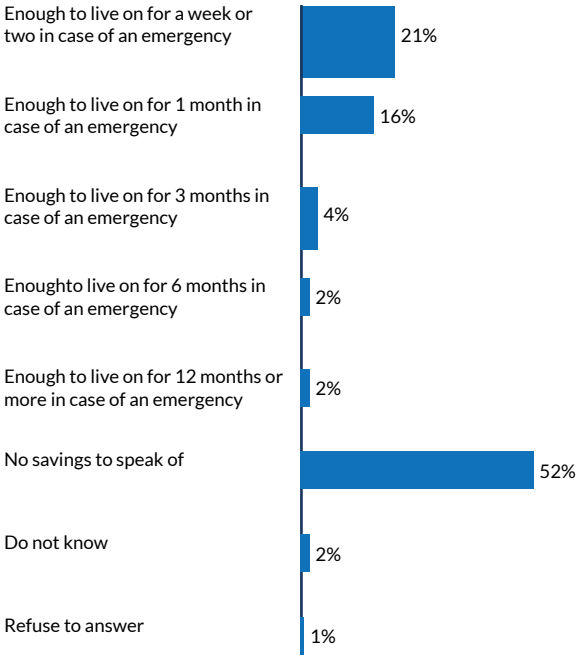
10% of the respondents report that they can now afford more goods and services. Among these, the highest proportion are those who had a monthly income from full-time employment.

Graph 37: **Compared to your first months in Bulgaria, do you think you can now afford more goods and services, the same, or fewer goods and services?**
N=352



A high degree of financial vulnerability characterizes a significant proportion of the refugee households in Bulgaria. Around 52% (n=183) report not having any savings. The majority of them are households without any income in the past month and without sufficient money for food. Overwhelmingly, the households without any savings are one-person households, mainly males in the 18-34 age range.

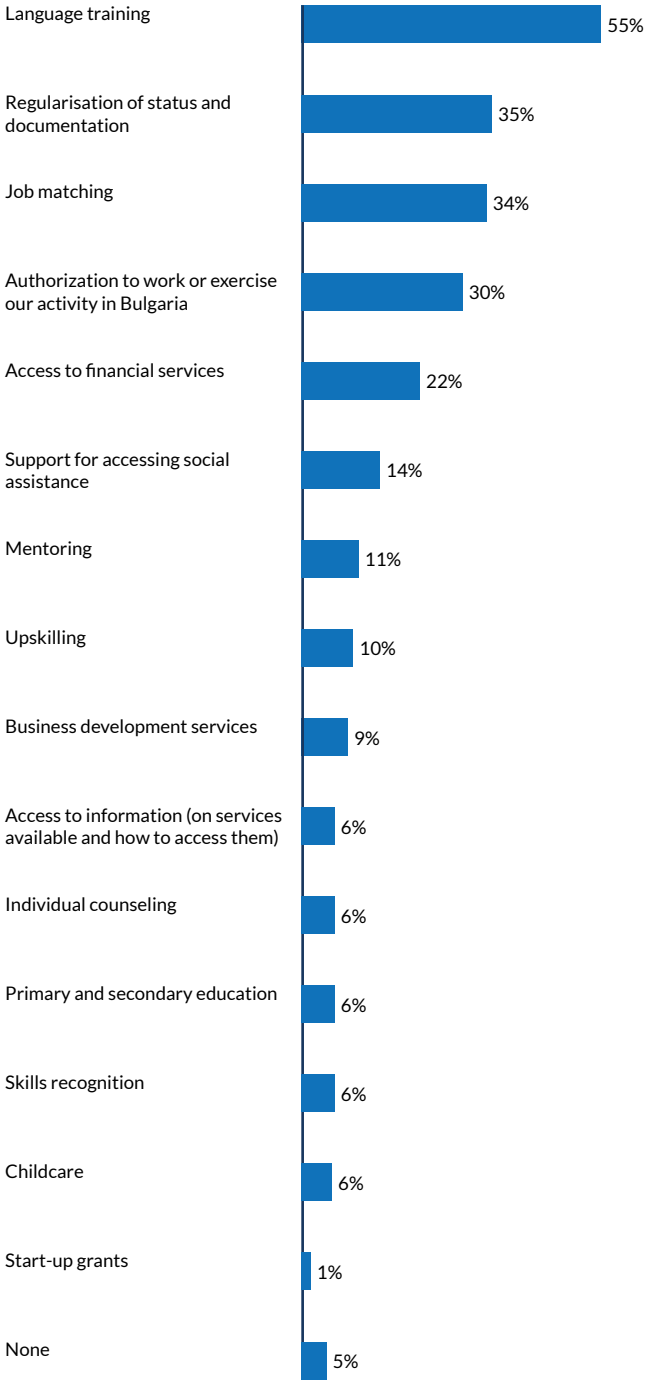
Graph 38: **How would you characterize the amount of savings that your household posesses?**
N=352



About 21% (n=73) of the households possess limited savings sufficient to cover emergency needs for a week or two, and about 16% (n=57) could rely on their savings for a month, if needed. The proportion of households with enough savings to cover a longer period (3 months or more) is considerably lower (around 8%).

In terms of services that could help improve the financial situation and opportunities of refugee households, language training is a top priority, followed by settling their status, finding a job, a work permit and access to financial services.

Graph 39: **What services would help you improve your financial situation and opportunities in Bulgaria?**
(respondents can provide more than one answer)
N=352



The need for language training as a top priority is reported by 55% (n=195) of the respondents. It is preferred by both people without income and those in full-time employment. Clearly, overcoming the language barrier is essential to improve the financial situation and to access more opportunities and services in Bulgaria.

Acquiring legal status is also considered a serious step towards improving the refugees' financial situation. Around 35% (n=124) of the households strongly felt that ensuring appropriate status and documentation was a key factor.

To better their financial situation and opportunities the refugees consider employment (34%, n=120) as one of the top three desired changes. This statement is shared by both people with no income in the last 30 days and those in employment, whether full-time or part-time.

Nearly 30% (n=105) of the respondents highlight the need of a work permit or conduct their activity in Bulgaria.

Nearly 22% (n=78) emphasize that access to financial services is important for the financial inclusion of refugees in the host society.

VULNERABLE GROUPS

About 74 per cent of the refugee households participating in the survey are one-person households and 26 per cent consist of two or more members (about 7 per cent are households with up to two members and about 19 per cent are households with three or more members).

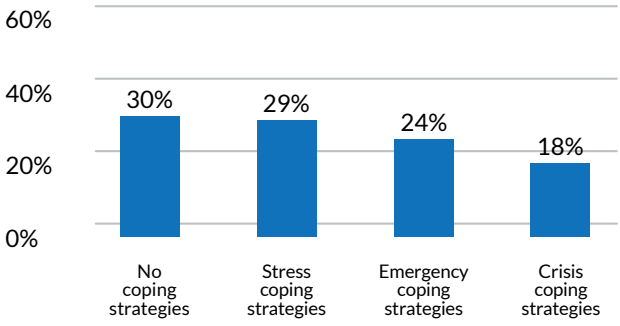
Nearly 70 per cent of refugee households report using some coping strategies in the last 30 days; approximately 30 per cent of households do not apply any coping strategies.

About 29 per cent had to implement stress coping mechanisms: including spending savings, selling household assets/goods, purchasing food on credit or borrowing food, migrating (entire household) / becoming displaced.

About 24 per cent of households had to implement emergency coping mechanisms (engaging in high-risk or dangerous work/ activities) in the last 30 days.

About 18 per cent had to implement crisis coping mechanisms - reducing essential health expenditures, withdrawing school-aged children or youth from school/university, selling productive assets or means of transport, reducing essential education expenditures.

Graph 40: **Share of households by coping strategy**
N=352 Households



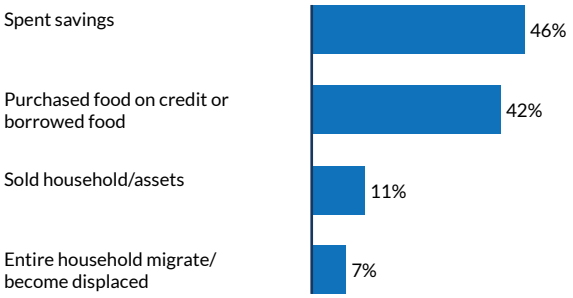
Livelihood Coping Strategy Index – Stress Coping Mechanism

Share of families using Stress Coping Mechanisms

A significant share of refugee households who have found asylum in Bulgaria had to resort to

coping strategies in the last month due to lack of resources to cover basic needs, including food, shelter, health and education. The most common strategy are spending savings (46%) and buying food on credit or borrowing due to lack of resources (42%). Household goods and assets are sold in 11% of the cases or, more drastically, the entire household has had to migrate (7%).

Graph 41: **Share of families using Stress Coping Mechanisms**
(respondents can provide more than one answer)
N=352 Households



About 46% (n=160) of the refugee households participating in the survey admit spending savings in the last 30 days to cover basic needs, including food, shelter, health costs, education. Among one-person households, this share is 43%, and among households with two or more members - 50%. This answer is more frequently given by respondents up to the age of 34 and refugees located in Sofia.

Around 42% (n=147) admit that their household had to buy food on credit or borrowing or to cover basic needs in the last 30 days. Among one-person households, this proportion is 43%, and among households with two or more persons – 39%. This answer is more frequently given by respondents located in Sofia.

Approximately 11% (n=37) of the refugee households report selling household assets/ goods (radio, furniture, TV etc.) in the last month to cover basic needs. This response is given more commonly by households with two or more members, mainly located in Sofia.

About 7 per cent (n=25) of refugee households report that they had to migrate/ become displaced due to a lack of resources in the last 30 days. The overwhelming majority of them are single-person households - males up to 34 years of age, located in Sofia.

Food Coping Strategy – Reduced Coping Strategy Index (RCSI)

Share of families who relied on coping mechanism at least once in the past week

A significant share of refugee households report that on at least one day in the last 7 days they have had to rely on a coping mechanism to manage a lack of food or money to purchase it.

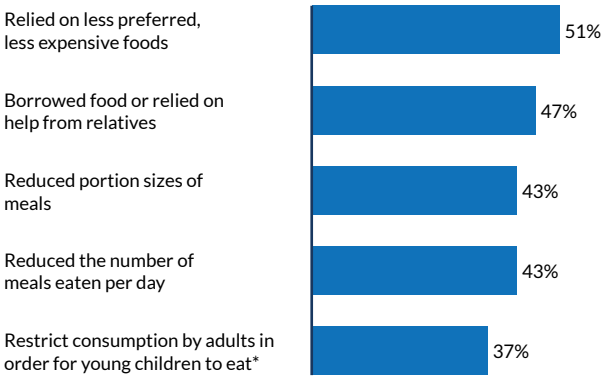
About 51 per cent (n=181) of the refugee households had to rely on less preferred and less expensive food at least one day in the last week. This answer is more often given by men, single-person households, aged 18-34, located in Sofia.

Around 47% (n=164) have borrowed food or relied on help from relatives on at least one day in the past week. This response is more often given by males aged 18-34, from single-person households.

On the other hand, about 43 per cent (n=150) of the refugee households report that reducing portion sizes of meals on at least one day in the past week, and another 43 per cent (n=150) - reducing the number of meals per day. Mainly males in the age range 18-34 years, the majority of them being one-person households give on these two answers.

Focusing specifically on households with children aged up to 17, which represent about 19 per cent (n=68) of the households in the entire study population, approximately 37 per cent (n=25) report that on at least one day in the past seven days, adults had to restrict their food consumption so that young children could be able to eat. These responses are given mainly among female respondents, mostly aged 25-44, from households with two or more members, predominantly localized in Sofia.

Graph 42: **Share of families who relied on coping mechanism at least once within the past week**
(respondents can provide more than one answer)
N=352 Households
*N=68 Households with children aged up to and including 17



Share of families using Crisis coping mechanisms

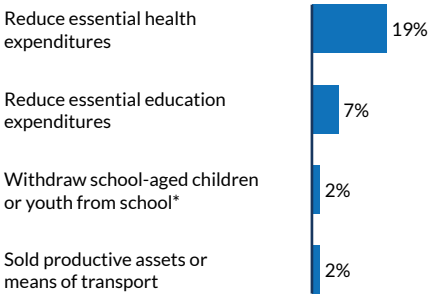
About 19% of the households (n=68) have reduced their essential health expenditures in the past month due to lack of resources. This strategy is twice as common among households with two or more members (33%) as among single-person households (15%). This answer is mainly given by respondents located in Sofia, slightly more often occurring among women, mostly up to 34 years of age.

Around 7 per cent (n=24) of the households declare that they have reduced essential education expenditures in the last 30 days due to a lack of resources. This is more often reported by single-person households, males in the 18-34 age range.

About 2 per cent (n=6) indicate that due to lack of resources to cover basic needs they sold productive assets or means of transportation (sewing machine, bicycle, car in the last month. This response is mainly given by one-person households.

Approximately 13 per cent (n=47) of the study population are households with children of compulsory school age (between 6 and 17 years old inclusive). Only one respondent (2% of households with children; 0.3% of the total survey population) reports withdrawing a child from school due to lack of food or lack of funds to buy food, in the last month.

Graph 43: **Share of families using Crisis coping mechanisms**
(respondents can provide more than one answer)
N=352 Households
*N=47 Households with children in compulsory school age (6-17 y.o.)



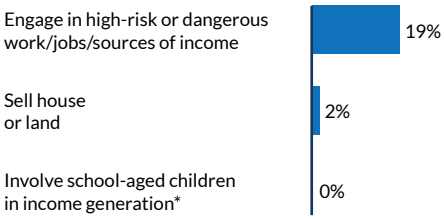
Livelihood Coping Strategy Index – Emergency coping mechanism

Approximately 19 per cent of households indicate being engaged in high-risk or

dangerous work/jobs/activities due to a lack of resources to cover basic needs in the past month. The majority of respondents reporting such sources of income are males in the 18-34 age range, single-person households.

The proportion of those reporting engagement in high-risk or dangerous work/jobs/activities is significantly higher among refugees located in Sofia than among those in cities outside the capital.

Graph 44: **Share of families using Emergency coping mechanisms**
(respondents can provide more than one answer)
N=352 Households



**N=68 Households with children aged up to and including 17*

No more than 2% of the households declare that had to sell a house or land to cover basic needs in the last 30 days. (In absolute numbers they represent 7 respondents of the survey population; n=7).

None of the households with children of compulsory school age (6-17 years) have engaged a child in income generation despite of lack of food or money to buy food.

SHARE OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH VULNERABILITY

Several vulnerable groups can be identified among the surveyed population of refugee households who have found asylum in Bulgaria. Approximately 57% (n=202) of all households in the study population had at least one member in the household who had been unemployed.

About 25% (n=88) of the refugee households have at least one child. Households with a chronically ill family member are about 16% (n=55).

Households with a person with a disability represent about 7% (n=26) of the study population; households with an elderly individual over 60 years of age represent 2% (n=7) of the total study population.

Graph 45: **Vulnerable Groups**
N=352

Vulnerable groups	% of HHs*
HH without employed members	57%
HH with children	25%
HH with chronically ill member	16%
HH with person with disability	7%
HH with older persons	2%

**Sum of % is more than 100% because HH can belong to more than one group."*

Within the framework of the study, it is important to examine the main priority needs of vulnerable groups, to inform efforts focused on assisting and resolving difficulties faced by the refugees Bulgaria.

Among the largest vulnerable group (refugee households in which at least one household member is unemployed) employment/ livelihoods support (63%) stands out as a need of primary importance. Other top needs include the need of accommodation (43%), support to secure legal status (36%), etc.

It is noteworthy that for all vulnerable groups without exception, the top priority needs are:

- the necessity to secure jobs and employment,
- livelihood support, and
- accommodation.

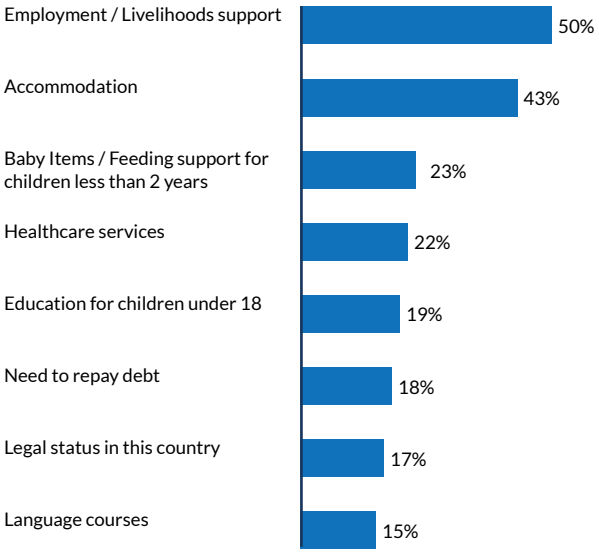
For the refugee households with children, the most urgent needs are employment and livelihood support (50%) and accommodation (43%).

Other priority needs for these households include

- baby items and feeding support for babies (23%); it is almost 17 pp higher than the average level recorded for the studied population,
- healthcare services (22%) (nearly 10 pp above the average),
- education for compulsory school age pupils (19%), (some 14 pp above the average).

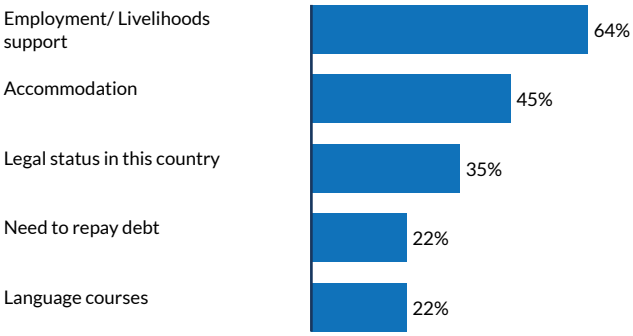
The share of households with children who defining their legal status in Bulgaria as a priority need is significantly lower (17%) than the average for the whole population – (almost 14 percentage points lower).

Graph 46: **Priority needs for households with children/with at least one child in the family**
(respondents can provide more than one answer)
Priority needs for households with children, N=88



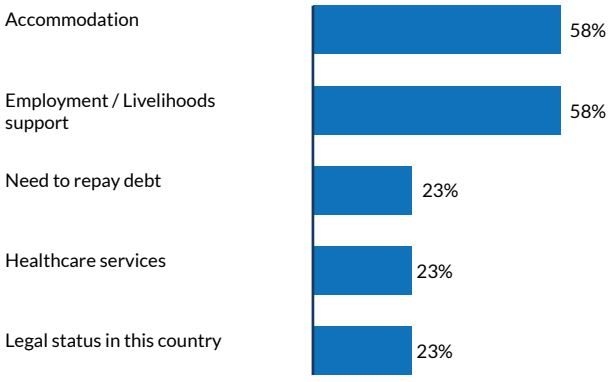
Among refugee households with at least one family member who is chronically ill, the need to secure employment (64%) and livelihood support (45%) stand out as top priority needs. Slightly more often than the average, households with a chronically ill member define securing legal status in the country as a priority need (35%) (about 4 pp. higher).

Graph 47: **Priority needs for households with chronically ill member**
(respondents can provide more than one answer)
Priority needs for households with chronically ill member, n=55



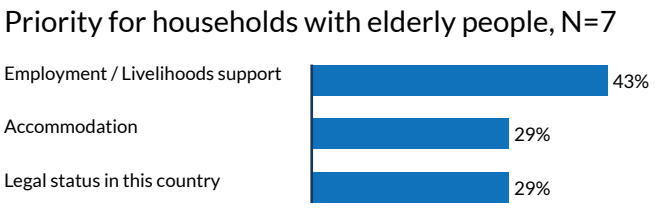
For the households with at least one member with a disability, the highest priority needs are providing accommodation (58%) and employment/livelihood support (58%).

Graph 48: **Priority needs for households with members with disability**
(respondents can provide more than one answer)
Priority for households with at least one member with a disability, N=26



The need to secure employment is leading for the households with elderly people. The need for accommodation and for securing legal status in Bulgaria are also emphasized as priority needs.

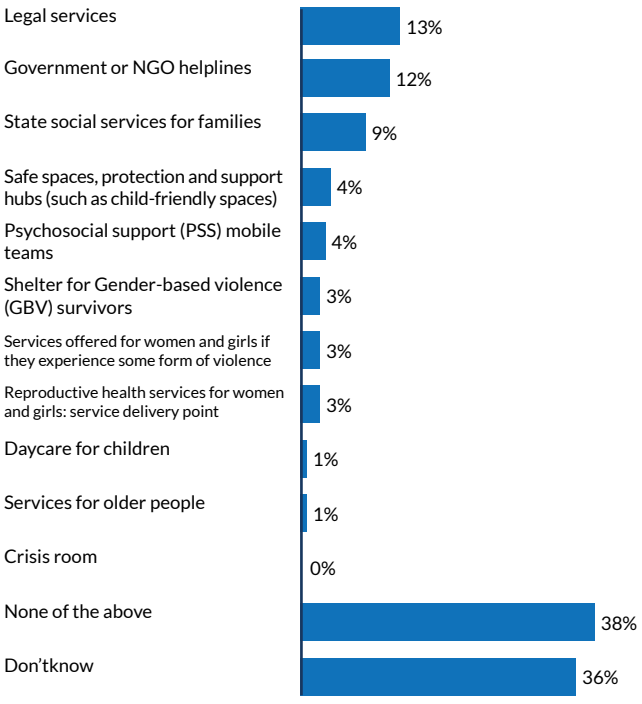
Graph 49: **Priority needs for households with elderly people**
(respondents can provide more than one answer)



INFORMATION REGARDING SERVICES

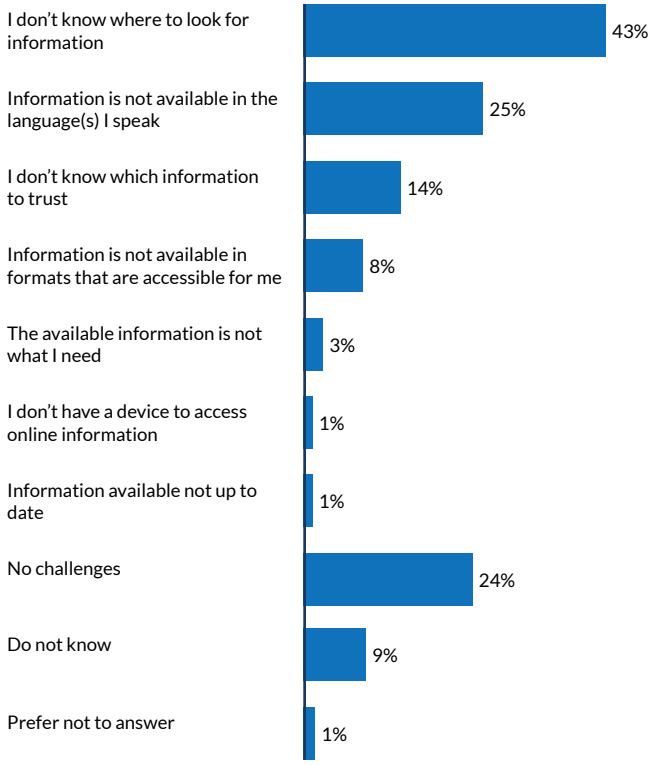
A predominant share of the respondents (75%) is not aware of the services in the area where they reside. The level of awareness about legal services (13%) and government or NGO helplines (12%) is highest. Respondents living in separate houses or apartments tend to be more aware of different services compared to those living in collective sites.

Graph 50: **Are you aware of the following services in the area where you are residing?**
N=352



66% of the households experience challenges in accessing information they need (including information on rights and entitlements, access to services, etc.). Lack of knowledge and language barrier are the most commonly encountered challenges. 43% of the household report not knowing where to look for needed information and 25% state that information is not available in the language they speak.

Graph 51: **What challenges are you facing in accessing information that you need at the moment (including information on rights and entitlements, access to services)?**



When it comes to preferred channels of receiving information, 73% of the households prefer WhatsApp, followed by face to face (helpdesk, outreach volunteer, community centres) (18%) and Facebook (18%). The lowest share of the household point SMS (0,3%), newspapers, magazines (0,3%), billboards, posters (0,3%) and complaint box / suggestion box (0,3%) as preferred channels for receiving information.

Graph 52: **What is your household's preferred means (channel) of receiving information?**

Whatsapp	73%	Face to Face	18%	TV	2%
Facebook	10%	Phone call/Helpline	7%	Leaflets	1%
Viber	5%	Official websites	6%	Newspapers	0,3%
Instagram	5%	Email	2%	Billboards, posters	0,3%
TikTok	2%	SMS	0,3%	Other	3%
Telegram	2%	Complaint box	0,3%	Do not know	2%
Messenger	1%			Prefer not to answer	0,3%

WhatsApp (50%) and face to face (helpdesk, outreach volunteer, community centre) (30%) are also the most preferred means of giving feedback to aid providers about the quality, quantity and appropriateness of aid.

Graph 53: **What are the preferred means of providing feedback to aid providers about the quality, quantity and appropriateness of aid?**

Whatsapp	50%	Face to Face	30%	Leaflets	1%
Facebook	8%	Phone call/Helpline	7%	TV	1%
Viber	4%	Official websites	3%	Newspapers	1%
Instagram	3%	Email	3%	Billboards, posters	0,3%
TikTok	2%	SMS	2%	Other	2%
Telegram	1%	Complaint box	1%	Do not know	13%
Messenger	1%	Signal	0,3%	Prefer not to answer	2%

35% of the households report that they have access to safe and confidential feedback and reporting community-based mechanisms. The share of refugees that claim to have access to such mechanisms is highest among those aged 60+ (60%). Among the other ages groups the shares of those who have access to feedback and reporting mechanisms is 34% for those in 18-34 age group and 37% for those 35-59 age group. The share of those who do not have access to such mechanisms is higher among women.

71% of the refugees reporting that they have access to safe and confidential feedback mechanism have never tried to use them. One fourth of those who have access to such mechanisms have received appropriate response through them. The share of those who haven`t used or haven't tried any of the channels is higher among the age group 35-59.

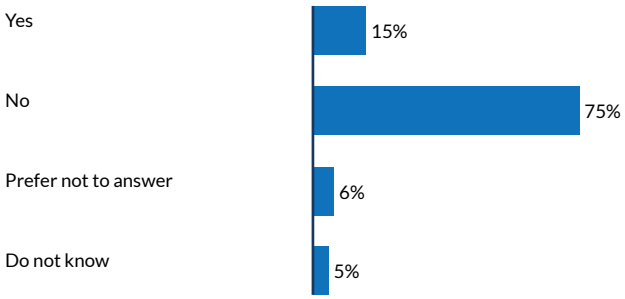
EDUCATION

ATTENDANCE/ENROLMENT

Among the surveyed population of refugees aged between 3 and 24 years (n=307), the share of those attending an educational institution that is part of the Bulgarian education system is generally low – around 15 per cent (n=46). They represent about 8 per cent of the total surveyed population (n=613).

The vast majority (75 per cent) of refugees, aged between 3 and 24, who have found asylum in Bulgaria are not included in the Bulgarian education system (n=230). Another 10 per cent (n=31) refused to answer or could not decide what to answer. It is reasonable to assume that they have also been excluded outside the Bulgarian education system.

Graph 54: **Is this child/young person attending a school/kindergarten/nursery that is part of the national education systems in Bulgaria in 2024/2025?**
*Among HH members aged 3-24
N= 307 HH members



It is notable that, by age group, among the refugee children and youth in households aged 3-24, only the proportion of children attending kindergarten (4–6-year-olds) and primary school (7–10-year-olds) is higher than the recorded average - one in three children aged 4-6 years and two in five children aged 7-10 years.

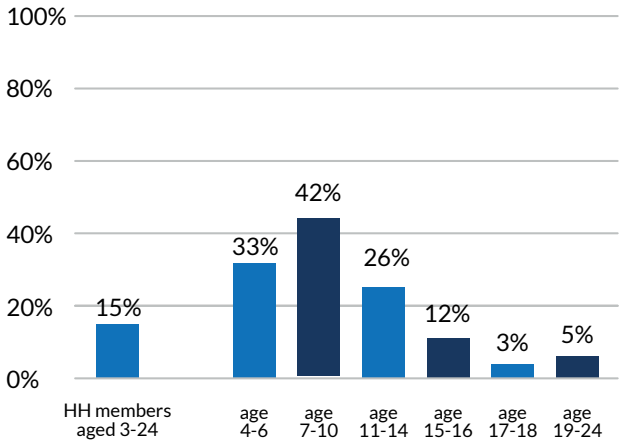
At the same time, secondary school attendance levels are noticeably lower and below the average recorded level.

Also, practically none of the 3-year-old children attend nursery school.

No more than 5% of the young refugees aged 19-24 who took part in the survey attend a Bulgarian university.

The breakdown by age group of individuals aged 3-24 from refugee households in Bulgaria who attend an educational institution that is part of the Bulgarian education system could be illustrated as follows:

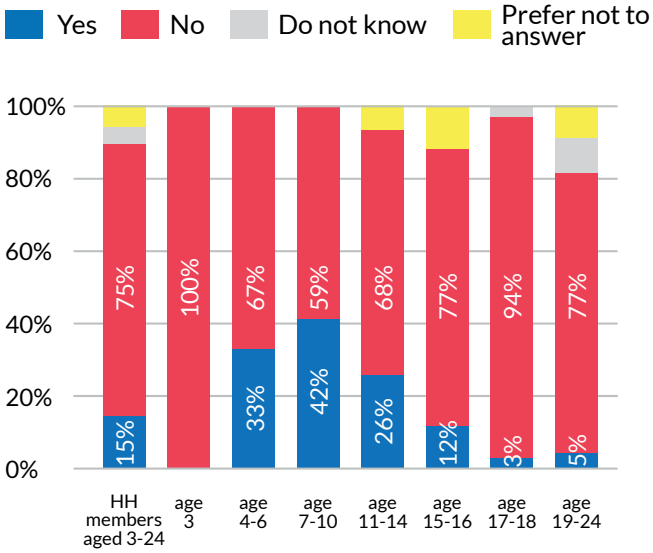
Graph 55: **Is this child/young person attending a school/kindergarten/nursery that is part of the national education systems in Bulgaria in 2024/2025?**
Only these that have answered "Yes"
N= 307 HH members



The breakdown by age group shows that of the surveyed population, practically no children aged 3 years attend nursery, two-thirds of pre-school children (aged 4-6 years) do not attend kindergarten, three in five children aged 7-10 years do not attend primary school. Also, two-thirds of children between the ages of 11 and 14, and three-quarters of children aged 15-16, are not attending school.

Among young people aged 17-18, almost no one attends a Bulgarian school, and among young people aged 19-24, about 77% do not attend a Bulgarian university. This illustrates that the overwhelming majority of young refugees over the age of 15 remain practically completely outside the Bulgarian education system.

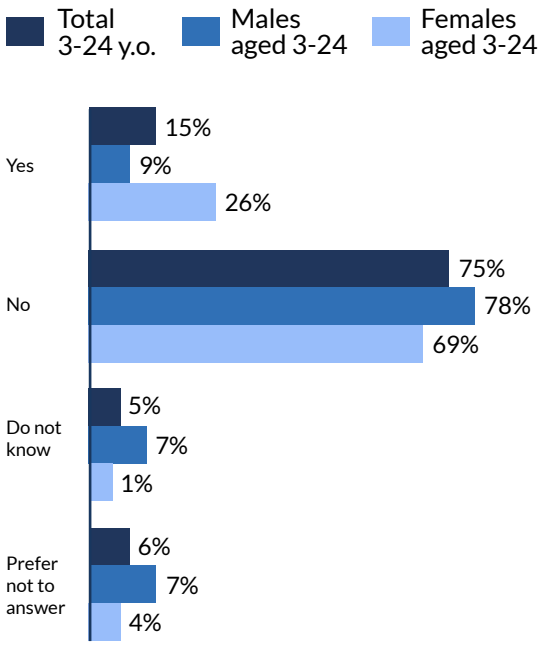
Graph 56: **Is this child/young person attending a school/kindergarten/nursery that is part of the national education systems in Bulgaria in 2024/2025?**
N= 307 HH members



In general, the majority of refugees aged between 3 and 24 who have found asylum in Bulgaria are not included in the Bulgarian education system.

By gender, it can be noted that among refugees aged 3-24, females are more likely to attend a Bulgarian school than males. Approximately a quarter of females (26 per cent) and 1 out of 10 males (appr. around 9%) aged 3-24 from refugee households participating in the survey attend a Bulgarian educational institution.

Graph 57: **Is this child/young person attending a school/kindergarten/nursery that is part of the national education systems in Bulgaria in 2024/2025?**
N= 306 HH members



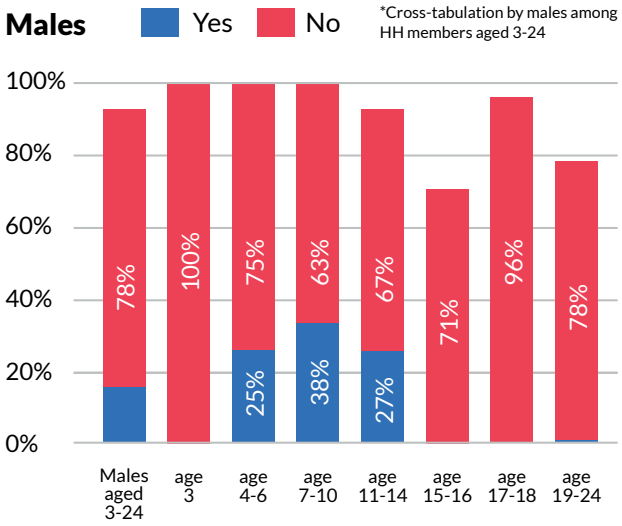
Children attending a Bulgarian educational institution is highest among age group 7-10 years. In their part, girls up to the age of 10 more often attend a Bulgarian educational institution than boys.

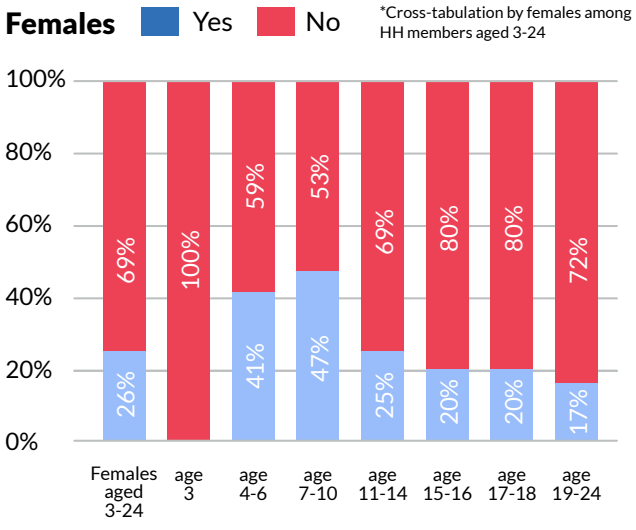
The proportion of those who are not in education is visibly increasing among those aged 11 and over.

Male participants between 15 and 24 practically do not attend Bulgarian educational institutions.

About 1 in 5 (n=6) women aged 19-24, of those attending an educational institution, study at a Bulgarian university. They represent appr. 6 per cent of females aged 3-24 years of the total study population (n=108).

Graph 58: **Is this child/young person attending a school/kindergarten/nursery that is part of the national education systems in Bulgaria in 2024/2025?**
N=198 HH male members
N= 108 HH female members

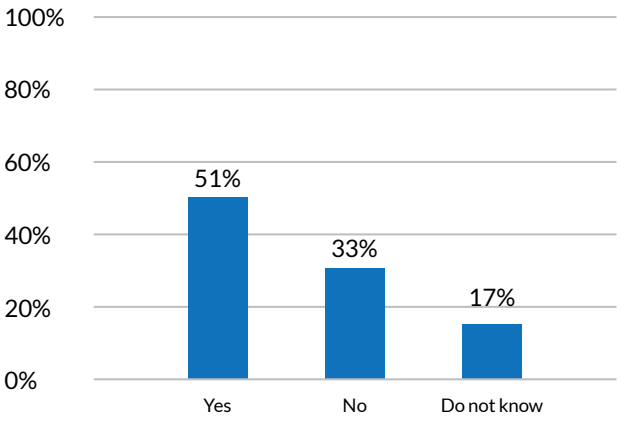




About half (51%) of the young people aged 3-24 from refugee households who have

found asylum in Bulgaria and who attend an educational institution in the country's education system, attend additional catch-up classes to learn Bulgarian, provided in school. They represent about 4 per cent of the total surveyed population, or approximately about 7.5% of those aged 3-24.

Graph 59: **If the child is enrolled in formal education in 2024/2025, are additional catch-up classes for Bulgarian language provided in the schools?**
N= 45 HH members



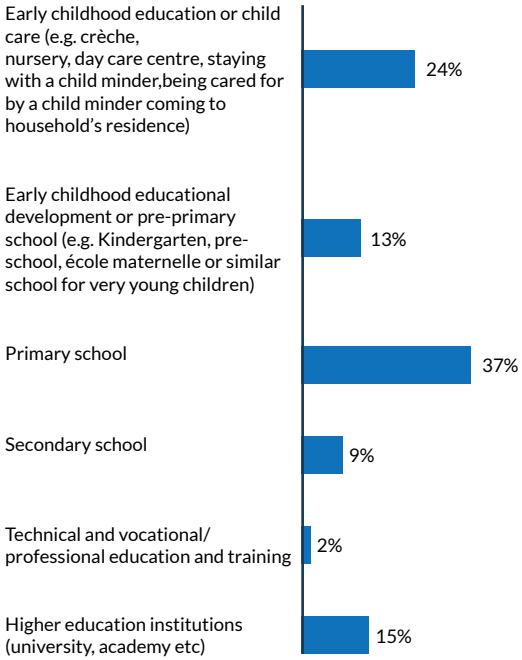
There is no statistically significant difference across age groups among children of compulsory school age. It is noteworthy that 19–24-year-olds are significantly less likely to continue their higher education at a Bulgarian university.

The breakdown of the different levels of education in the Bulgarian national education system attended by respondents aged 3-24 is presented below.

Respondents attending a Bulgarian educational institution represent about 7 per cent of the total survey population, or about 15% of individuals aged 3-24 in total.

Among those attending a Bulgarian educational institution, the highest proportion are children aged between 7 and 14, attending primary school (37% among 3–24-year-olds, or about 3% of the total survey population). There is a noticeably lower proportion of children enrolled in pre-school education.

Graph 60: **During the 2024-2025 academic year, what level of education is/was this child/ young person attending?**
N= 45 HH members



The data shows that of all young people aged 19-24 (n=143), only about 5 per cent (n=7) are attending a higher education institution in the 2024/2025 academic year (University, Academy, etc.).

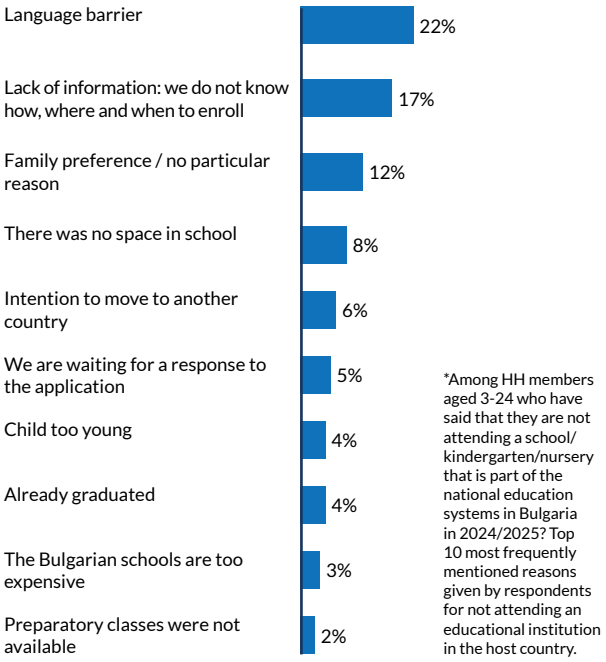
It is important to highlight here that the overwhelming majority of young people aged 19-24 remain outside the scope of tertiary enrolment in the Bulgarian education system. Practically 95% of the 19–24-year-olds do not attend an institution of the Bulgarian education system.

Young refugees who are not attending an

educational institution in the Bulgarian education system are around three quarters (75%) of those aged 3-24 years and represent a total of around 38 per cent (n=230) of the total survey population (n=613).

Among the most frequently cited reasons why young refugees aged 3-24 do not attend an educational institution in Bulgarian education system are the language barrier (22 per cent), as well as the lack of information (17 per cent) on how, where and when to enrol in the educational system; about 12 per cent state that it is due to a family/household decision or state no particular reason.

Graph 61: **What are the reasons your child/ young person does not attend school/ kindergarten/nursery that is part of the national education system in Bulgaria?**
N= 230 HH members



The language barrier is a difficulty for individuals of virtually all age sub-groups in the 3-24 age range. Lack of information is a barrier most often for individuals between 7 and 14.

The highest proportion of young refugees not attending an educational institution in Bulgarian education system because of family preference or for no particular reason are among those aged 19-24. The majority of those not attending an institution of the national education system in the academic year 2024/2025 are males.

Other reasons for not attending an educational institution in the Bulgarian education system by young refugees aged 3-24 include a lack of space in the local educational institution (8%) or expecting a response to the application (5%).

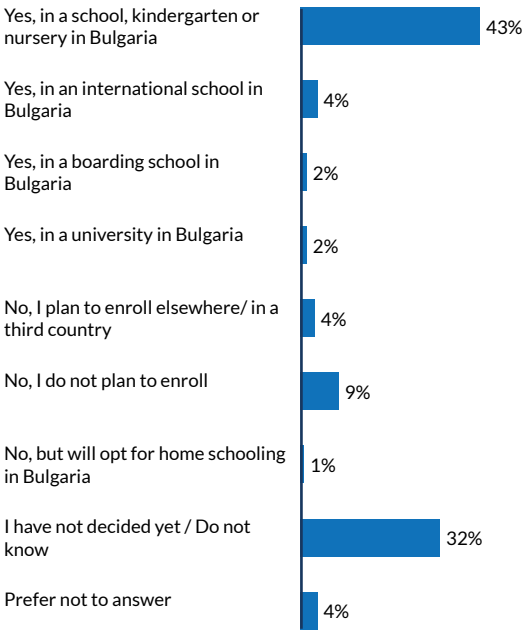
Lack of space in the local school has been a reason for not attending education most often for pre-school aged individuals (4-6 years) and for the 19–24-year-olds. Those not attending an educational institution in 2024/2025 due expecting a response to an application are most commonly pre-school aged children (4-6) or primary-school aged ones (7-10).

Around 6% are not enrolled in an educational institution in the host country because of their intention to move to another country. On the other hand, 3% state that Bulgarian schools are too expensive.

Approximately 43 per cent of the refugees aged 3-18 who have found asylum in Bulgaria, will be enrolled in an educational institution that is part of the country's education system. They represent about 11% of the total surveyed population. The majority of them are pre-school children (4-6 years old) and children between 7 and 14 years old.

It is notable that there is a high proportion of those who are either not sure or do not know whether individuals in their households who are aged 3-18 will be enrolled for a second semester in the 2024/2025 school year – this applies

Graph 62: **Will you enroll this child/young person in a school/kindergarten/nursery that is part of the national education systems in Bulgaria for next year, 2024/2025 second semester?**
N= 164 HH members
*Among HH members aged 3-18



to practically one in three (32%) of those aged 3-18, and they represent 9% of the surveyed population overall.

A total of 9% are not planning to be enrolled in Bulgaria's education system in the second semester of the 2024/2025 school year, representing about 2% of the total studied population.

Responses that no decision has been made or it is not known if they will be enrolled for the second semester of the 2024/2025 school year, and that there are no plans to enrol, are more frequently reported for males ages 3-18.

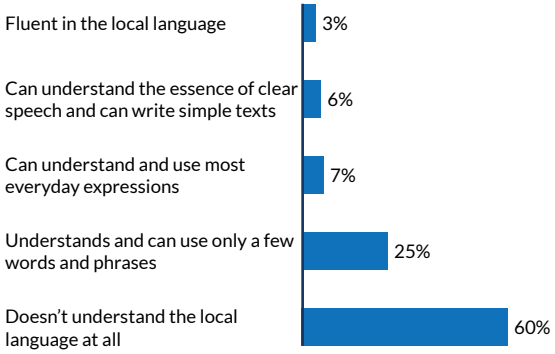
LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

The majority of the respondents aged 12-64 do not understand the language of the host country - Bulgarian. The data shows that nearly 60% do not understand the local language at all, and another 25% could understand and use only a few basic words and phrases. Compared to the whole studied population, their total share is about 69%.

About 16% of the respondents aged 12-64 could comprehend the local language. About 7% could understand and use in their speech most of the everyday expressions, nearly 6% could understand the essence of clear speech and could write simple texts.

Around 3% of the refugees aged 12-64 are fluent in Bulgarian (the language of the host country) and can understand complex texts and could use the local language regularly without a problem.

Graph 63: **Which of the following options best describes this person's knowledge of Bulgarian?**
*Among HH members aged 12-64
N=500 HH members



The highest proportion of the respondents, who do not understand the local language at all, are the young ones (12-24 years).

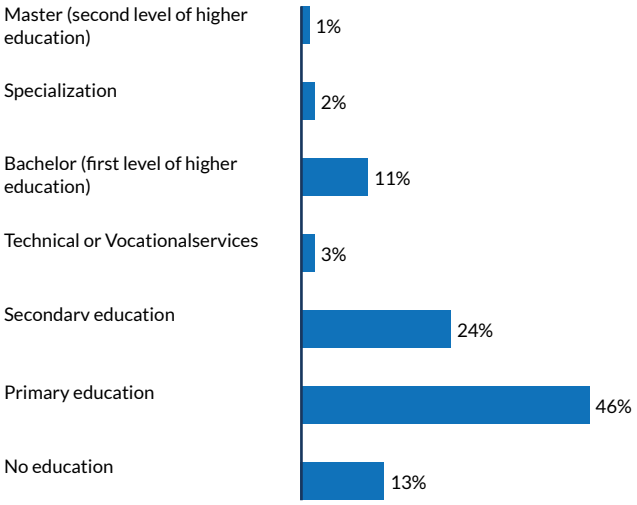
Among those who can understands and use only a few words and phrases, the proportion of 25–44-year-olds is a higher than the rest of the age groups.

SOCIO ECONOMIC INCLUSION AND LIVELIHOOD

EDUCATION PROFILE

Almost 70% of working-age individuals (15-64 years) have primary and secondary education; that is more than half of the individuals in the entire study population. Among those of working age, about 46% had primary education and almost 24% had secondary education, just over 11% had a bachelor's degree, and fewer than 2% had a master's degree. About 2% of household members between 15 and 64 years of age reported having completed a specialisation, almost 3% reported having a technical or vocational education, and more than 13% reported having no education.

Graph 64: **% of HH members by highest education level achieved**
N=477



The gender distribution by level of formal education is as follows: among women of working age, the largest share is primary school graduates, followed by secondary school graduates and bachelor graduates. More than 15% of women between 15 and 64 years of age indicate that they had no education. Among men of working age, the majority have completed primary education, almost a quarter have secondary education, and nearly 13% have no formal education.

Graph 65: **What is the highest level of formal education (this person) has attained to date?**
Cross-tabulation Gender (Col%) vs. q48. What is the highest level of formal education (this person) has attained to date?

	Total	Women	Men
Master (second level of higher education)	2%	2%	1%
Specialization	2%	3%	1%
Bachelor (first level of higher education)	11%	17%	9%
Technical or Vocational	3%	2%	3%
Secondary education	24%	23%	24%
Primary education	46%	37%	49%
No education	13%	15%	13%

PREVIOUS OCCUPATION STATUS

Before coming to Bulgaria, the largest proportion (40%) working-age (between 16 and 64 years) household members worked for someone else for pay, 11% manage or are engaged in business, farming or other activities (mainly men) and 14% have interrupted their studies by moving to Bulgaria. Almost 15% were unemployed/seeking work, while 11% were engaged in household or family duties (almost all of them - women), including caring for children and the elderly before fleeing their country of origin. Of the remaining household members of working age, 5% were assisting in a family business or farm (predominantly male), less than half a percent were engaged in carrying out unpaid voluntary, community or charitable work, 1% have suffered from a long-

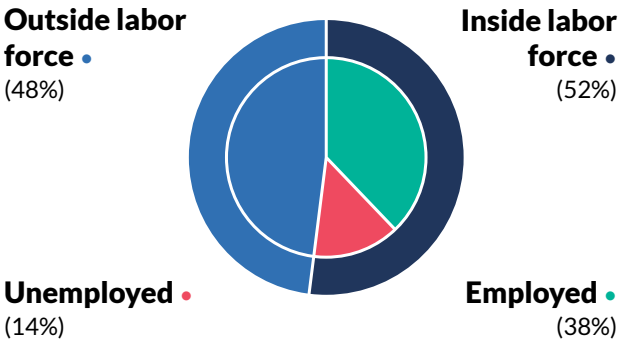
term illness, injury or disability (similar number of men and women). A small proportion, less than a percent, were undergoing vocational training. The remaining approximately 3% reported to have been engaged in something else before leaving their country of origin.

CURRENT EMPLOYMENT AND CHALLENGES FOR FINDING WORK

Of those of working age (between 15 and 64), more than half - 52% are inside the labor force. Employment encompasses engaging in gainful activities in the past week by persons of working age, including formal employment, self-employment, agricultural/ fishing work, miscellaneous income generation, temporary absence from paid roles, and unpaid contributions to a family business. 38% of the working-age household members were employed and 14% were unemployed. The unemployed are defined as working-age individuals not employed in the past week, who had sought paid work or attempted to start a business in the past 4 weeks, and who were willing to start work within the next 2 weeks if an opportunity arose.

Youth (16 to 24) who are not in education, training or employment are 28%.

Graph 66: **Labor Force Participation (out of working age population 16 to 64)**
N=470

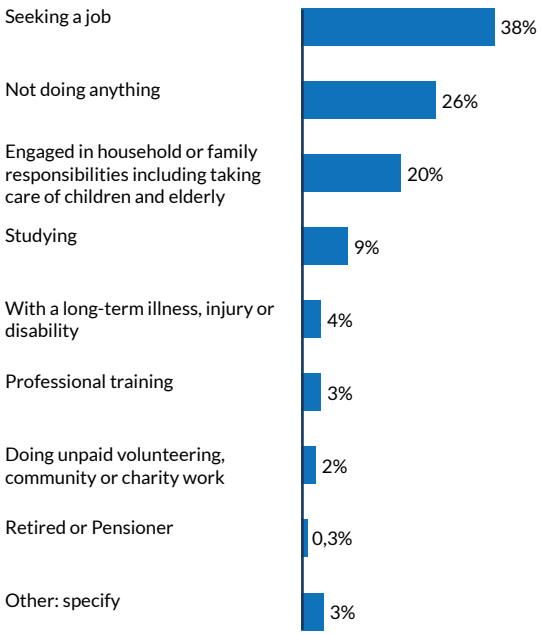


The most common activity for household members aged 16-64, who

- have not worked for anyone for pay in the last week,
- do not run their own business,
- have not tried to start their own business and
- will not start work in the next two weeks

is looking for work (38%). More than a quarter report to be doing nothing and almost 20% are engaged in household or family duties including childcare and elderly care. Studying is the main occupation of 9% of individuals and 3% are engaged in vocational training. Prolonged illness, injury or disability accounts for approximately 4%, the proportion of retired people is less than half a percent, almost 2% are engaged in unpaid voluntary, community or charitable work and the remaining 3% do something else.

Graph 67: **Which of the following best describes what (this person) is mainly doing at present?**
N=293



Almost half of the employed (46%) have jobs that adequately match their level of skills and qualifications, 28% have jobs well below their level, 18.7% of employed household members are thought to be employed just below their level of skills and qualifications, almost 4% admit that the job requires skills and qualifications that they do not have. About 2% have a significant lack of knowledge and skills. 1% are unable to judge and under 1% prefer not to answer.

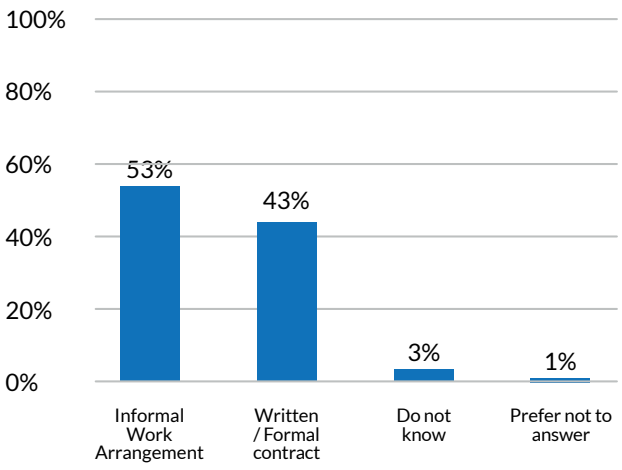
The majority of working household members (68%) find employment through social contacts (previous work contacts, friends, etc.). One in ten individuals use job platforms used by local residents to find a job. Approximately 7% of the working people are contacted by private sector employees who help to get a job. 5% use social networks (Viber, Telegram, Instagram, Facebook or similar) to find their last job. Only 1% report receiving assistance by a local job centre that leads to a successful employment. A small proportion of those in work (1%) refuse to share how they found a job, almost 2% could not judge, and over 5% indicate an a way not mentioned above.

The largest proportion of working household members are engaged in construction (41%) and all of them are men; 11% are work for hotels and restaurants, mostly men; 6% indicate administrative and support activities (predominance of women); 5% are engaged in information and communication, among whom more than half are women. The main activity for about 4% is manufacturing, the same proportion (4%) are employed in real estate operations (all of them are men). Less than 4% are engaged in activities of households as employers (undifferentiated household activities in the production of goods and services), with an increased presence of women (80% of all those indicating this response). Wholesale and retail trade; car and motorcycle repair are the main activities of 4% of employed household members - mostly men; and almost 5% are engaged in water supply; sanitation; waste management and restoration activities, all of whom are men. Slightly more than 2% report working in human health and social activities - equal proportions of women and men. Agriculture, forestry and fishing is indicated for 1% of individuals, and approximately 2% are involved in professional, scientific and technical activities - 100% of them are male. Less than one percent indicated each of the following:

-arts,
-entertainment and recreation,
-education,
-electricity,
-gas,
-steam and air conditioning supply,
-extractive industries,
-transportation and storage.

3% indicate other services, and the remaining approximately 5% indicated something different. Half of the employed household members have an informal work arrangement and over 40% have a formal/written contract.

Graph 68: **Does (this person) have a formal contract or informal work arrangement?**
N=168



Among employed household members, the most common arrangement for is in-person in Bulgaria (87%). Almost 5% are employed in a hybrid mode in Bulgaria. Over 1% work remotely in Bulgaria, about 1% are remotely employed in their country of origin, the same proportion prefer not to respond. The remaining 5% indicate they cannot answer.

The most common difficulties in finding a job are related to not knowing the local language. Almost 48% of the household members aged 15-64 define the language barrier as the main obstacle to their realisation on the labour market in Bulgaria. For 28% of the persons in the same group, the lack of a work permit is a decisive factor influencing their being hired for a job or starting their own business, almost 14% are hindered by lack of other documents. Around 16% openly state that they are not actively looking for a job, while one tenth of the household members between 15 and 64 years old do not face any difficulties in terms of finding a job in the country. A tenth of this population cannot find a job with decent pay, which is perceived as a major obstacle to successful labour market integration, while 6% report that they lack sufficient information about the market. Around 6% note that they would not like to start working illegally, while there is no prospect of finding formal employment. A similar proportion cannot find a job that matches their skills and experience. More than 5% indicate that they do not intend to stay in Bulgaria. Lack of education and lack of recognition of the person's experience is a barrier for 3% of the household members in the age group of 15-64. Slightly more than 2% have to take care of other household members, about 2% consider the inability to work with a suitable or flexible schedule as a barrier. For less than 2%, age is among the major barriers to find work, 2% are hindered by lack of a residential address. Less than one percent report that they lack adequate transportation to work or have limited access to child care services, which hinders finding job. Discrimination is a problem for starting work for 1% of the 15-64 aged refugees in the country.

HEALTH

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

21% of the refugees had a health problem in the last 30 days that required medical attention.

The proportions of respondents who need health care reflects to their age:

- 11% for those aged 0-4 years,
- 4% for those aged 5-17 years,
- 25% among the 18–34-year-olds,
- 32% among the 35–59-year-olds, and
- 43% for those aged 60+.

21% of the refugees needed health care, however 39% of them did not receive it. The proportion of those who are not able to access necessary health support is highest (41%) among refugees aged 18-34 and 35-39. For children, these cases are less frequent: the proportion not receiving health care in the 5 to 17 age group is 20%; the proportion of those aged 0 to 4 years - 25%. While the shares of those needing medical help is almost equal for both genders (23% for women and 20% for men), women are more likely to receive it (78% vs 48%).

Graph 69: **Was the person able to obtain the needed health care**
(Missing percentages are on account of "Do not know" and "Prefer not to answer)

The most common barrier is lack of knowledge of how to access health services (35%). Other barriers are:

- high fees/costs for hospitals/clinics or medications,
- language barrier,
- unavailable services (specific medication, treatment or service needed unavailable).

25% of the women (aged 10-55 years) who did not receive the needed health care indicate barriers to access to sexual and reproductive health services in the past 3 months. Most of the women could not afford the clinic's fee, the costs of medication and did not know how to access health services.

15% of HHs have chronically ill member

Analysing the access to health care requires paying special attention to regular monitoring and medication concerning the chronically ill persons. The share of chronically ill refugees is 10%. 60% of them needed health care in the last 30 days. However, 37% of them were not able to obtain the needed health care in this period. The main barriers to accessing health services in front of chronically ill refugees are:

- lack of knowledge how to access health services (36%),
- lack of health insurance in Bulgaria (29%),
- financial: not being able to afford clinic's fees or the cost of medication (21%),
- unavailable service - specific needed medication, treatment or service were unattainable (21%),
- language barriers (21%).

Another important aspect when it comes to access to health is the health insurance. 41% of the households have at least one member without a health insurance. Among the main reasons for not having health insurance are:

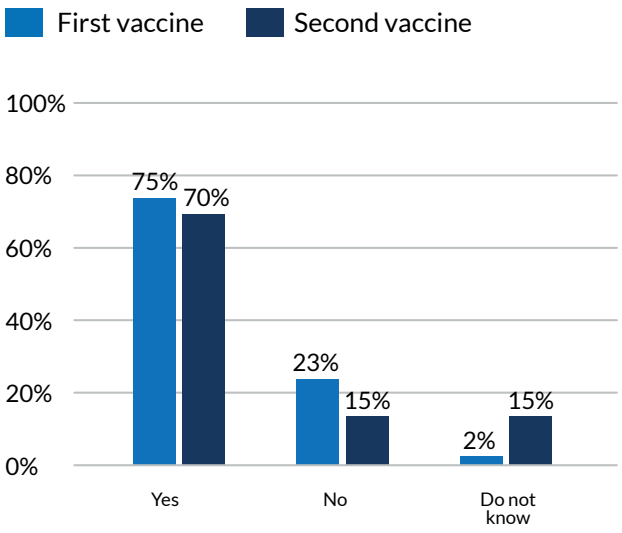
- not being eligible to enrol in governmental health insurance (e.g. without a contract) (25%) and
- lack of employment (25%).

The share of the respondents not having health insurance is higher among those living in collective sites (43%). The share of households with health insurances is higher for those living in separate apartments and houses (60%) or in employment accommodations (67%).

CHILD HEALTH

The proportion of children who have received the mandatory measles vaccines is 75% (first vaccine) and 70% (second vaccine) respectively. For about 30% of the children who have received the first vaccine (n=10) is not known if they received a second vaccine or it is indicated that none has been received.

Graph 70: **Proportion of children vaccinated against measles in the age group 9 months to 5 years**



MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT (MHPSS)

27% of refugees and asylum seekers have felt so upset, anxious, worried, agitated, angry, or depressed that it affected the person's daily functioning during the last four weeks. A similar proportion (of about 26%) of men and women have felt bad enough that they could not carry out their daily duties.

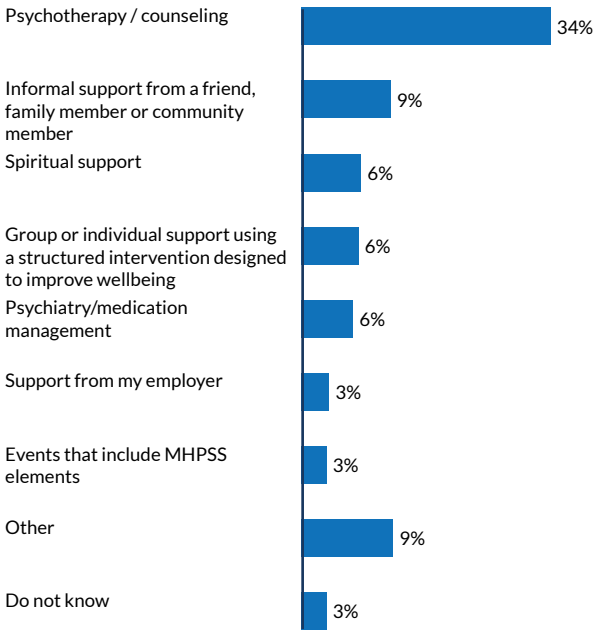
27% felt so upset, anxious, worried, agitated, angry, or depressed that it affected your/the person's daily functioning during the last four weeks

These cases are significantly more common among the unemployed. It is noticeable that those not in work or with a long-term illness, injury or disability were most likely to be upset, anxious, worried, agitated, angry, or depressed (64%), followed by jobseekers (37%) and those engaged in domestic duties (37%). Among those with chronic illnesses, there is also a significantly higher proportion suffering from psychological and emotional problems (46% vs. 24%).

21% tried to find support for this problem

Only 21% of refugees and asylum seekers that felt upset, anxious, worried, agitated, angry, or depressed, sought support for their condition. People with low education are significantly less likely to have tried to solve their problem through professional or friendly help. Although by a small statistical difference, women are more likely to seek help than men (22% vs. 18%). The main form of support is psychotherapy and counselling.

Graph 71: **What type of mental health and psychosocial support service was received (if any)?**
N=45

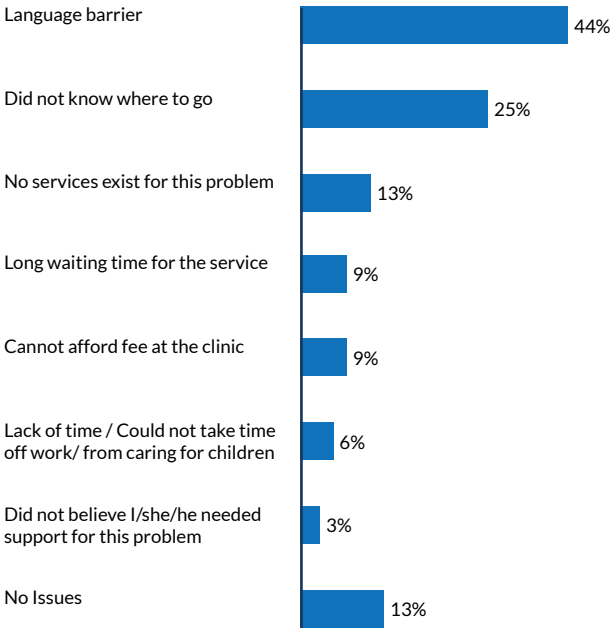


It is interesting that only 9% seek informal support from a friend or relative. This might mean that the rest:

- are poorly integrated into the host society and do not have friendly relations with locals, and
- do not have a contact with their relatives who are not in the country.

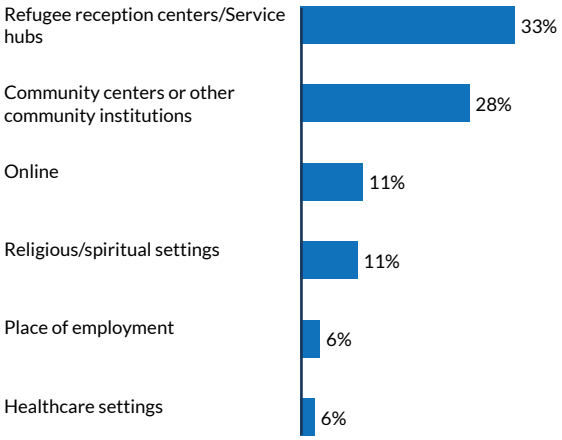
The main challenge to get the needed support is the language barrier (44%). Nearly 60% of refugees who have reported such a problem have difficulty finding work for the same reason. The proportion of those who do not know where to seek help is also high (25%). Men are nearly twice as likely (30%) not to know where to go as women. The proportion reporting language barriers as a reason is also higher among them (48 vs. 38%). Refugees and asylum seekers aged 35 and over are approximately twice as likely to not know where to go compared to the younger refugees.

Graph 72: **What challenges did you/he/she face in accessing the needed mental health and psychosocial support or services?**
N=45



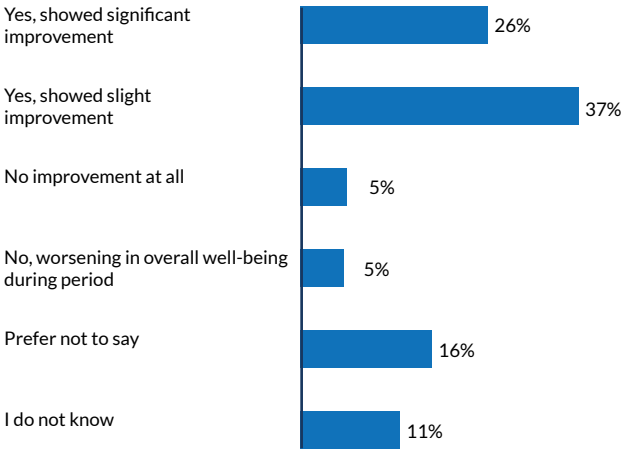
Just under 15% indicate that there is no service that can help them with their mental health. This could mean that awareness of available services is low. Shares of 9% point out to long waiting time for service and inability to pay medical fees as reasons. Those who do not have time are aged over 35 years while those who are hindered by long waiting are under 35 years.

Graph 73: **Where did you/he/she receive MHPSS services?**
N=22



The places where most assistance is received are refugee receptions and service hubs. It is also relatively common to receive assistance at community centres or other community institutions.

Graph 74: **Did your/his/her wellbeing improve after receiving mental health and psychosocial services?**
N=19



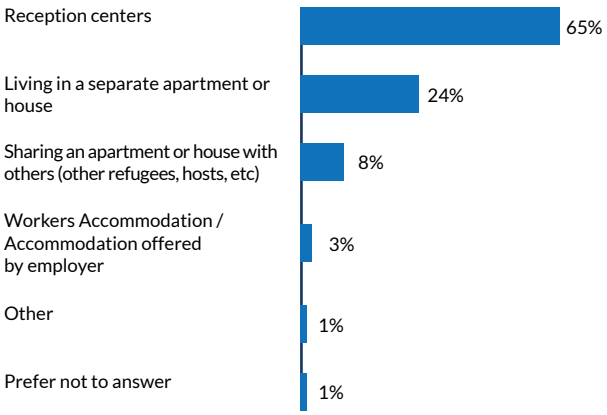
Those who report that the support they received has not resulted in an improvement of their condition are 10%. The rest have experienced either slight improvement (37%) or significant improvement (26%).

ACCOMMODATION

The majority of the refugee households live in collective sites (reception centres) (65%). Approximately 24% of the households live in separate apartments or houses and 8% in shared apartments or houses. The lowest proportion is of those who receive

accommodation from their employers (3%). Those who live in the collective sites are more commonly characterized by having low amount of savings (no savings or enough to live on for a week of two in case of emergency) while those living in a separate apartment more often possess higher saving amounts. When it comes to the households' income levels, again those living in collective sites are more likely not to have enough income for food, while those living in a separate apartment are more likely to have sufficient income to cover basic needs.

Graph 75: **What type of accommodation is the household residing in?**

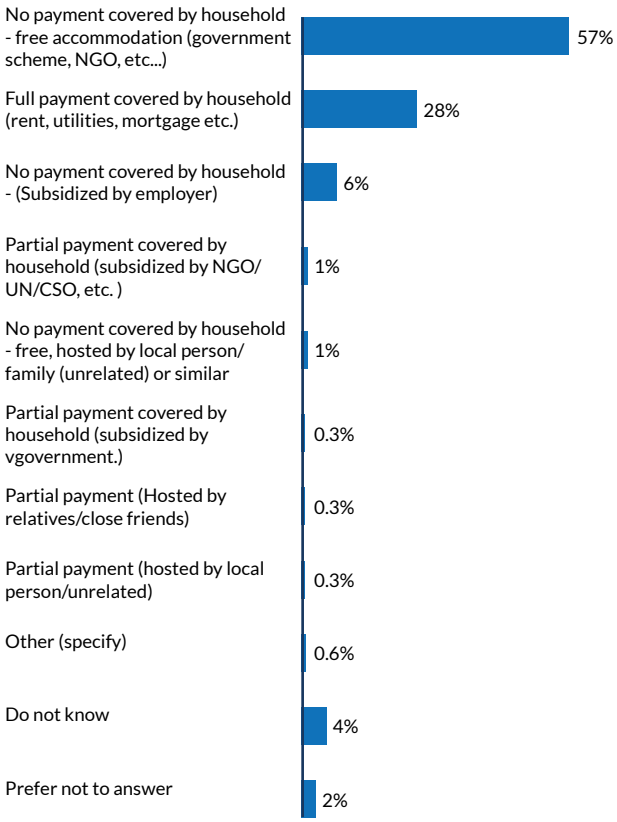


Nearly 64% of the households do not pay for their accommodation with the higher proportion of them being paid by government schemes, NGOs, etc (57%). 28% of the households pay all their accommodation costs.

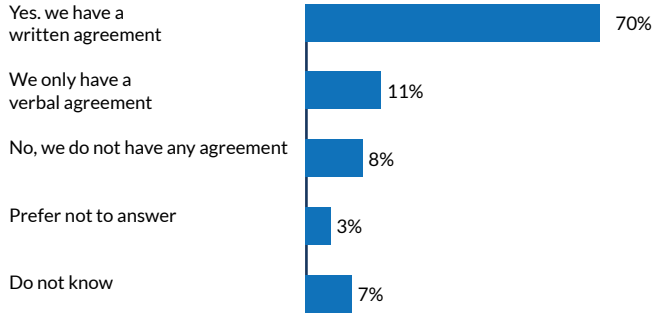
The majority of the households (in a place different from a collective site) have some type of an agreement for their accommodation. 70% have a written agreement for their accommodation, while 11% have only a verbal agreement.

The most frequent reason for not having a written contract is a refusal by the landlord. Another reason is that the apartment is rented by another person (shared accommodation).

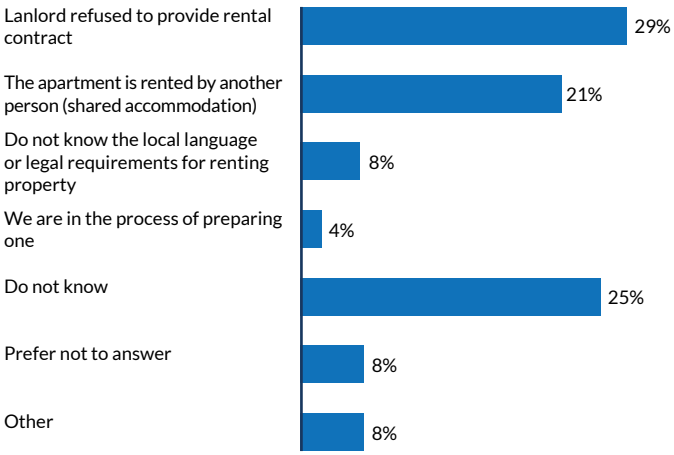
Graph 76: **What is the arrangement for your household accommodation?**



Graph 77: **Does your household have a written documentation to prove your occupancy arrangement for your accommodation?**
(among those who live in places different from collective sites)

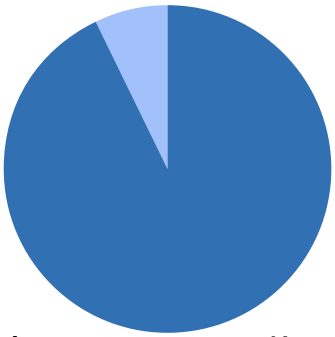


Graph 78: **Why not?**
(among those who live in places different from collective sites)
(respondents can provide more than one answer)



Overcrowding is described as a situation of three or more people living in one room. 6% of the families live in such conditions.

Graph 79: **% of HHs in overcrowding conditions**
HH with 3 and more people in a room



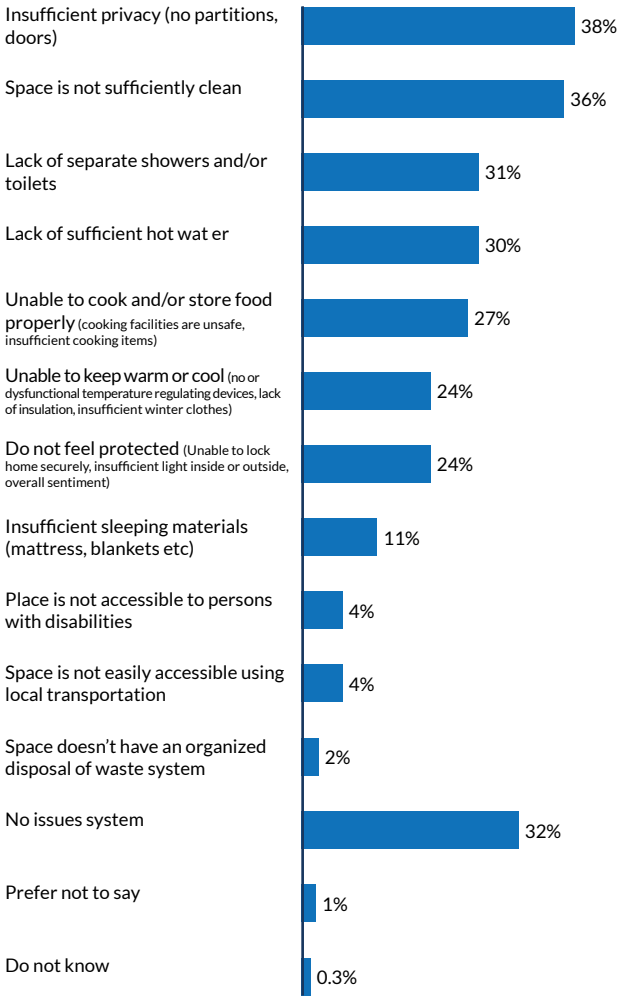
Overcrowded (6%)

Not overcrowded (94%)

Around a third of the households do not experience any issues stemming from the living conditions in their accommodations. The most frequent challenges faced by the rest of the households are insufficient privacy (38%), cleanliness of the space (36%) and lack of separate showers and/or toilets (31%).

Those who live in separate apartments or houses or share apartments or houses with others are more likely to say that they do not face particular challenges with the conditions in their accommodation (respectively 64% and 48%). The respondents living in reception centres sites are more likely to experience issues concerning privacy (54%).

Graph 80: **What issue, if any, are you facing in terms of living conditions in your accommodation?**
(respondents can provide more than one answer)



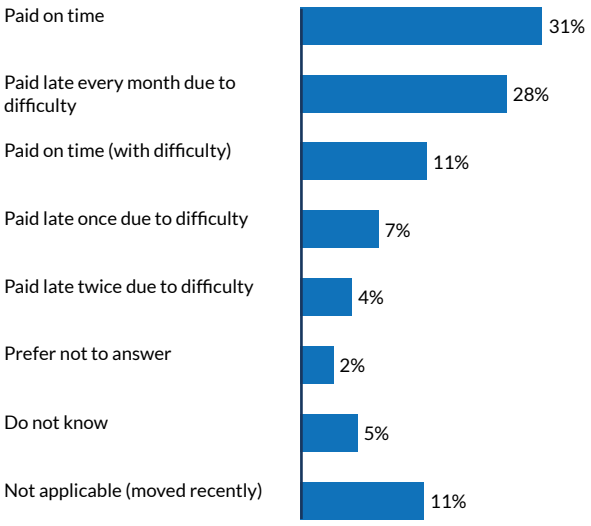
17% of the households that can stay in their current accommodation for more than 3

months live in sites with insufficient winter preparation (heating, insulation and hot water). 71% of the households (that can stay in their current accommodation for more than 3 months) inhabit sites with hot water. The same is the share of those having sufficient / adequate heating. 64% of the households (being able to stay in their current accommodation for more than 3 months) state that the place they live in has sufficient insulation (e.g. double glassed windows, insulated doors, wall/roof/floor insulation).

EXPENDITURE AND SECURITY OF TENURE

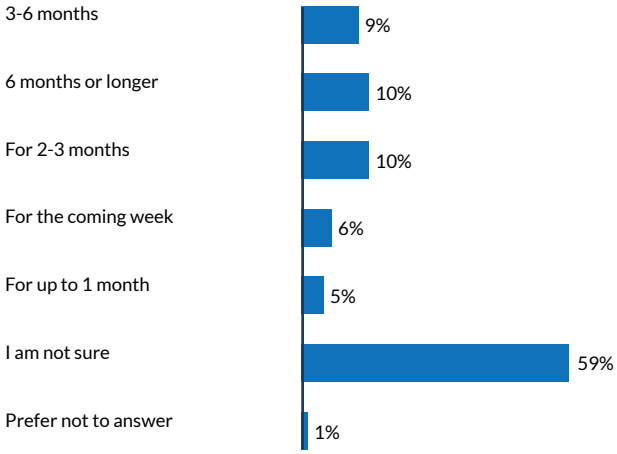
The average accommodation cost of the households living in separate apartment or house (free market) is 833 BGN. This is measured with an indicator asking for the last 30 days prior to the period of the survey.

Graph 81: **In the last 3 months, how many times did you have problems paying the rent on time?**
(among those who live in a place different from collective site)



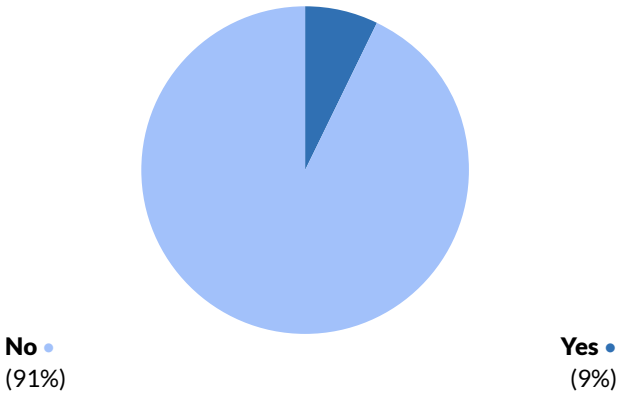
While 31% of the households (that live in a place different from collective site) state that they pay the accommodation rent on time and have no financial distress related to it, 28% admit that they are late every month.

Graph 82: **How long do you believe you can stay in this accommodation if you need to?**



Approximately 60% of the households express uncertainty about how long they can stay in the current accommodation.

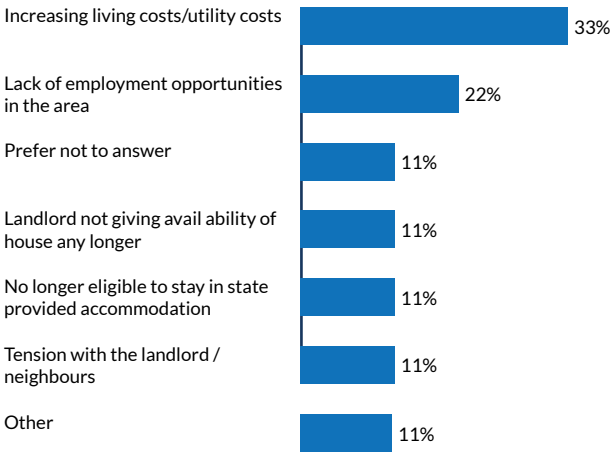
Graph 83: **% of HHs under pressure to leave**
(among those who can stay in their current accommodation for up to 6 months)



The majority of households confirm that they haven't been pressured to leave their accommodation. Only 9% indicate that they

have been pressured to do so. The main reasons for this pressure are the increasing living costs (33%) and the lack of employment opportunities in the area (22%).

Graph 84: **If under pressure or want to leave soon, why?**



SOCIAL COHESION

The geographic position of Bulgaria at the south-eastern corner of the EU and especially its proximity to areas of intense unrest, such as civil wars and military conflicts, make the country a natural entry point to the EU for the refugees. Against this background, having an adequate understanding of the nature and the dynamics of the attitudes and interactions between refugees and the hosting Bulgarian communities is of paramount importance for shaping both short-term and long-term policies and intervention measures. While the former should address immediate needs and challenges, the latter could play a crucial role in safeguarding social cohesion.

"Social cohesion" is a multifaceted concept, often used in academic and policy and policy-implementation documents.[1] To safeguard coherence with previous studies and mostly to allow cross-references and comparisons that might add value to shaping forthcoming policies and interventions, this report employs the definitions of social cohesion that have been used in the need assessment of the Ukrainian refugees in Bulgaria, namely:

> Social cohesion is a situation that encompasses both vertical and horizontal interactions within society. It is characterized by a set of attitudes and norms, including trust, a sense of belonging, willingness to participate, and mutual assistance. These attitudes and norms are also reflected in people's behaviours.[2]

> Social cohesion is a descriptive attribute of a collective, indicating the quality of togetherness within the group. It emphasizes the unity and solidarity among members of the collective.[3]

UNHCR considers social cohesion in relation to the Sustainable Development Goal 16 in view of the specific targets relating to promoting peaceful, just, and inclusive societies, and strengthening resilience in contexts of displacement and migration. Social cohesion is a critical factor for stability and protection in displacement contexts. It is not measured by a single index but through a multi-dimensional approach that captures relationships within and between communities, as well as trust in institutions. The process begins with context analysis, where UNHCR and partners assess the

[1] Global Metrics (2023) UKRAINE SITUATION Multi-Sector Needs Assessment. A report commissioned by UNHCR Bulgaria. Read the document.
[2] Ibid, quoting: Chan, J., To, HP. & Chan, E. Reconsidering Social Cohesion: Developing a Definition and Analytical Framework for Empirical Research. Soc Indic Res 75, 273–302 (2006). https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-005-2118-1, p.290
[3] Global Metrics (2023) UKRAINE SITUATION Multi-Sector Needs Assessment. A report commissioned by UNHCR Bulgaria. Read the document, quoting: Schiefer, David & Van der Noll, Jolanda. (2017). The Essentials of Social Cohesion: A Literature Review. Social Indicators Research. 132. 10.1007/ s11205-016-1314-5., p.14

social fabric of host and refugee communities, including SEIS. This includes identifying potential sources of tension, patterns of interaction, and perceptions of fairness in resource distribution.

The scope and the function of the present study limit the report to reviewing only some of the factors that influence the potential of the refugees to integrate and to contribute to the cohesiveness of the host society. Five thematic categories are reviewed in this section, namely:

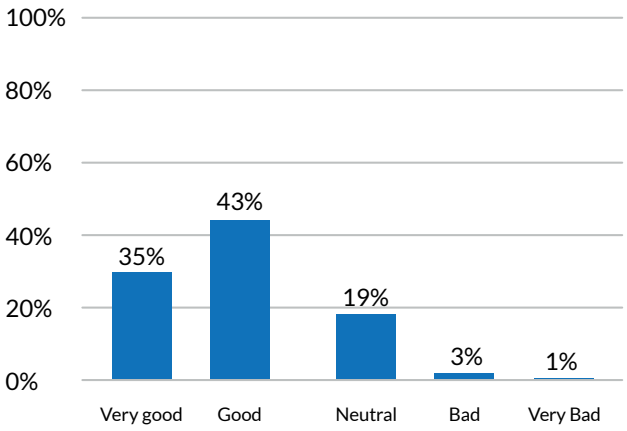
a) the overall relationship between the refugee and the host communities, as assessed by the refugees;
b) the dynamics of the relationship between the refugee and the host communities, again, as assessed by the refugees;
c) experienced by the refugees' behaviour or attitudes that were perceived as hostile;
d) forms of perceived hostility;
e) assumed motivation for perceived hostilities.

The scope of the review is restricted not only thematically but also in terms of respondent characteristics. For example, this study is focused on a population not covered by a previous report that was centred on the Ukrainian refugees.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE REFUGEE AND THE HOST COMMUNITIES AS PERCEIVED BY THE REFUGEES

The overall assessment of the respondents of their relationships with the host communities is overwhelmingly positive. Only a minimal proportion of them (3.6%) define these relationships negatively; moreover: less than a percentage point of the respondents experience the relations with the host community as very bad.

Graph 85: **How would you describe the relationship between the refugee and the host communities in the location where you live?**



On the other hand, for more than a third of the respondents (35.2.%) the relationships with hosting communities are very good. The overall positive assessment of these relationships exceeds three quarters (77.8%) of the answers given by the interviewed refugees. Almost a fifth of the respondents (19%) perceive de relationships as neither good nor bad.

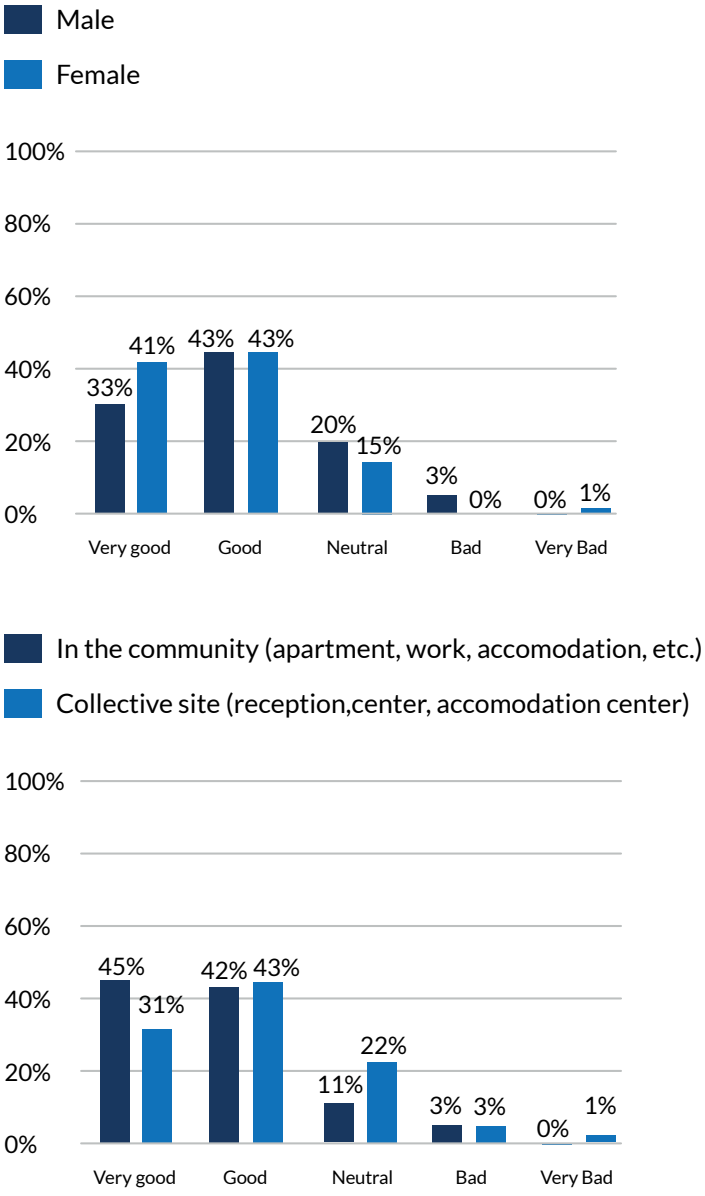
A review of the disaggregated data provides interesting insights. The female respondents evaluate the relationships with the host society as better than the male ones do: overall, these relationships are considered as positive by 84.2% of women, vs. 75.7% of the men with the difference between the women and men assessing the relationships as very good reaching 8.5% percentage points.

How would you describe the relationship between the refugee and the host communities in the location where you live?

Refugees living among the host society clearly

[4] Global Metrics (2023) UKRAINE SITUATION Multi-Sector Needs Assessment. A report commissioned by UNHCR Bulgaria. Read the document.

Graph 86: **How would you describe the relationship between the refugee and the host communities in the location where you live?**



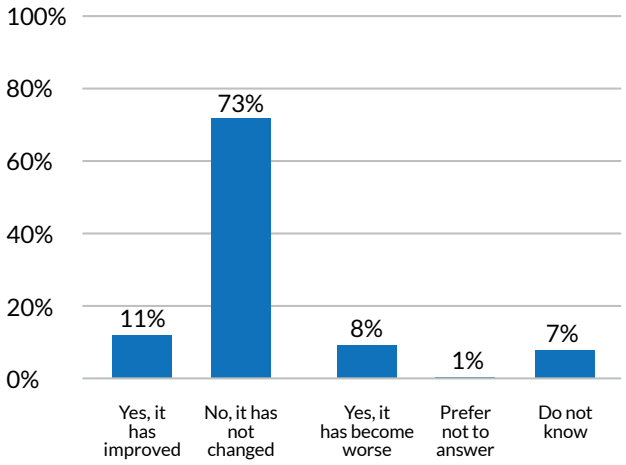
evaluate the relation with the latter as better than their peers placed in refugee-specific locations. The relationship is evaluated as positive by 86.5% of former group against "only" 74.1% of the latter. What is more important is that the variation is due to these respondents who perceive the relationship with their Bulgarian neighbours, co-workers, etc. as very positive. The difference between the respondents living among the Bulgarian communities and their peers placed in separate centra who assess the relationship with the host communities as very good amount to 14.4%. Unfortunately, though, two thirds of respondents are placed in the centra and only one third live in the community.

DYNAMICS OF THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE REFUGEE AND THE HOST COMMUNITIES

The dynamics of the relationships between the refugee and the host communities remains stable, with close to three quarters of the respondents stating that it did not change over time. Only about a fifth of the interviewees report alterations: with positive changes exceeding the negative: 10.5% vs. 8%. It is worth noting, though, that 47% of the respondents have been in the country for a period of six months or shorter. This requires some cautiousness when interpretating the relation-dynamics data.

Probably the most important aspects of the

Graph 87: **Has the relationship changed since your household first arrived in this location?**



relations-dynamics are to be found in the disaggregated data on this issue. There is a clear difference in the dynamics depending on the accommodation of the respondents and their gender.

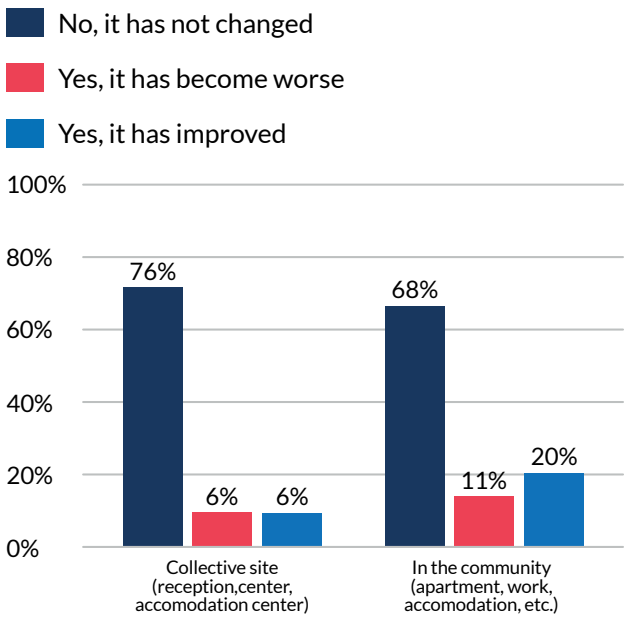
For the refugees living among the Bulgarians, the dynamics is not only more intensive but also clearer. It is noteworthy that more than a tenth of the respondents placed in reception centres (11%) respond with do not know, whereas none of the other respondents do so. The refugees scattered among the local population experience stronger changes in their relationships with the Bulgarians in both directions – positive and negative, but the positive changes are much stronger. Almost twice as many refugees (20.2%) define the dynamics of the relationships as positive against 10.9% as negative.

The most important difference to be noted, though, is in the proportions of refugees experiencing positive changes in the two accommodation sub-groups. Against 20.2% of the refugees living among Bulgarians, who report positive dynamics, there are only 5.7% of the refugees placed in centra, who report the same.

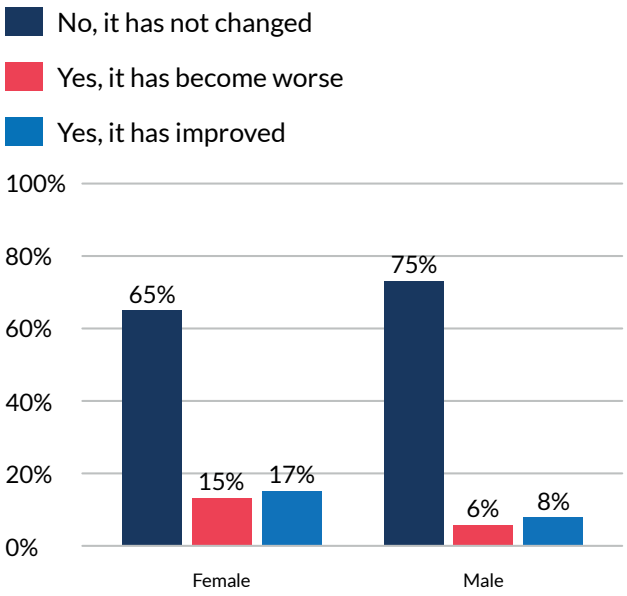
The differences in the answers given by female and male respondents to the question "Has the relationship changed since your household first arrived in this location?" must be noted, too. The women report notably greater relationships dynamics: no changes are indicated by three quarters of the male respondents (75.3%) against a bit less than two thirds (64.6%) of the female. Men are also much more unsure if the relationships altered: almost a tenth of them respond with do not know (vs. only 2.4% of the women).

When it comes to the specificity of the changes of the relationships, the answers "Yes, it has

Graph 88: **Has the relationship changed since your household first arrived in this location?**



Graph 89: **Has the relationship changed since your household first arrived in this location?**



improved" slightly surpass the "Yes, it has become worse" within each of the respondent

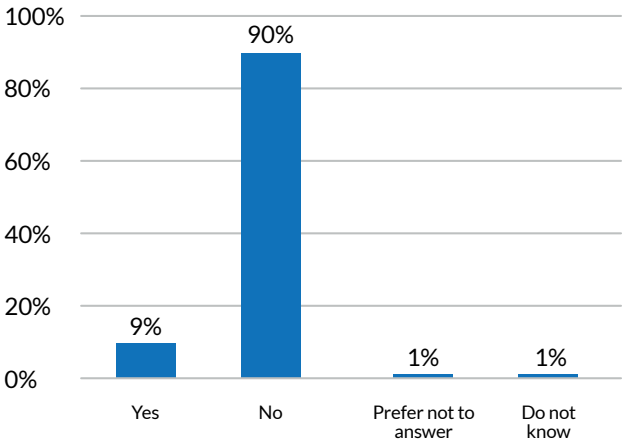
groups (difference of 2.5 percentage points within the female group and 2.2 percentage points within the male one). The difference between these two respondent groups, however, are prominent: with 17.1% of the women reporting changes to the better (vs. 8.2% of the men) and 14.6% of the women reporting changes to the worse (vs. 6% of the men).

Once again, contemplating over the disaggregated data, the reminder that almost half of the respondents (47%) have stayed in the country six months or shorter should be kept in mind.

REPORTED EXPERIENCED BEHAVIOUR OR ATTITUDES PERCEIVED AS HOSTILE

The overwhelming majority of the respondents, 89.5%, report not experiencing behaviour or attitudes by the Bulgarians perceived as hostile.

Graph 90: **Have you or anyone in your household experienced what you felt was hostile behaviour or attitudes by the local population since arriving to Bulgaria?**



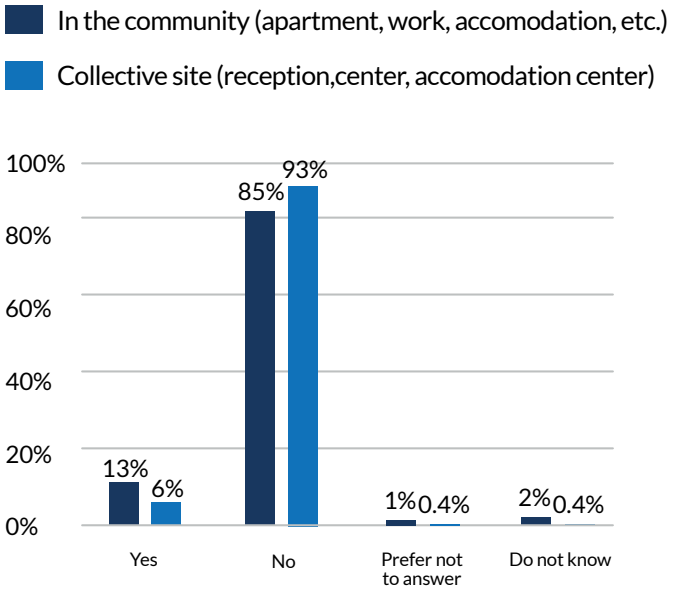
Percentage points exceed 100 due to rounding.

Regardelss of the mentioned limitated duration of the stay of almost half of the repsondnets (see above), the answers given by refugees indicate that there are no reasons to consider the environment provided by the host communities as hostile. Only 8.8% of the respondents reported unfavourable behaviour or attitudes, moreover, answering also on behalf of the other members of their household.

Once again, the disaggregated data provides a valuable insight, with respect to the association between the type of accommodation the respondents live in and the occurrence of experiences felt by them (or members of their households) as hostile.

Experienced behaviour or attitudes that were perceived as hostile: data disaggregated by gender and age.

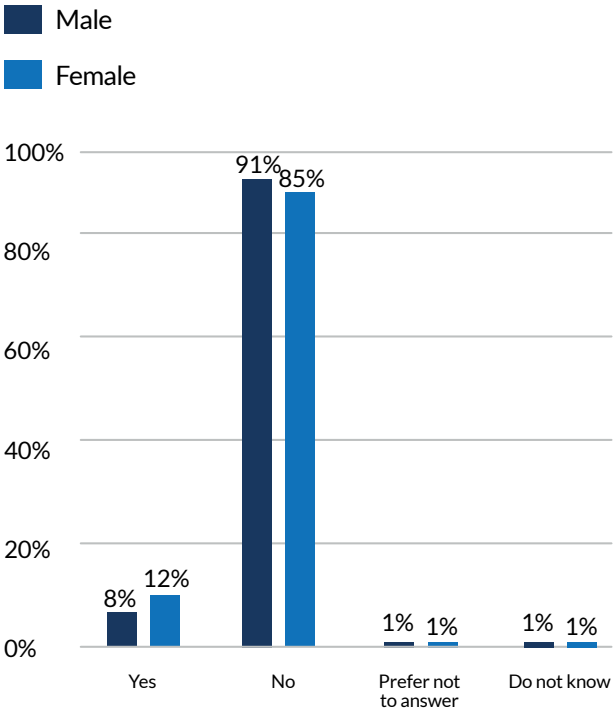
Graph 91: **Have you or anyone in your household experienced what you felt was hostile behaviour or attitudes by the local population since arriving to Bulgaria?**



This time, the refugees who are in closer co-habitation with the host community report twice as many hostile acts or attituded by the

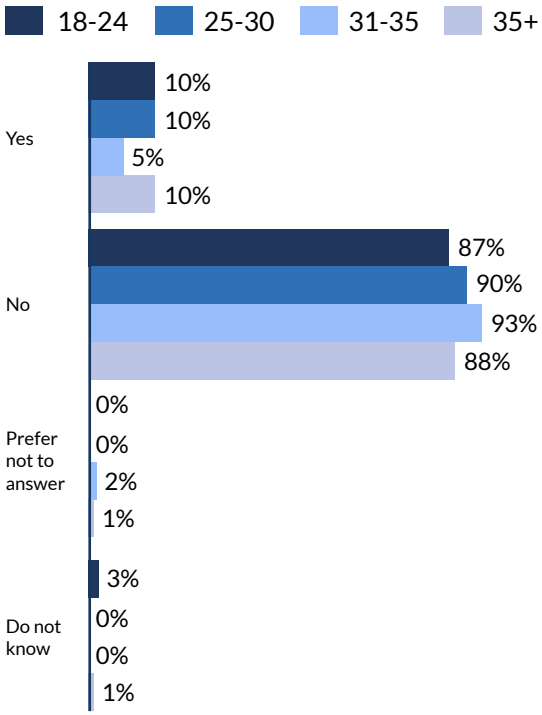
Bulgarians as their peers living in the centra, that by default are more isolated. Yet, it is important to underline that all-in-all only 12.6% of the former respondents reported hostility (vs. 6.1% of the refugees placed in the centra).

Graph 92: **Have you or anyone in your household experienced what you felt was hostile behaviour or attitudes by the local population since arriving to Bulgaria?**



The review of the disaggregated data and the way the question has been formulated[5] do not allow to conclude that a particular age/gender group has been more prone (than another group) to experiencing hostile behaviour or attitudes. Yet, an assumption is possible that the youngest and the oldest female respondents have been more likely to feel, witness or be aware of hostile actions or perceptions

Graph 93: **Have you or anyone in your household experienced what you felt was hostile behaviour or attitudes by the local population since arriving to Bulgaria?**

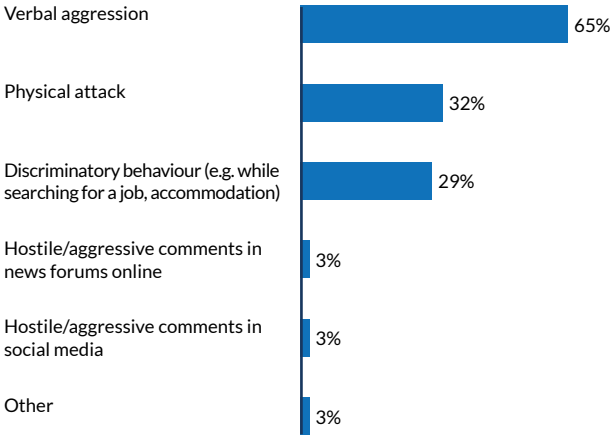


FORMS OF PERCEIVED HOSTILITY

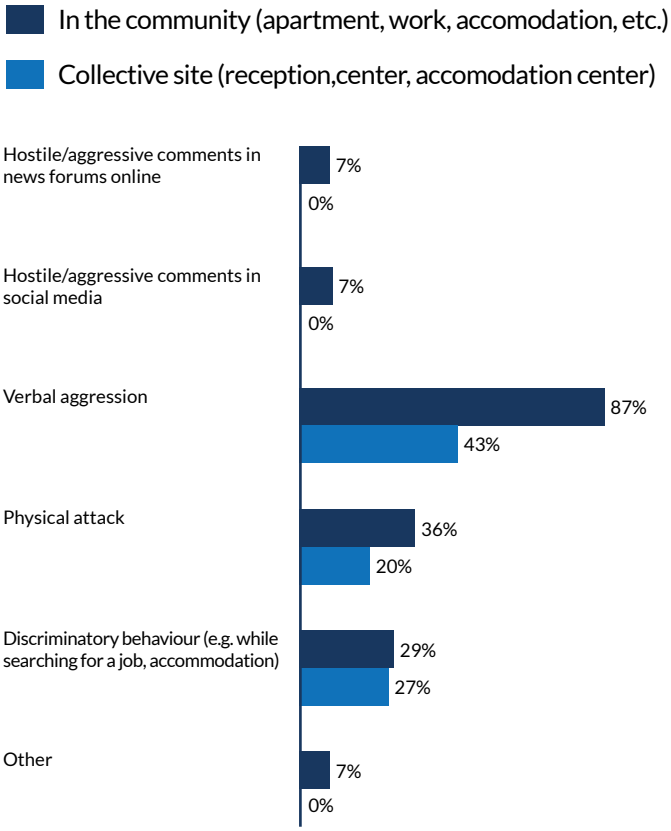
Zooming in into the percieved hostile acts and attitudes, it is important to note that one and the same incident might have been reported under varioous types of hostility, therefore the overall percentage of reproted (forms of) hostilities exceed 100. Keeping this in mind, it is worthnoting that "Verbal aggression" accounts for two thirds of reported incidents (64.5%) whereas more severe "Physical attack" – for a third (32.3%). Almost another third of the incidents (29%) are defined as "Dicriminatory behaviour". Less friquent incidents of "Hostile/ aggressive comments in social media", "Hostile/ aggressive comments in news forums online" and unspecified "Other" hostility are reported, too.

[5] Asking the respondents to report presumed hostility also against members of their households.

Graph 94: **What kind of hostile/unwelcoming behaviour(s) were these?**



Graph 95: **What kind of hostile/unwelcoming behaviour(s) were these?**



It is important to note - once again – that as it has been made clear above, only 8.8% of the respondents reported perceived hostile behaviour or attitudes. Thus, the forms of hostility reviewed here have been experienced by less than one tenth of the respondents or by members of their households. It is good to point out, also, that the way the data was collected might have let to reporting more intense hostility incidents more than once in various categories. Thus, there is certain trade-off between the intensively of the incidents and their number and this must be kept in mind when contemplating over the forms of perceived hostility.

The analysis of the disaggregated data reveals an interesting pattern in the association between the type of the accommodation the refugees dwell in and the type of perceived hostile behaviour they experienced, witnessed or are aware about.

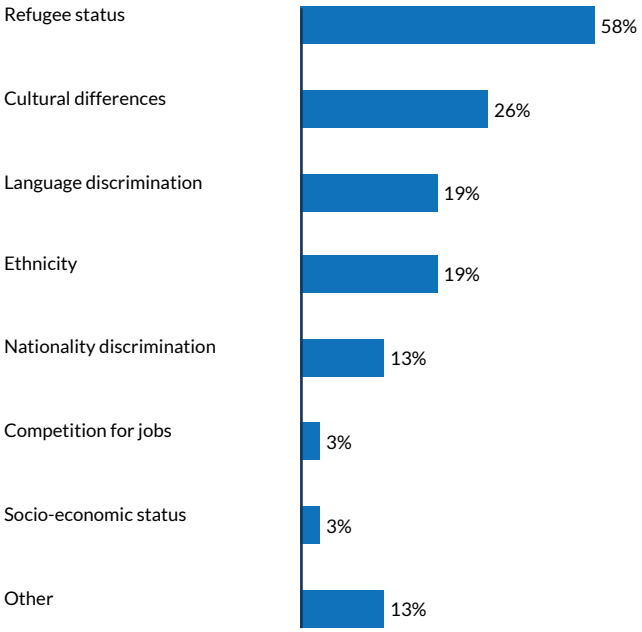
Reports about physical attacks come – proportionally – more often from inhabitants of refugee centra, while verbal aggression is by far the more often perceived form of hostile behaviour reported by the refugees living among the host communities. The latter form is identified by the respondents living among the Bulgarians more than twice as often as it is by the refugees in the centra (86.7% vs. 42.9%). Discrimination as a form of perceived hostility is reported en par by both refugee groups (28.6% vs. 26.7%).

ASSUMED MOTIVATION FOR PERCEIVED HOSTILE BEHAVIOUR

Finally, again zooming in into the reported incidents of felt hostilities, the assumed reasons for unfriendly acts are examined. Here, again the reminder that only 8.8% of the respondents reported perceived hostile behaviour or attitudes is in order.

Graph 96: **Assumed reason for hostile behaviour**

The respondents could give multiple answers to the question.

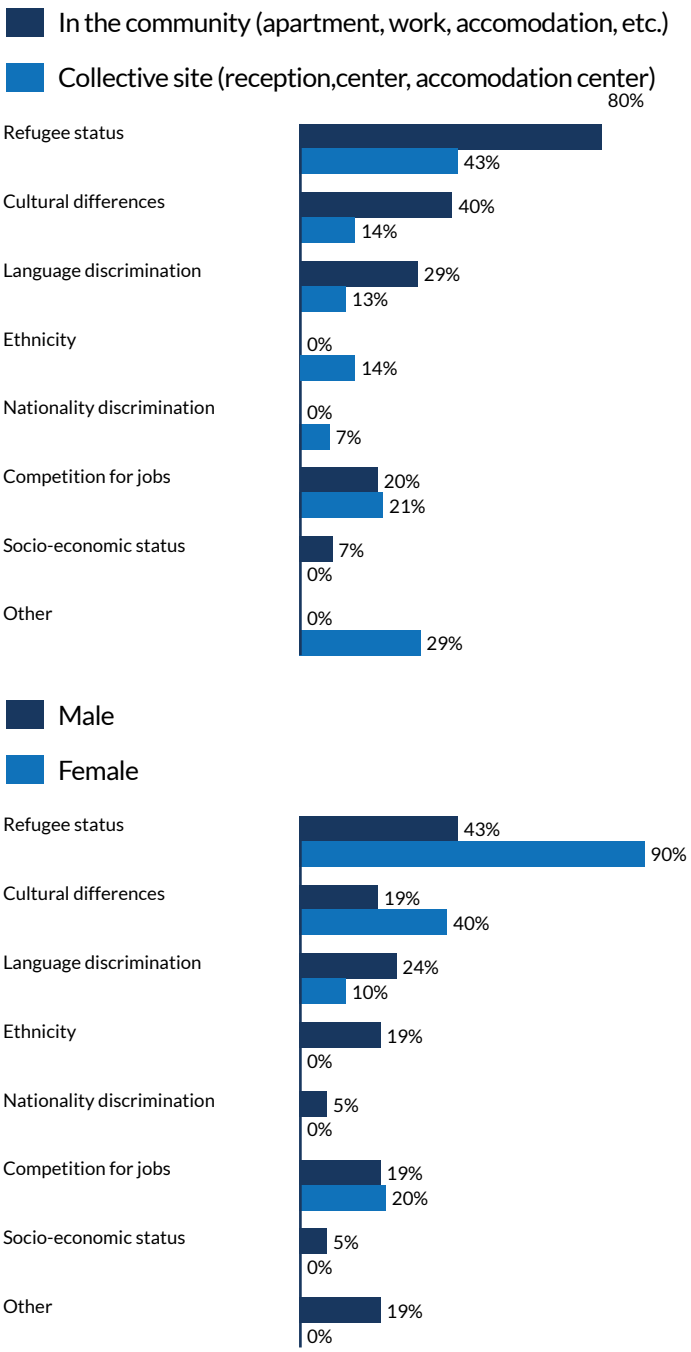


The respondents could assume more than one reason for one and the same incident, and thus give multiple answers; so, also here, the overall percentage exceed 100. The most widely assumed by the refugees' reason for hostility is their "Refugees status". This is named as a motivation for unfriendly behaviour on behalf of the Bulgarian hosts in 58.1% of the cases. "Cultural difference", the second most often appearing answer, accounts (as one of the assumed reason(s) for a quarter of the hostility incidents (25.8%). "Language discrimination" and "Ethnicity", each, are mentioned as an assumed motivation for a fifth of the incidents (both with 19.4%), followed by nationality (12.9%).

The disaggregated data shows that a female refugee, living among the Bulgarians, is most likely to assume that her/a refugee status might be a reason for unfriendly behaviour by a representative of the host communities.

Male refugees tend to presume wider range of motivations for unfavourable acts and attitudes by the Bulgarians, as do the inhabitants of the refugee centra.

Graph 97: **Assumed reason for hostile behaviour: data disaggregated by gender and accommodation type**



SOCIAL COHESION: CONCLUDING REMARKS

Taking "the unity and solidarity among members of the collective"[6] and the "attitudes and norms […] also reflected in people's behaviours"[7] as theoretical and methodological departing points to evaluate the potential of the non-Ukrainian refugees in Bulgaria to integrate into the Bulgarian society and potentially, further on down the road, to contribute to the social cohesion of the host communities, the reviewed study findings are mixed, but overall optimistic.

The grounds for optimistic view on the potential for fostering social cohesion are several and with potential to be further fostered. First and foremost, the ratio between the refugees who evaluate the relationships with the host communities positively and those who view them negatively exceeds 20 times (to remind: 77.8% vs. 3.6%). Second, the refugees' perceptions of their relationships with the host society remain relatively stable (72.7%) or improves over time (10.5%) with only 8% reporting deterioration. Last but not least, the refugees who have already made their first steps of integrating into the Bulgarian society (lining in the community, already being employed) report better relationships with the local communities, especially in the sub-category of very good relationship. This cannot be overlooked when analysing the data and must not be ignored when contemplating both short-term intervention and longer-term policies.

The cautiousness with respect to the optimistic read of the findings stems from some of the findings as well as from some overall restrictions and methodological limitations of the study. To start with the former, negative attitudes and incidents of hostilities are reported, including such of physical attacks. Although, seemingly, their number is not great any such incident is a direct blow to every social cohesion prospect. It is also concerning that although the proportion of the reported hostilities remains overall low, women report more often incidents. Switching to the overall and the methodological limitations of the study, one of them is that, unfortunately, the study does not include a question on the authorities' reaction to the acts of hostilities. Other limitations, also beyond the methodology, have already been mentioned, e.g. the fact the almost half of the respondents have been in the country for half a year or shorted.

Living in the community is conducive to better relationships and might serve as a first purposefully taken step towards integration of the refugees in the hosting society and, respectively, to better social cohesion. This finding can't be surprising, rather spelling it out here risks stating something banal. And yet, this study confirms that refugees living in the community have clear attitudes and better relationships with the hosing society. Some minor conflicting points such as higher reporting of verbal aggression might be well explained by the supposedly much greater interaction of this refugee group with the local communities, compared to the refugee group placed in the centra. At the same time, severer forms of aggression such as physical attacks are reported not as often as by refugees living in the community as by refugees living in the centra. Yet, unfortunately, the ratio between the refugees(-respondents) living in the community to those placed in the centra is one to two.

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