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Social
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LANGUAGE LADDER

LEARNING AND NURTURING GROWTH USING ADAPTIVE GUIDANCE
AND EDUCATION FOR REFUGEE
YOUTH IN ESTONIA AND POLAND

WP2

Summer camps findings and evaluation



ESTONIAN
REFUGEE
COUNCIL



DOBRA
FABRYKA



TALLINN UNIVERSITY

Summer camps findings and evaluation

The summer camps in Estonia and Poland created a live test environment where the theoretical assumptions the initial study could be observed in practice. They gave us real-world behavioral insight on how youth actually respond to interventions, what activates belonging, what shuts them down, and what creates voluntary participation instead of forced compliance. Youth responded not as abstract categories, but as young people with agency, humour, preference, emotional logic and selective vulnerability.

These camps confirmed that integration is not allocated – it must be earned relationally, and it only emerges when emotional safety precedes academic effort.

Across both countries we saw that belonging is formed primarily through peer relational bonding – not through instructional transfer.

In Estonia, smaller group dynamics enabled bonding to emerge sooner and more evenly across participants. In Poland, the integration curve was slower – but still visible – and we observed that the point at which new friendships started forming consistently was in the third week.

This was the strongest validation that integration required time and regular interaction in different settings.

At Week 3, a shift happens: youth begin to share private references, humour synchronises.. Shared cultural experiences (outings, music, collective challenges) accelerate this effect. Importantly – this belonging emerged regardless of region of origin or which year youth arrived. This suggests belonging creation is possible across internal identity segmentation – when designed correctly.

In both countries, youth valued activities where emotional exposure was low and personal expression could emerge gradually. The presence of psychologists and facilitators skilled in relational holding mattered more than the thematic content of activities. Youth expressed repeatedly that feeling “looked after” and “safe” was more important than what specifically was taught.

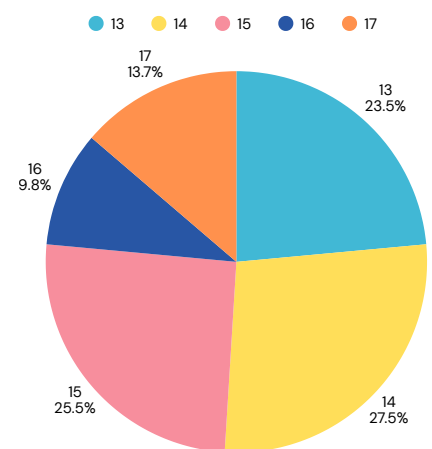
Guardians reinforced this perspective: they valued primarily that someone was reliably caring for their children’s emotional well-being, structure and supervision – especially during a period where many families could not provide stable summer schedules.

This reconfirms that emotional safety is a prerequisite for meaningful educational or language outcomes – not a secondary “soft” component.

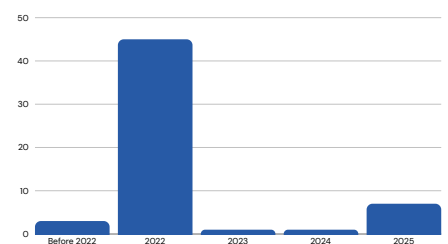
BENEFICIARY PROFILE POLAND

BOYS – 31 (54%)
GIRLS – 26 (46%)

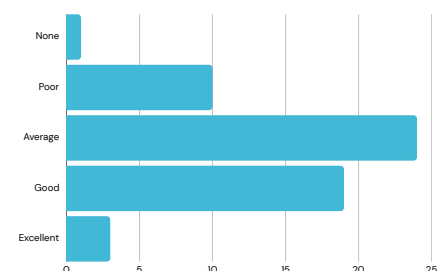
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IN POLAND SINCE



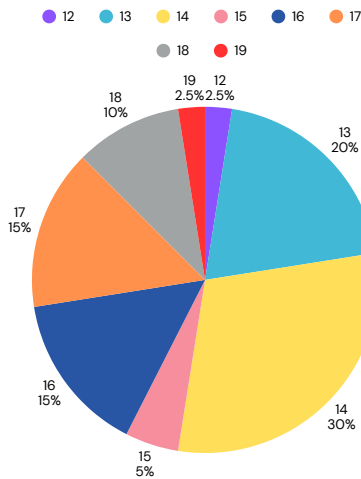
POLISH LANGUAGE SPEAKING LEVEL



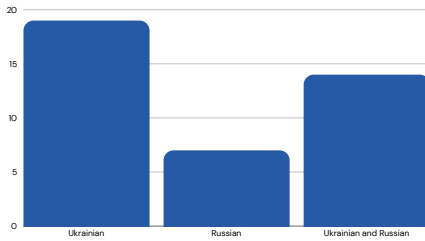
BENEFICIARY PROFILE ESTONIA

BOYS – 19 (48%)
GIRLS – 21 (52%)

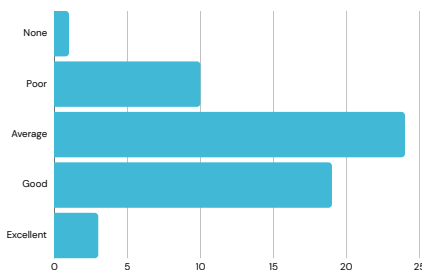
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MOTHER TONGUE



ESTONIAN LANGUAGE SPEAKING LEVEL



One of the strongest learnings from both countries is that “education” must be experienced differently by youth in displacement contexts to create value. Youth did not respond positively when activities resembled formal school environments. If sessions felt evaluative or instruction-heavy, engagement dropped immediately. What worked consistently was **embedding learning inside activities that felt social, creative, purposeful, relatable and fun.**

This validates the blueprint decision to treat educational reinforcement as a natural outcome of belonging, not the starting trigger. Youth are willing to learn Polish/Estonian as subjects, math, or English — but only **when they first feel emotionally safe, seen, and able to perform** competence without fear of comparison. In both Estonia and Poland, youth described language learning as meaningful only when it helped them understand peers, humour, culture and shared games — not when it was framed as correction or formal grammar transmission.

Retention challenges were visible particularly in Poland, where drop-out over the 4-week cycle ranged between 23% and 30%. This was not linked to rejection of programme content — but to seasonal dynamics (summer period competing priorities) and competing family plans.

This is an important operational learning: the integration curve is slow, and the time unit required for meaningful belonging formation is longer than a typical 1–2 week pilot format. The camps demonstrated that Week 3 is when belonging accelerates — therefore interventions that are shorter risk stopping exactly before they start working.

In Estonia, a similar process has been observed – feedback gathered from the participants highlighted noticeable emotional and social transformations among youth during the camps over the time of the camp. The youth group leaders described the process as not immediate *“We saw children arrive closed off and cautious — and then gradually open up, try new things, reveal talents, and become more confident.”*

The camp environment allowed youth to rest, feel safe and supported, and emotionally self-regulate which was expressed by their readiness to participate and express themselves: *“Children had a real opportunity to change their surroundings, feel more at ease, and simply rest — which is especially meaningful in the current circumstances,”* noted another group leader.

This review confirms that the summer pilots were not a “test of activities” — they were a test of integration logic. The results validate the conceptual approach and directly shaped the refined intervention plan. The camps showed us how youth actually integrate — slowly, relationally, situationally — and how education becomes meaningful only once belonging (in different shapes and forms) has been secured.