



ANALYSIS OF THE STATUS AND INTEGRATION OF UKRAINIAN STUDENTS AT MATEJ BEL UNIVERSITY



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1. Introduction

The ongoing geopolitical situation in Ukraine has led to a significant increase in the number of Ukrainian students seeking higher education opportunities abroad. Universities across Europe, including Matej Bel University (UMB) in Slovakia, have observed a rising trend in the enrollment of Ukrainian students. This report provides a comprehensive analysis of their presence at UMB, focusing on demographic trends, academic choices, accommodation conditions, and qualitative insights from stakeholder discussions.

UMB has implemented several initiatives to support Ukrainian students, such as offering specialized Slovak language courses, scholarships, and administrative assistance. Ukrainian students have shown a preference for enrollment in faculties such as the Faculty of Economics, the Faculty of Political Science and International Relations, and the Faculty of Law. The university's efforts to foster academic and social integration have been pivotal in ensuring a smooth transition for these students into the Slovak higher education system.

This report combines quantitative data from UMB's official information system for the academic year 2023/2024 with qualitative insights from the roundtable discussion titled **"European Inclusion of Ukrainian Students"**, held in April 2024. Together, these sources offer a multidimensional view of the current state of Ukrainian students at UMB and provide actionable recommendations for their academic and social integration.

The structure of this report is as follows:

1. Introduction
2. Literature Review
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4. Overview of Ukrainian students (Analysis of Quantitative Data)
5. Demographic analysis (Analysis of Quantitative Data)
6. Analysis of Ukrainian Students by City of Permanent Residence
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2. Literature Review

The increasing presence of Ukrainian students in Slovak higher education institutions reflects the multifaceted dynamics of international student mobility. A review of existing literature reveals the significant contributions of international students to their host institutions, the unique motivations of Ukrainian students choosing Slovakia, the reciprocal benefits for Slovak universities, and the challenges these students encounter.

International students enhance the global competitiveness and diversity of Slovak universities. Ferencz et al. (2020) highlight how internationalization fosters cultural and academic exchanges that benefit all stakeholders. Ukrainian students represent a key demographic in this context, facilitated by the geographical proximity and cultural affinity between Slovakia and Ukraine. Berinšterová (2023) underscores that the linguistic and cultural similarities make Slovakia an appealing destination, enabling a smoother adaptation process for these students.

The motivations of Ukrainian students are deeply intertwined with the geopolitical and economic landscapes. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has driven thousands to seek refuge and education abroad (Štefková & Šveda, 2022). Slovakia emerges as a preferred option due to its affordability and the lower living costs compared to Western Europe (Koroutchev, 2020). Furthermore, government initiatives such as scholarships, simplified visa procedures, and Slovak language courses have been pivotal in increasing accessibility for Ukrainian students (Ministry of Education, Science, Research, and Sport of the Slovak Republic, 2023).

Ukrainian students benefit significantly from studying in Slovakia. Slovak universities, as part of the European Higher Education Area, offer globally recognized qualifications that enhance employability. Berinšterová (2023) emphasizes that many Ukrainian students see this education as a gateway to careers in the European labor market. Additionally, Slovak universities provide psychosocial support mechanisms, including counselling and mentorship programs, which are crucial for students affected by the trauma of conflict (Štefková & Šveda, 2022).

The presence of Ukrainian students also benefits Slovak universities. Beyond the financial contributions through tuition fees and local spending, these students bring cultural diversity and academic excellence (Koroutchev, 2020). Their participation in academic and extracurricular activities enriches the university environment, fostering intercultural dialogue and collaboration.

Despite these advantages, Ukrainian students face significant challenges. Language barriers remain a persistent issue, even with linguistic similarities between Slovak and Ukrainian (Ferencz et al., 2020). Social integration is another hurdle; many Ukrainian students report difficulties in building connections with Slovak peers, leading to a sense of isolation (Berinšterová, 2023). Administrative complexities, including navigating housing, visa processes, and academic systems, further exacerbate their challenges (Štefková & Šveda, 2022).

Addressing these barriers requires targeted interventions. Slovak universities have made strides in offering Slovak language courses and organizing cultural exchange programs to foster inclusivity (Koroutchev, 2020). Administrative support services and mentorship programs are critical in helping students navigate their new environment. Štefková & Šveda (2022) advocate for ongoing research to evaluate the long-term efficacy of these measures, ensuring sustainable support for international students.

3. Methodology

The methodology underpinning this report integrates both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the status and integration of Ukrainian students at Matej Bel University (UMB). This mixed-methods design allows for a holistic analysis of enrolment trends, demographic characteristics, academic preferences, accommodation challenges, and the broader context of their experiences.

3.1. Quantitative Data Collection

Quantitative data for the academic year 2023/2024 were meticulously extracted from the official academic information system of Matej Bel University, providing a comprehensive overview of Ukrainian students at the institution. The data capture several key parameters, including enrolment numbers, faculty distribution, demographic characteristics, study program preferences, and accommodation details.

The total number of Ukrainian students enrolled across all faculties forms the core of the analysis, offering insights into the overall presence of this group within the university's academic community. Further, the distribution of these students among various faculties illustrates their academic integration and highlights any notable concentrations in specific fields of study.

Demographic variables such as age and gender provide a detailed profile of the student body, revealing patterns and trends that may influence academic and social dynamics. Additionally, data on study program preferences shed light on the academic interests and career

aspirations of Ukrainian students, showing which programs attract the most enrolment and potentially identifying areas of strong interest or need for targeted support.

Accommodation data further enrich the analysis by illustrating the living arrangements of Ukrainian students, including the proportion residing in university dormitories compared to those living in private housing. This information provides valuable context regarding their integration into the university environment and the community at large.

To ensure the reliability and ethical integrity of the dataset, all information underwent thorough validation and anonymization processes. This careful approach guarantees both the accuracy of the data and full compliance with ethical standards, particularly in safeguarding the confidentiality of student information. Such measures underscore the commitment to responsible data handling while enabling a detailed and transparent examination of the Ukrainian student population at Matej Bel University.

3.2. Qualitative Data Collection

Qualitative insights were gathered from a roundtable discussion held on April 29, 2024, titled "*European Inclusion of Ukrainian Students*." This event provided a platform for in-depth exploration of the academic and social integration of Ukrainian students, structured around three thematic panels. The first panel, *Pre-War vs. Post-War Dynamics*, delved into the shifts in integration experiences before and after the onset of the war, highlighting changes in the academic and social inclusion of Ukrainian students. The second panel, *Inclusive Environments Across Faculties*, focused on identifying faculty-specific practices that have successfully fostered inclusion, offering a nuanced understanding of how different academic environments address the needs of Ukrainian students. The third panel, *Barriers and Opportunities for Inclusion*, provided a comprehensive exploration of the challenges faced by both students and institutions while uncovering valuable lessons and potential strategies for enhancing integration.

Participants in the discussion represented a diverse group, including Ukrainian and Slovak students, faculty members, and university administrators, ensuring a broad spectrum of perspectives. The discussions were transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of key insights. These qualitative findings were further enriched by triangulating them with quantitative data, creating a robust and multifaceted understanding of the inclusion of Ukrainian students. This approach not only deepened the insights gained but also ensured that the findings were grounded in both experiential and empirical evidence,

offering a comprehensive view of the issues and opportunities surrounding the integration of Ukrainian students within the European academic context.

3.3. Data Analysis

The research employed a rigorous methodological approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and integration of Ukrainian students. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistical methods, enabling a clear and detailed presentation of enrolment trends, faculty distribution, demographic characteristics, and accommodation patterns. These findings were visually summarized using tables, charts, and graphs, which facilitated the identification of patterns and trends over time, offering valuable insights into the evolving dynamics of Ukrainian student integration at the university.

Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis, a methodical approach that uncovered recurring themes and key insights related to the academic and social experiences of Ukrainian students. This qualitative dimension enriched the research by providing context and depth to the statistical findings, highlighting individual and collective experiences, and identifying both challenges and opportunities for improved inclusion within the university environment.

The research adhered strictly to ethical guidelines, ensuring the rights and privacy of all participants were fully protected throughout the study. Key ethical measures included obtaining informed consent from participants in the roundtable discussion, who were thoroughly briefed on the purpose and scope of the research to ensure their voluntary and informed participation. Anonymization procedures were implemented rigorously, with all personal identifiers removed from the data to protect the confidentiality of participants. Additionally, robust data security measures were in place, ensuring that all data were stored securely and accessed only by authorized personnel. These ethical practices underscored the commitment to conducting research with integrity, ensuring the validity of the findings while safeguarding the well-being and trust of all participants.

4. Overview of Ukrainian Students

In this part, we provide results of the analysis of the secondary data obtained from the official academic information system at Matej Bel University (AIS2). Data are processed particularly for the 2023/2024 academic year. However, several information are provided also cumulatively for the longer period (from 2021).

4.1. Enrolment Trends

The number of Ukrainian students at Matej Bel University has seen a significant rise, particularly in recent years. The enrolment data reveals an upward trajectory, with the most substantial increase occurring between 2021 and 2022.

Cumulative Data (All Years)

The enrolment of Ukrainian students at Matej Bel University (UMB) has shown a remarkable upward trend over recent years, reflecting both external geopolitical influences and the university's proactive support initiatives. **In 2019, only 4 Ukrainian students were enrolled**, marking the starting point of this significant growth trajectory. **By 2020, the number had doubled to 8 students**, demonstrating a steady initial increase.

The Figure 1 illustrates the enrollment trends over time.

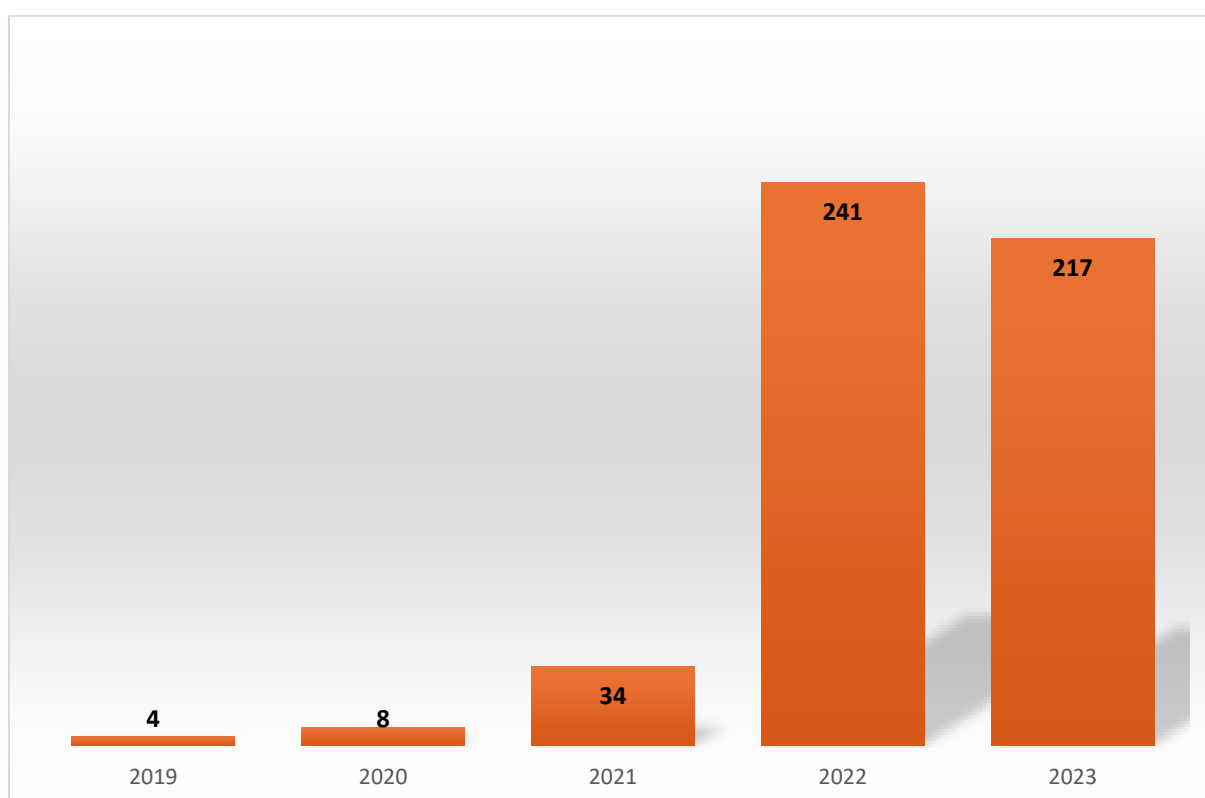


Figure 1: Enrollment Trends of Ukrainian Students Over Time)

Source: own elaboration based on AIS2 data

A pivotal moment occurred in 2021, with the enrolment surging to **34 students**, an eightfold increase from 2019. This marked the beginning of a sustained and rapid expansion. **The largest increase was observed in 2022**, when **241 Ukrainian students enrolled**,

underscoring the profound impact of external geopolitical factors, likely including the escalation of conflict in Ukraine and the resultant displacement of students seeking stable educational opportunities abroad.

While 2023 saw a slight decrease, **217 students joined UMB**, maintaining the upward trend and highlighting the continued demand for higher education among Ukrainian students. This sustained interest suggests that UMB has become an increasingly attractive destination for Ukrainian students, driven by its reputation, support structures, and commitment to inclusion.

This progression from 4 students in 2019 to over 200 students annually in recent years indicates a **growing demand for higher education at UMB among Ukrainian students**, strongly influenced by geopolitical conditions and the university's responsive measures to accommodate their needs. The data reveal not only the resilience and adaptability of Ukrainian students but also the effectiveness of UMB's initiatives in fostering a welcoming and inclusive academic environment.

Academic Year 2023/2024

For the academic year **2023/2024**, the number of newly enrolled Ukrainian students reached **217**, maintaining the high levels observed in the previous year. These students represent a diverse group in terms of study programs and faculty distribution, as outlined in the following section.

4.2. Faculty Distribution

Cumulative Data (All Years)

The cumulative enrolment data for Ukrainian students at Matej Bel University reveals a varied distribution across faculties, reflecting their academic preferences and career aspirations. Over the years, the **Faculty of Economics has consistently attracted the highest number of Ukrainian students**, positioning itself as a primary choice for those seeking education in economic disciplines, particularly in management and finance. The **Faculty of Political Science and International Relations** and the **Faculty of Law** also rank prominently, with substantial enrolment numbers highlighting a strong interest in international relations, political studies, and legal disciplines, particularly those with a focus on international law and European legal frameworks. In contrast, **lower enrolment figures are observed in the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Natural Sciences**, suggesting a more limited interest in pedagogical and scientific fields among Ukrainian students.

This varying faculty distribution underscores the appeal of fields like economics, law, and international relations, which likely align closely with the career goals of Ukrainian students and their applicability in both Slovakia and Ukraine. The geopolitical context of their home country may also play a significant role in shaping these preferences, as these disciplines offer skills and knowledge that are highly relevant in post-conflict reconstruction, international cooperation, and global economic integration.

Academic Year 2023/2024 Insights

During the 2023/2024 academic year, the distribution of newly enrolled Ukrainian students across faculties follows a similar pattern. The **Faculty of Economics** continues to lead as the most popular choice, reaffirming its appeal to students interested in economic fields, particularly management and finance. The **Faculty of Political Science and International Relations** maintains its strong position, reflecting an ongoing interest in international relations and political studies, likely influenced by the continuing geopolitical situation in Ukraine. Similarly, the **Faculty of Law** has experienced steady enrolment, particularly among students drawn to international and European legal studies, which are increasingly relevant in the context of Ukraine's aspirations for closer ties with the European Union.

In contrast, the **Faculty of Education** and the **Faculty of Natural Sciences** continue to see lower enrolment numbers, although they remain valuable options for Ukrainian students pursuing careers in pedagogy and scientific disciplines. These faculties provide essential academic opportunities, even if they attract a smaller portion of the Ukrainian student population.

Overall, the distribution of Ukrainian students at UMB reflects not only their academic preferences but also broader socio-economic and geopolitical factors that influence their choices. The sustained interest in economics, international relations, and law underscores the alignment of these disciplines with the skills and knowledge needed to navigate and contribute to a rapidly changing global environment, both during and after the challenges posed by external conflicts.

The Figure 2 presents the distribution of Ukrainian students by faculty for the 2023/2024 academic year.

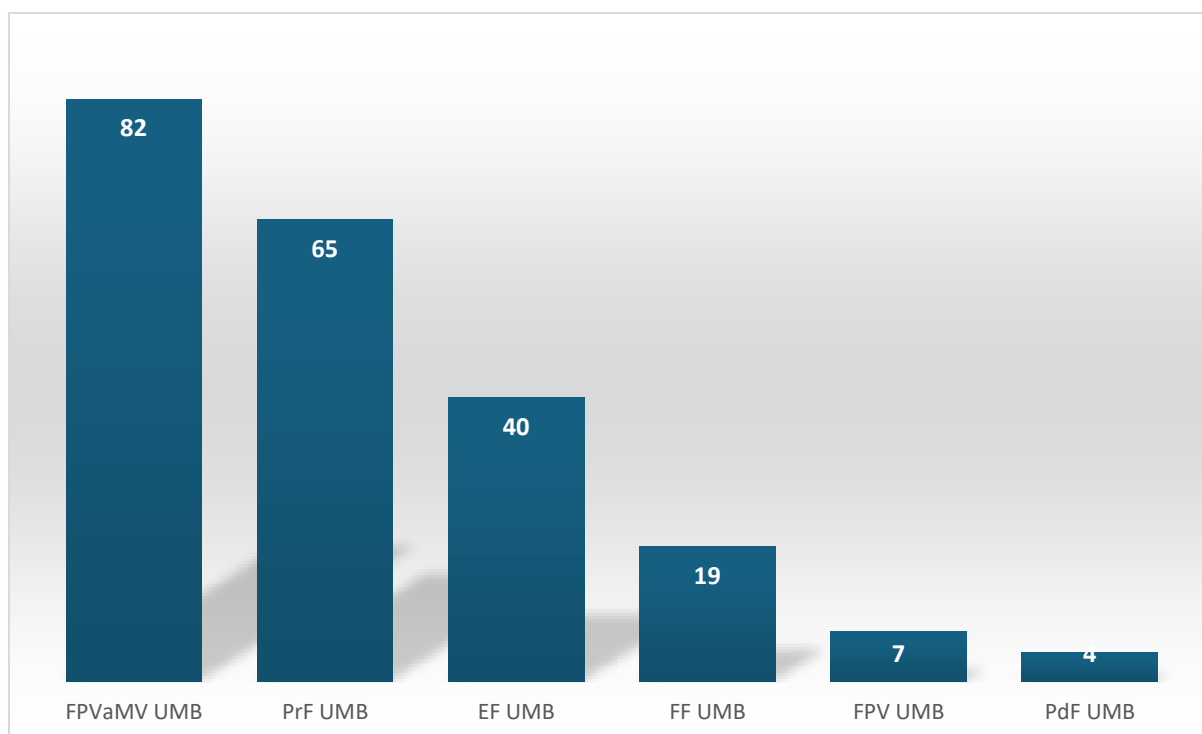


Figure 2: Ukrainian Student Enrollment by Faculty for 2023/2024

Source: own elaboration based on AIS2 data

The next section delves into the demographic characteristics of these students, including gender distribution, age, and nationality.

5. Demographic Analysis of Ukrainian students

Understanding the demographic composition of Ukrainian students at Matej Bel University (UMB) provides critical insights into their academic preferences, social integration, and support needs. This section details gender and age distribution trends, emphasizing cumulative data across all years and specific trends for the academic year 2023/2024.

5.1. Gender Distribution

Cumulative Data (All Years)

The overall gender composition of Ukrainian students at UMB reveals a predominance of female students, with **57% female** and **43% male**. This distribution aligns with global trends where disciplines such as economics, international relations, and education tend to attract a higher proportion of female applicants. At UMB, the **Faculty of Economics** and the **Faculty**

of Political Science and International Relations are notable for their high female enrolment, reflecting the appeal of business, management, and diplomatic studies among female students.

Conversely, the **Faculty of Law** and the **Faculty of Natural Sciences** show a more balanced gender ratio. These fields often attract a diverse demographic due to their broader career applications, including legal professions and STEM-related opportunities. Figure 3 displays gender distribution of Ukrainian students (as cumulative situation).

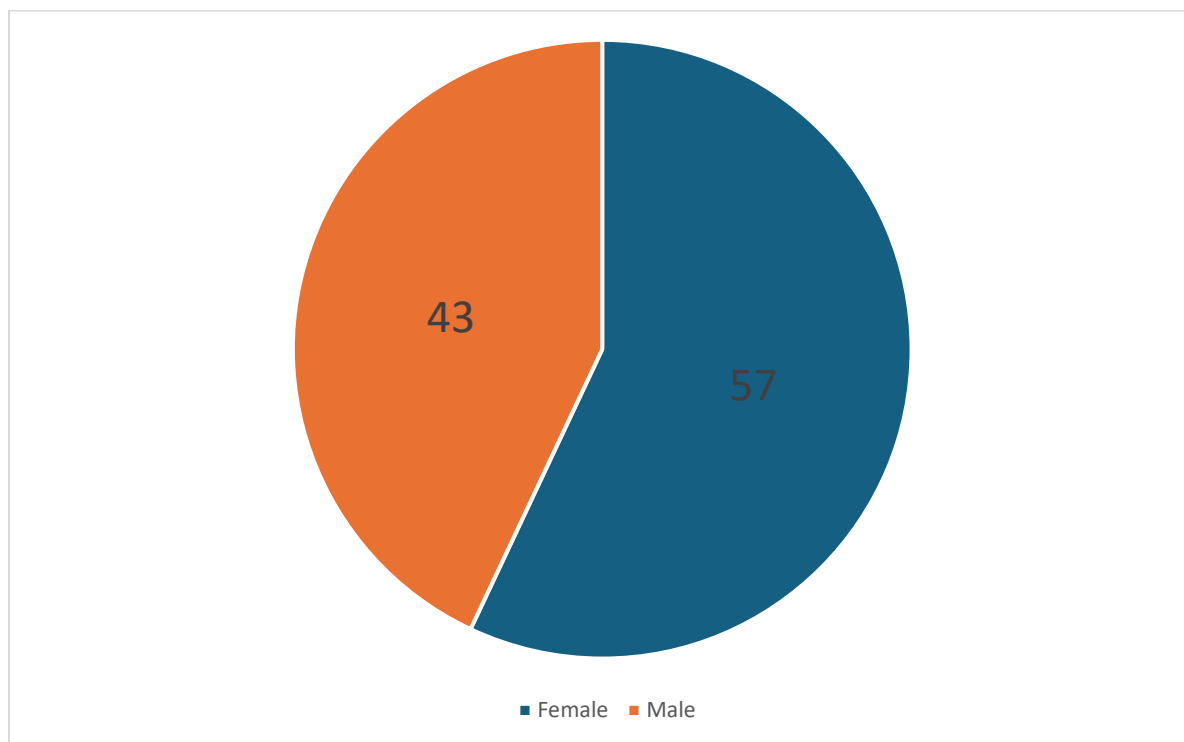


Figure 3: Gender of Ukrainian Student (cumulative data; in %)

Source: own elaboration based on AIS2 data

Academic Year 2023/2024

The gender distribution for the academic year **2023/2024** remains consistent with cumulative trends, with **56% female** and **44% male** students. Female representation continues to dominate in faculties focused on social sciences and business studies. The **Faculty of Economics** sustains its position as the most attractive for female students, underlining the global shift towards gender diversity in traditionally male-dominated sectors like finance and management.

The **Faculty of Political Science and International Relations** also retains a higher female enrolment, suggesting that political and diplomatic studies are increasingly perceived as viable and attractive career paths for women, particularly in the context of geopolitical

challenges. In the Figure 4, gender distribution of Ukrainian students in academic year 2023/2024 is displayed.

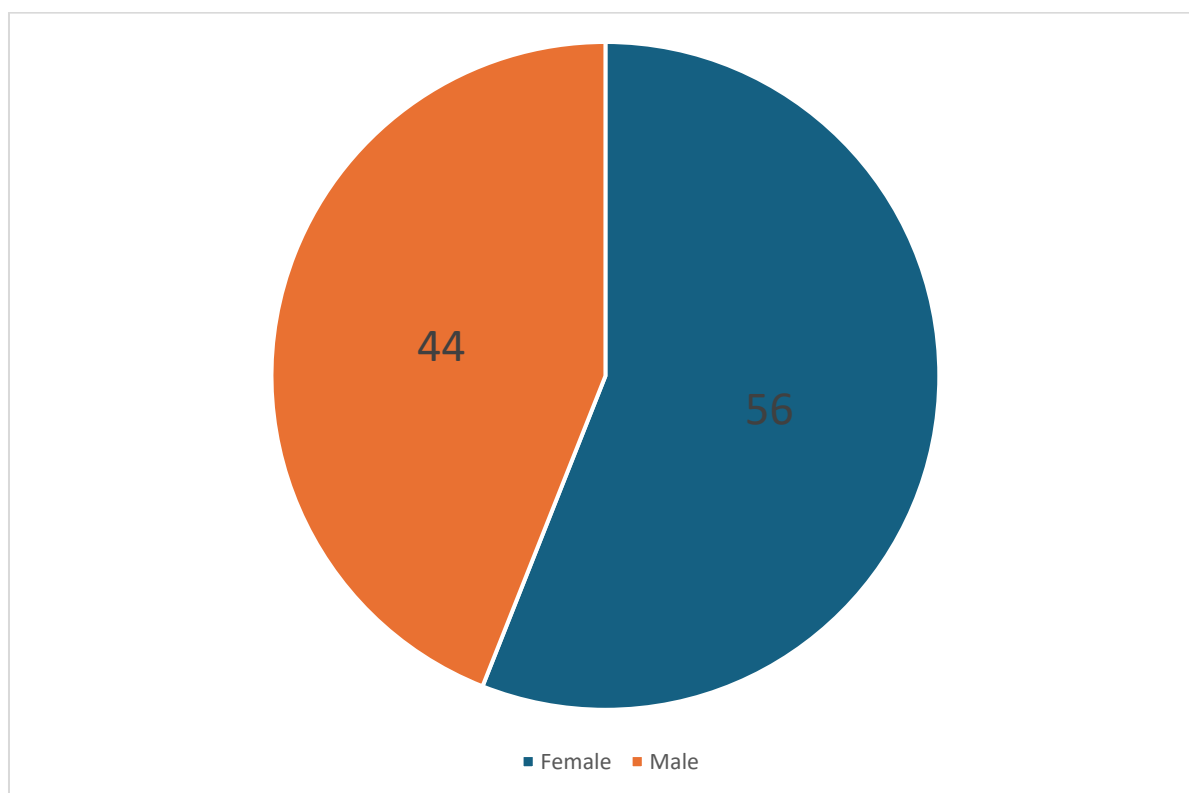


Figure 4: Gender of Ukrainian Student (2023/2024 data; in %)

Source: own elaboration based on AIS2 data

5.2. Age Distribution

Cumulative Data (All Years)

Age distribution among Ukrainian students highlights the predominance of younger demographics. Students aged **18-25 years** constitute the majority, reflecting direct transitions from secondary education to undergraduate programs. This trend underscores the importance of robust undergraduate recruitment and support structures for this age group.

A smaller but significant proportion of students, aged **30 and above**, are engaged in specialized or postgraduate programs. These individuals are often mid-career professionals seeking advanced qualifications, demonstrating UMB's ability to attract a diverse range of learners. Age distribution of Ukrainian students cumulatively for the 2021 – 2024 is displayed on Figure 5.

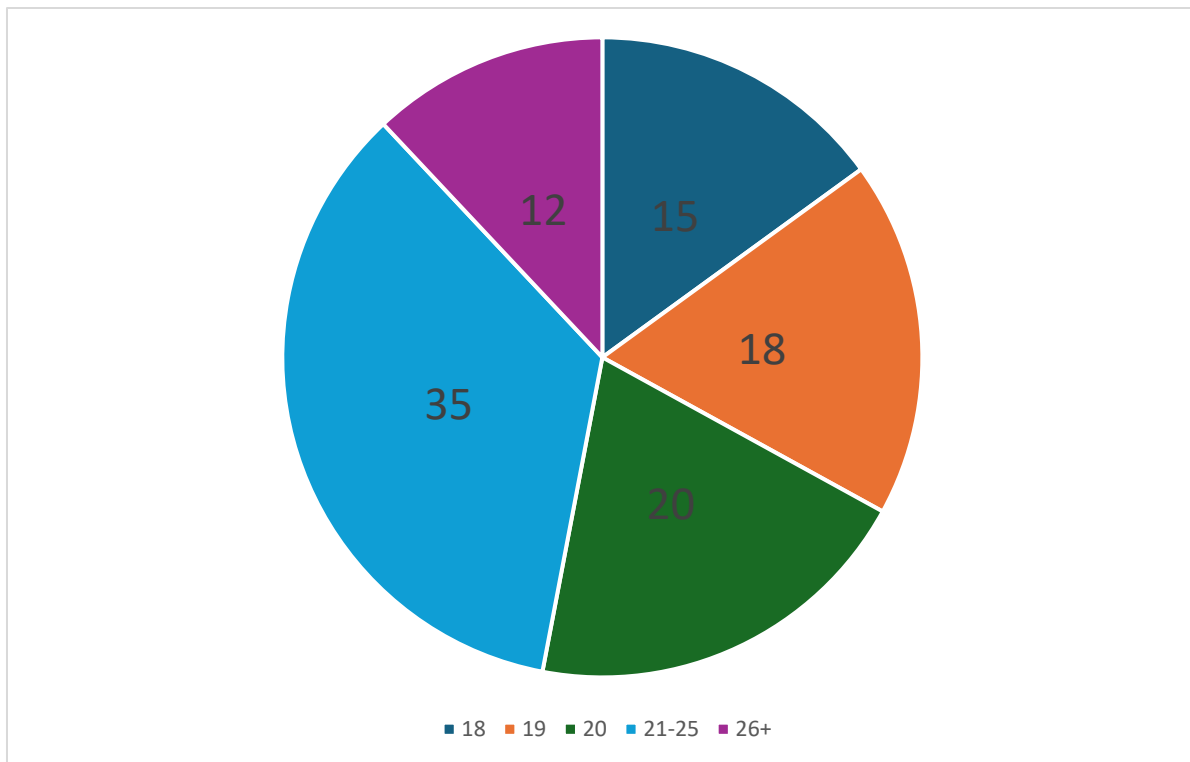


Figure 5: Age distribution of Ukrainian Student (cumulative data; in %)

Source: own elaboration based on AIS2 data

Academic Year 2023/2024

The age distribution of Ukrainian students at Matej Bel University in the academic year 2023/2024 reveals significant insights into their academic engagement and preferences. The most represented age groups are **18, 19, and 20 years old**, with the majority of these students enrolled in first-year undergraduate programs. This dominance of younger students highlights the critical role of UMB's undergraduate offerings as an entry point for Ukrainian students pursuing higher education. It also underscores the university's attractiveness to students seeking foundational studies in a variety of disciplines.

Age distribution patterns vary notably across faculties, reflecting differences in academic focus and student demographics:

- 1. Faculty of Economics:** This faculty attracts the largest proportion of younger students, primarily those aged **18 to 22 years**, indicating its strong appeal for individuals beginning their academic journeys in fields like business, finance, and management. This trend emphasizes the role of the Faculty of Economics in offering robust undergraduate programs that cater to foundational and career-oriented education.
- 2. Faculty of Political Science and International Relations:** The age distribution here demonstrates a **balanced mix of younger and slightly older students**, suggesting that

this faculty appeals not only to undergraduates but also to those pursuing postgraduate studies. This balanced demographic profile may be influenced by the interdisciplinary and globally relevant nature of its programs, which attract a diverse range of students with varied academic and professional aspirations.

- 3. Faculty of Law: A noticeable presence of older students**, particularly those aged **25 and above**, is observed in this faculty. This demographic trend highlights the faculty's role in providing opportunities for mid-career professionals or individuals transitioning into legal studies. Such students may be drawn to programs focused on international law or European legal frameworks, aligning with the evolving professional needs of Ukrainian students in light of geopolitical changes.

The age distribution, as visually presented in **Figure 6**, provides a comprehensive overview of these trends, illustrating the unique characteristics of each faculty's student population. This diversity in age profiles across faculties not only reflects the variety of academic programs available at UMB but also the university's capacity to meet the needs of a wide range of students, from those embarking on their first degree to those seeking further specialization or career changes.

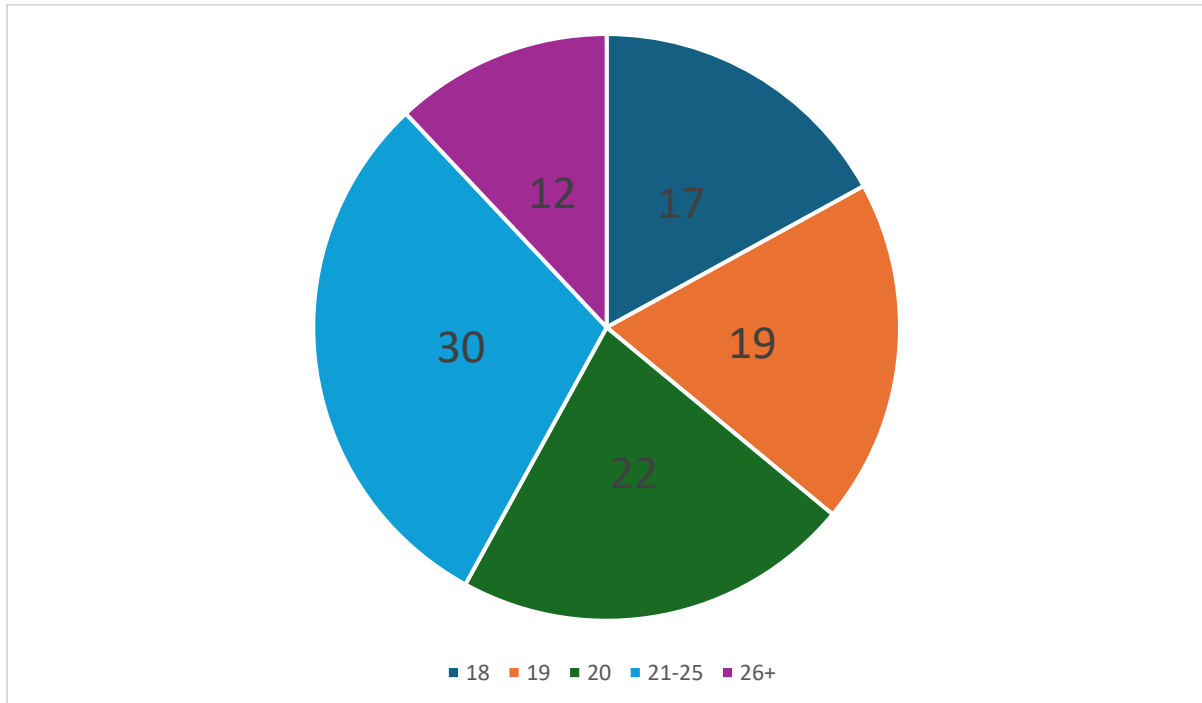


Figure 6: Age distribution of Ukrainian Student (2023/2024 data; in %)

Source: own elaboration based on AIS2 data

In summary, the age distribution data for 2023/2024 reinforces the strategic importance of UMB's undergraduate and postgraduate offerings in attracting and accommodating Ukrainian students. The faculty-specific variations further emphasize the university's ability to cater to diverse academic interests and professional goals, ensuring that it remains a pivotal institution for Ukrainian students at different stages of their educational journeys.

These demographic patterns reveal essential insights into the composition of Ukrainian students at UMB, informing targeted strategies for academic support, mentorship, and integration initiatives.

5.3. Academic Programs and Study Levels

Understanding the academic preferences and study levels of Ukrainian students at Matej Bel University provides essential insights into their educational aspirations and the university's ability to cater to their needs. This section provides a detailed analysis of the most popular study programs and the distribution of students across different levels of study.

5.3.1. Popular Study Programs

Among the 52 study programs at which Ukrainian students at Matej Bel University study, several programs emerge as the most popular among Ukrainian students. Their popularity reflects both global educational trends and specific factors influenced by Ukraine's current socio-economic and geopolitical circumstances. The academic preferences of Ukrainian students reveal distinct patterns, with a strong focus on programs that align with their aspirations and the socio-economic needs of their home country. The following programs are notable in terms of enrolment and popularity: *International Relations*, *Law*, *Economy and Business Management*, and *Slovak Language in Linguocultural Competence for Foreigners*. Each of these programs caters to specific interests and career goals, reflecting broader trends in education and employment.

- 1. International Relations** This program leads in popularity, with 222 Ukrainian students actively enrolled, making it the most sought-after program at UMB. Several factors contribute to its appeal:
 - **Relevance to Ukraine's geopolitical context:** The ongoing conflict and Ukraine's pursuit of stronger international alliances have heightened the demand for expertise in global politics and diplomacy.

- **Comprehensive curriculum:** Students are exposed to critical areas such as international law, global governance, and conflict resolution, equipping them with tools to work in international organizations, embassies, and NGOs.
 - **Strategic aspirations:** Ukrainian students view this field as a platform to advocate for their country's interests on the global stage and strengthen its international presence. This program's ability to address both immediate and long-term needs of Ukraine's international positioning makes it an ideal choice for many students.
2. **Law** The *Law* program, with 95 students enrolled, highlights a significant interest in legal education, particularly in international and European contexts:
- **Preparation for legal professions:** This program provides foundational and specialized knowledge in areas such as European law and international treaties.
 - **Alignment with Ukraine's EU aspirations:** As Ukraine continues to pursue closer ties with the European Union, legal expertise becomes critical for governance and policy alignment.
 - **Diverse career opportunities:** Students are drawn to careers in law that include judiciary roles, international advocacy, and corporate law, making this program highly relevant.
3. **Economy and Business Management** The *Economy and Business Management* program attracts 31 students, demonstrating a focus on practical and managerial education:
- **Skills for economic growth:** The program equips students with essential skills in entrepreneurship, corporate leadership, and financial management.
 - **Relevance to Ukraine's economic revitalization:** As Ukraine works toward rebuilding its economy, this program positions students as future leaders in business, both domestically and internationally.
 - **Career-oriented focus:** The emphasis on innovation and sustainable business practices resonates with students aiming to contribute to economic development.
4. **Slovak Language in Linguocultural Competence for Foreigners** With 25 students enrolled, this program underscores the importance of linguistic and cultural integration for Ukrainian students:
- **Support for long-term residency:** Students interested in establishing careers or lives in Slovakia find this program particularly valuable.

- **Facilitation of social integration:** The curriculum focuses on building linguistic proficiency and cultural competence, critical for adapting to Slovak society.
- 5. Economy and Business Management in English** This program, with 15 students enrolled, caters to those seeking an internationally oriented education in business and management:
- **Global focus:** The English-language curriculum appeals to students aiming for careers in multinational corporations or international markets.
 - **Accessibility for non-native Slovak speakers:** The use of English ensures accessibility for Ukrainian students still mastering the Slovak language.

The following table provides a visual summary of enrolment in these popular programs.

Table 1 Number of Ukrainian students at the most popular study programs (2023/2024)

Program	Number of Students
International Relations	222
Law	95
Economy and Business Management	31
Slovak Language in Linguocultural Competence for Foreigners	25
Economy and Business Management in English	15

Source: own elaboration based on AIS2 data

These five programs underscore the strategic focus of Ukrainian students at UMB. Their popularity reflects not only personal career aspirations but also broader national priorities, as students prepare to contribute to Ukraine's economic recovery, international standing, and governance reforms. These programs collectively highlight UMB's role in equipping students with the skills and knowledge needed to address critical challenges and opportunities in both domestic and global contexts.

5.3.2. Study Level Distribution

The distribution of Ukrainian students across different study levels at Matej Bel University offers a nuanced understanding of their educational objectives and career aspirations. The majority of students are pursuing foundational education through undergraduate programs, while a significant portion is engaged in advanced studies through postgraduate programs.

- **72% Bachelor's Programs:** Undergraduate education represents the entry point for most Ukrainian students at UMB. These programs are tailored to provide a broad academic foundation, equipping students with essential skills and knowledge in fields like economics, international relations, and public administration. The high enrolment reflects the demand for accessible and high-quality undergraduate education, especially among younger students who are transitioning from secondary schools in Ukraine. Additionally, the curriculum's practical orientation ensures that graduates are well-prepared for professional careers or further studies.
- **28% Master's Programs:** Postgraduate education, though representing a smaller segment, is a critical component of UMB's academic offerings for Ukrainian students. Many students pursuing master's programs aim to specialize in their respective fields, with a focus on advanced topics such as international diplomacy, public policy, and strategic management. This segment often includes mid-career professionals or individuals seeking to enhance their qualifications for leadership roles. The presence of this group underscores UMB's ability to attract students with diverse academic and professional goals.

Observations and Insights The predominance of Bachelor's students suggests that UMB serves as an entry point into higher education for many Ukrainian students. This trend aligns with the university's efforts to provide accessible and supportive undergraduate programs. At the same time, the presence of Master's students highlights UMB's ability to attract individuals seeking advanced academic and professional development.

These findings underline the importance of maintaining high-quality undergraduate offerings while also expanding resources and opportunities for postgraduate students, particularly in the most popular disciplines.

The majority of Ukrainian students at Matej Bel University are enrolled in full-time programs (96.6%), reflecting a preference for comprehensive and immersive academic experiences.

This overwhelming preference for full-time study indicates that Ukrainian students prioritize structured and intensive educational engagement, likely aligning with their goals for rapid integration and academic advancement. The high proportion of full-time students underscores the importance of providing robust support structures for their academic and social integration. Full-time study programs require students to dedicate significant time and

resources, which may necessitate additional support in areas such as housing, scholarships, and mental health resources.

The relatively low number of part-time students suggests that this mode of study is less popular among Ukrainian students at UMB. This could be due to language barriers, visa requirements, or a lack of tailored part-time program offerings. It also indicates that most students likely prioritize an uninterrupted academic schedule over balancing studies with work or other commitments. By maintaining strong support for full-time students and exploring ways to make part-time study more accessible, Matej Bel University can further enhance its ability to cater to the diverse needs of its Ukrainian student population.

6. Analysis of Ukrainian Students by City of Permanent Residence

The geographic distribution of Ukrainian students at Matej Bel University based on their city of permanent residence provides valuable insights into their origins and potential socio-economic backgrounds. The data identifies the most represented cities and highlights trends in student demographics. The analysis also reflects the impact of cultural, geographic, and geopolitical factors.

Most Represented Cities

The analysis reveals that Ukrainian students come from a diverse range of cities. Among the most represented cities are:

1. **Kyiv:** As the capital city, Kyiv stands out with the highest number of students (18 %). Its representation underscores the central role of metropolitan areas in facilitating access to higher education and opportunities abroad.
2. **Lviv:** Located in Western Ukraine, Lviv (covering 12 % of Ukrainian students) serves as a significant hub for students seeking cross-border educational experiences, likely due to its proximity to Slovakia and cultural ties with Central Europe.
3. **Kharkiv:** Despite being in Eastern Ukraine and closer to conflict zones, Kharkiv's strong academic tradition might explain its significant representation among students (10 %).
4. **Odessa:** At 8%, Odessa is another major city represented, likely due to its metropolitan status and established educational infrastructure.
5. Smaller cities such as **Dnipro** and **Ivano-Frankivsk** each contribute around 6%, reflecting broader geographic diversity.

Table 2 provides data on the territory origin of Ukrainian students.

Table 2 Town of origin of the students

City	Number of Students	Percentage of Total Students
Kyiv	40	18%
Lviv	27	12%
Kharkiv	22	10%
Odessa	18	8%
Dnipro	12	6%
Ivano-Frankivsk	12	6%
Other Cities	67	31%
other outside UA	19	9%
Total	217	100%

Source: own elaboration based on AIS2 data

Regional Diversity

The data shows a balanced representation from both urban centres and smaller cities. While metropolitan areas like Kyiv and Lviv dominate, students also come from medium-sized cities and even rural areas, indicating the university's wide appeal across different regions of Ukraine.

Western Ukrainian cities, including Lviv and Ivano-Frankivsk, collectively account for 25% of the students. This highlights a strong regional connection to Central Europe and Slovakia in particular. Eastern cities, such as Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia, contribute 15%, likely influenced by geopolitical instability in these regions. Central Ukraine, led by Kyiv, remains the largest single regional contributor with 18% of the students, underscoring the metropolitan hub's importance.

Impact of Geopolitical Factors

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine may have influenced the migration patterns and decision-making of students seeking higher education abroad. Cities closer to conflict zones, such as Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia, show notable representation, suggesting that students from these areas prioritize educational opportunities in relatively stable environments like Slovakia.

Cultural and Geographic Proximity

Western Ukrainian cities like Lviv and Ivano-Frankivsk are well-represented, likely due to their cultural and geographic proximity to Slovakia. This proximity may simplify the transition process for students, making Matej Bel University an attractive option for higher education.

The geographic distribution of Ukrainian students reflects both the accessibility of Matej Bel University and the broader socio-political context of Ukraine. Metropolitan areas serve as significant contributors to the university's student body, driven by access to resources and awareness of international education opportunities. At the same time, representation from conflict-affected regions demonstrates the resilience of students and their families in prioritizing education despite challenges.

Recommendations

- 1. Targeted Outreach Programs** – to develop recruitment strategies aimed at underrepresented regions to ensure even greater geographic diversity. Focus on areas with lower representation, providing information sessions and financial support for students in those regions.
- 2. Support for Students from Conflict-Affected Areas** – to enhance support mechanisms, including scholarships and mental health resources, for students originating from conflict zones. Foster an inclusive campus environment that addresses the unique challenges faced by these students.
- 3. Leveraging Proximity to Western Ukraine** - Strengthen collaborations with schools and organizations in Western Ukrainian cities, capitalizing on cultural and geographic ties to Slovakia.

The distribution of Ukrainian students by city of permanent residence highlights the university's appeal across Ukraine's diverse regions. By leveraging this data, Matej Bel University can further enhance its outreach efforts, address the needs of its students, and continue to serve as a leading destination for Ukrainian students seeking higher education in Central Europe.

7. Accommodation Trends

Accommodation plays a crucial role in shaping the student experience, particularly for international students such as those from Ukraine. At Matej Bel University (UMB), significant efforts have been directed toward ensuring the provision of adequate housing facilities to meet the growing demand arising from the increasing number of Ukrainian students. This analysis examines the current trends in accommodation, the challenges faced, and the support mechanisms in place, along with recommendations for improvement.

Currently, UMB accommodates a substantial portion of its Ukrainian student population in university dormitories. Out of the total Ukrainian student cohort, 382 individuals, representing approximately 76%, are housed on campus. This highlights the university's dedication to providing accessible and affordable housing options. Among the available dormitories, ŠD 3 C-D-E is the most utilized, hosting 45 students. Its popularity is attributed to its central location, affordability, and proximity to essential university facilities. Other dormitories, such as ŠD 1 and ŠD 5, also play a key role in catering to the needs of Ukrainian students, offering amenities that support both academic and social aspects of university life.

Despite these efforts, approximately 24% of Ukrainian students, equating to 123 individuals, remain outside the scope of university dormitory accommodation. These students have sought alternative housing arrangements, including private rentals, shared apartments, and living with relatives. Private rentals are often chosen due to the limited capacity of dormitories, preferences for greater privacy, or the availability of modern amenities. Shared housing arrangements are popular for their cost-effectiveness and convenience, while living with host families facilitates cultural integration and language immersion. The choice of private accommodation is influenced by factors such as insufficient dormitory capacity, personal preferences for higher-quality facilities, and the flexibility offered by private housing in terms of lease durations and living arrangements.

However, the housing landscape is not without its challenges. The rapid increase in Ukrainian enrolments over the past two academic years has placed significant pressure on the existing dormitory infrastructure, resulting in high demand and waitlists for some students. Additionally, feedback from students has highlighted disparities in the quality of dormitory facilities, with some accommodations requiring renovations and modernization to meet contemporary living standards.

In response to these challenges, UMB has implemented several initiatives aimed at improving the accommodation experience for its students. The university's dedicated housing office (Správa účelových zariadení) is renovating step by step particular dormitories or their parts. Moreover, plans are not only to renovate older dormitories but also to expand the overall housing capacity to address future demand effectively.

While the university has made commendable strides in accommodating the majority of Ukrainian students, observations indicate that a significant portion remains reliant on private housing. This situation underscores the need for proactive measures to expand dormitory capacity and improve the quality of existing facilities. Furthermore, although private housing

solutions are viable, they may pose financial and logistical challenges for students, necessitating enhanced support from the university.

While Matej Bel University (UMB) is committed to supporting its international student population, including the growing number of Ukrainian students, it is equally imperative that the university upholds and prioritizes the interests of Slovak students. Balancing the needs of both groups is essential to maintaining equity, fostering inclusivity, and ensuring the university's broader mission of serving the entire academic community.

Slovak students form the cornerstone of the university's identity and have traditionally been the primary beneficiaries of its resources and infrastructure. Their educational experience, well-being, and professional development are central to UMB's role as a national institution of higher learning. Any perceived imbalance in attention or resources could risk alienating this core group, potentially leading to dissatisfaction and undermining the university's reputation among its domestic stakeholders.

Moreover, prioritizing the interests of Slovak students is critical for maintaining social cohesion within the university community. Internationalization, while valuable, must not come at the expense of the inclusivity and sense of belonging felt by local students. Slovak students may feel overlooked if significant resources are disproportionately allocated to addressing the needs of international students. This could lead to tensions or a divide between groups, ultimately affecting the collaborative and multicultural environment that the university seeks to promote.

Practical considerations also underscore the need to balance these interests. Slovak students rely on university housing and other support services just as much as their international peers. For instance, dormitory accommodations must be managed in a way that ensures Slovak students have fair access, avoiding scenarios where they feel disadvantaged due to the prioritization of international students.

8. Qualitative data – panel discussion in 2024

On April 29, 2024, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica hosted a roundtable discussion titled *European Inclusion of Ukrainian Students*, an event co-financed by the European Union under project code 2023-1-SK01-KA220-HED-000157553. The discussion, held from 17:00 to 20:00 at 365.lab, Lazovná 5, aimed to explore the dynamics of integrating Ukrainian students into the university community while fostering dialogue among stakeholders. The event's promotion utilized official university communication channels, posters, and word-of-mouth, ensuring active participation from both students and faculty.

The discussion was structured into three 30-minute panels, each addressing a specific theme related to the inclusion of Ukrainian students. The panels encouraged open dialogue, guided by primary questions that were further refined into sub-questions for deeper exploration. Participants included faculty members, Slovak students, and Ukrainian students, offering a diverse range of perspectives.

Panel 1: Shifts in Experience – Pre-War vs. Post-War Dynamics

This panel explored the perceived differences in the academic experiences of Ukrainian students before and after the onset of the war. Faculty and students observed minimal changes in the number of Ukrainian students or their academic preparedness over time, with historical interest from Ukrainian students already high, particularly at the Faculty of Political Science and International Relations. Faculty members expressed positive attitudes toward Ukrainian students and described their willingness to provide accommodations, such as extended deadlines and linguistic support, to address language barriers.

While such measures were generally well-received, the discussion also touched on the sensitive topic of perceived positive discrimination, which Slovak peers largely accepted with understanding. However, the formation of isolated groups or "bubbles" among Ukrainian students emerged as a recurring challenge, raising questions about whether such dynamics ease the transition process or hinder broader integration.

Panel 2: Creating Inclusive Environments Across Faculties

This panel examined the efforts of faculties to create welcoming and supportive environments for Ukrainian students. Key measures included Slovak language courses, informal discussions to address academic challenges, and providing explanations of academic material in English when necessary. Additionally, the employment of Ukrainian women on campus, such as in housekeeping roles, offered both moral and practical support, contributing to a sense of community.

Despite these efforts, challenges persisted, particularly in fostering meaningful interactions between Slovak and Ukrainian students. Misunderstandings about academic requirements occasionally created barriers to integration, highlighting the need for improved guidance and support systems.

Panel 3: Barriers and Opportunities for Inclusion

The final panel delved into the barriers to inclusion and the opportunities arising from these experiences. Both Slovak students and faculty identified the segregation of Ukrainian students into exclusive groups as a significant barrier. Ukrainian participants explained that language barriers often necessitated such clustering, while faculty members emphasized the importance of respecting students' autonomy in choosing their social groups. Nonetheless, there was a shared recognition of the need to foster a more inclusive and harmonious academic environment.

Reflections and Recommendations

The event provided a platform for open dialogue, fostering mutual understanding between Slovak and Ukrainian participants. Hosting the discussion in a neutral, off-campus setting contributed to a relaxed atmosphere, which encouraged honest exchanges. Faculty members particularly valued the student-led approach to organizing the event, which brought fresh perspectives to the discussions.

Key takeaways included the importance of increasing interaction and communication between Slovak and Ukrainian students to break down barriers. Participants also emphasized the need for enhanced information and guidance systems to help Ukrainian students navigate academic expectations and integration processes.

Key Insights from Panel discussions

1. Adaptation Process

The adaptation of Ukrainian students to a new academic and social environment was identified as a complex, multi-stage process. Faculty members highlighted that the first months of integration often involve overcoming significant challenges, including unfamiliarity with the Slovak academic system and language barriers. To ease this transition, faculties implemented Slovak language courses and offered informal support through discussions and explanations of academic material in English when needed.

Participants emphasized the need for continuous adaptation beyond the initial months, recognizing that students' needs and challenges evolve. Adaptation was described as a fluid process rather than a fixed timeframe, varying based on individual circumstances and external conditions.

2. Challenges Faced by Students

Ukrainian students reported struggles with navigating academic expectations, understanding course content, and integrating socially. Language barriers emerged as a critical obstacle, affecting both academic success and the ability to build connections with Slovak peers. These challenges underscored the importance of targeted support mechanisms to foster both academic and social adaptation.

3. Sources of Support

Faculties have taken several steps to create a welcoming environment. These include offering employment opportunities for Ukrainian women in campus facilities, such as housekeeping roles, which provide both financial assistance and a sense of community. Faculty members also highlighted their willingness to engage with students individually, addressing personal and academic concerns on a case-by-case basis.

4. Long-Term Integration

The discussion revealed that adaptation is a continuous process that extends beyond the first semester. Faculty members acknowledged the need for sustained support, particularly for students who require additional time to fully integrate into the academic and cultural environment. Long-term adaptation was linked to students' overall success and well-being, reinforcing the importance of flexible and responsive faculty policies.

5. Recommendations for Improvement

Faculty members reflected on the effectiveness of their current measures and identified areas for improvement. Suggestions included enhancing the visibility and accessibility of support services, developing more structured mentoring programs, and fostering greater interaction between Slovak and Ukrainian students through collaborative projects and cultural activities. Open discussions about students' needs were seen as crucial for maintaining an inclusive environment.

6. Addressing Barriers to Inclusion

A significant portion of the discussion focused on the formation of social “bubbles” among Ukrainian students, often driven by language barriers and cultural differences. Faculty members expressed a commitment to respecting students' autonomy in forming social groups

while simultaneously encouraging broader integration. This balance was deemed essential for creating a harmonious academic community where all students feel supported.

The roundtable discussion provided valuable qualitative data on the experiences of Ukrainian students at UMB, highlighting both successes and ongoing challenges. The insights gained reinforced the importance of sustained efforts to foster inclusivity and address the evolving needs of students.

Key recommendations included:

- Expanding language support and mentorship programs to aid long-term adaptation.
- Enhancing faculty-student communication to identify and address challenges proactively.
- Promoting interaction between Slovak and Ukrainian students through structured group activities, cultural exchange programs, and academic collaborations.
- Encouraging faculties to remain flexible and open to adapting their strategies based on feedback and changing circumstances.

By implementing these measures, Matej Bel University can further strengthen its role as an inclusive and supportive academic institution, setting a benchmark for other universities in navigating the complexities of student integration. These findings will also contribute to a broader academic dialogue on inclusion, as they are set to be published in the journal *Mladá Veda*, offering valuable insights to educators and policymakers across EU.

Building on the outcomes of this event, several actionable steps were proposed:

1. Expand Similar Events: **Future discussions should involve larger audiences and a broader range of stakeholders to deepen insights and promote inclusivity.**
2. Develop Structured Surveys: **Comprehensive questionnaires could provide detailed data on the challenges and successes of integrating Ukrainian students.**
3. Foster Collaborative Initiatives: **Group projects and cultural exchange programs could enhance relationships and promote mutual understanding between Slovak and Ukrainian students.**

9. Main Results and Discussion

The analysis reveals a multifaceted perspective on the integration of Ukrainian students at Matej Bel University. Quantitative data underscores significant enrollment growth,

demographic diversity, and academic preferences. Meanwhile, qualitative findings illuminate the nuanced experiences of students, including integration barriers and opportunities for fostering inclusivity.

Quantitative findings highlight steady growth in Ukrainian student enrollment, with a majority pursuing undergraduate programs. The Faculty of Economics emerges as the most attractive choice, reflecting broader trends in economic education and career aspirations. Accommodation data reveal that while 76% of Ukrainian students benefit from dormitory housing, 24% rely on private solutions, signaling a need for expanded capacity and support.

Qualitative insights from the roundtable discussion emphasize challenges such as language barriers and social isolation. Participants highlighted the importance of inclusive practices, such as Slovak language support and faculty-led mentorship. The discussions also shed light on positive discrimination practices, which were generally understood by Slovak peers but require careful management to ensure equity.

The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative findings underscores the complex interplay between structural support mechanisms and individual experiences. These insights pave the way for targeted interventions aimed at enhancing the academic and social environment for Ukrainian students.

10. Practical Implications for the University and Students

The findings of this report yield actionable recommendations for Matej Bel University and its stakeholders:

1. **Infrastructure Development:** Expand dormitory capacity to accommodate increasing enrollment and address housing disparities.
2. **Enhanced Language Support:** Offer intensive Slovak language courses tailored to the needs of Ukrainian students, enabling smoother academic integration.
3. **Cultural Exchange Initiatives:** Organize events and workshops fostering interactions between Slovak and Ukrainian students, promoting mutual understanding.
4. **Administrative Assistance:** Streamline visa processes, housing applications, and academic onboarding to reduce administrative burdens.
5. **Mentorship Programs:** Pair Ukrainian students with Slovak mentors to facilitate social and academic integration.

For students, the implications include access to enhanced support services, improved housing conditions, and opportunities for cultural engagement, all of which contribute to a fulfilling academic experience.

11. Conclusion

The integration of Ukrainian students at Matej Bel University reflects both opportunities and challenges inherent in international student mobility. While the university has made significant strides in supporting these students, further efforts are required to address language barriers, housing constraints, and social integration gaps.

This report underscores the importance of a holistic approach that combines structural interventions with individualized support. By fostering an inclusive academic environment, UMB can not only enhance the experiences of Ukrainian students but also strengthen its position as a hub for international education.

Future research should explore longitudinal outcomes, including academic performance and post-graduation trajectories, to ensure sustainable support and continuous improvement in integrating international students.

While this report provides valuable insights into the inclusion and integration of Ukrainian students at Matej Bel University (UMB), it is important to recognize certain limitations that may influence the depth and generalizability of its findings. Acknowledging these limitations is essential for ensuring that future studies build on a more robust and comprehensive foundation.

The quantitative data utilized in this report are confined to the academic year 2023/2024. While this snapshot offers meaningful information about the current state of Ukrainian student integration, it does not capture long-term trends or account for potential changes in enrollment, accommodation patterns, or integration dynamics over time. Without longitudinal data, it is challenging to assess whether observed trends are consistent or indicative of broader systemic developments.

The qualitative insights presented in this report are derived from a single roundtable discussion. While this format allowed for rich, detailed narratives and fostered open dialogue among participants, it may not fully reflect the diverse experiences and perspectives of all Ukrainian students at UMB. The limited number of participants and the specific context of the discussion may result in biases or exclude significant viewpoints, particularly those of students who were unable or unwilling to participate in the event.

Broader geopolitical and economic factors, such as the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and its impact on migration patterns, financial stability, and access to education, are acknowledged in the report but only through qualitative analysis. The absence of quantitative data addressing these external influences limits the ability to measure their direct impact on the inclusion and

integration of Ukrainian students. As these factors are likely to evolve and continue shaping student experiences, a more systematic approach to analyzing their effects is necessary.

To overcome these limitations and enhance the reliability and comprehensiveness of future findings, several actions are recommended:

1. **Continuous Data Evaluation:** Implement ongoing monitoring of data from the university's academic information system. This approach will allow for the collection of longitudinal data, enabling the identification of patterns and trends over multiple academic years. Such data can provide a clearer picture of the evolving dynamics of Ukrainian student integration and inform evidence-based decision-making.
2. **Targeted Questionnaire Surveys:** Conducting specific surveys targeted at Ukrainian students can help capture a wider range of experiences and opinions. Well-designed surveys can provide quantitative data to complement qualitative findings, ensuring that the perspectives of diverse student groups are represented. These surveys can be tailored to address specific aspects of integration, such as accommodation, academic support, language barriers, and social interactions.
3. **Quantitative Analysis of External Factors:** Future studies should incorporate quantitative methods to evaluate the impact of geopolitical and economic influences on student integration. This could include analyzing regional migration statistics, financial aid utilization rates, and other relevant metrics. By quantifying these factors, the university can better understand their significance and develop strategies to mitigate potential negative impacts.

While the findings of this report offer valuable insights into the inclusion of Ukrainian students at UMB, addressing these limitations is essential for ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with their integration. By adopting continuous data collection, targeted surveys, and quantitative analyses, the university can refine its approach to supporting Ukrainian students and foster an environment that is both inclusive and adaptable to changing circumstances. This commitment to ongoing evaluation and improvement will strengthen UMB's position as a leader in promoting diversity and inclusion within higher education.

12. References

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