ANTILIMBO SURVEY RESULTS OVERVIEW-
UKRAINIAN YOUTH SITUATION
IN LATVIA
autumn 2025

50 Ukrainian teenagers living in Belgium completed the survey. The age of the respondents was 66.7% under 15, 9.5% between 15–18, 23.8% over 18. The gender of the respondents was 66.7% girls, 31.0% boys, 2.4% prefer not to say

Educational engagement among respondents is extremely high. **95.2%** are studying in a **local Belgian institution**, demonstrating strong integration into the school system. A very small proportion study **online in Ukraine (2.4%)** or use a **hybrid model combining Belgian and Ukrainian systems (2.4%)**. Notably, **0%** reported not studying at all. This means every participant is connected to some form of structured education, reinforcing schools as the central environment for belonging, language acquisition, and daily routine.

Half of the teens describe their connection to people in Belgium as **neutral (50.0%)** — not negative, but not yet close or emotionally deep. Over a third feel **weakly connected (35.7%)**, suggesting lingering barriers such as language, cultural unfamiliarity, or emotional fatigue. Only a small share feel **strongly connected (14.3%)**, highlighting slow but emerging integration. Together, these patterns reflect a transitional social stage: teens are participating, but deep belonging is still forming.

Most teens have begun building a small social circle: **61.9%** report having **a few friends** locally. A smaller proportion, **11.9%**, say they have **many friends**, showing successful integration for a subset of youth. However, **16.7%** do not yet have local friends, pointing to emotional or linguistic barriers. Additionally, **9.5%** are **not currently interested in forming friendships**, suggesting withdrawal, uncertainty, or preference for familiar contacts. These patterns depict a community slowly establishing social roots, with pockets of vulnerability.

Ukrainian teens maintain a hybrid social world. The most dominant group — **61.9%** — say their closest friends remain in **Ukraine**, reflecting strong cross-border emotional continuity. **38.1%** have **Belgian friends**, and an equal **38.1%** rely on **online friendships**, which often feel easier and safer during integration. A smaller proportion, **11.9%**, have **local Ukrainian-origin friends**, while **7.1%** report not having many friends at all. Their friendships span physical distance, digital spaces, and cultural communities.

For many teens, “home” is defined by relationships, not geography. **40.5%** say **family** — often specifically mothers — is what makes them feel at home. **23.8%** say **friends**, and **21.4%** mention **connection to Ukrainian culture**, such as language, TV, or traditions. **16.7%** rely on hobbies, music, sports, gaming, or nature. Smaller proportions mention Ukrainian food (7.1%). About **11.9%** say **nothing helps** or they do not know, reflecting difficulty in forming a sense of belonging.
Overall, emotional comfort comes from family, familiarity, and continuity.

Hope for return remains strong: **38.1%** imagine themselves back in **Ukraine** within five years, often tied to hopes for safety and rebuilding. **21.4%** anticipate staying in **Belgium**, while **16.7%** envision living elsewhere in **Europe**, drawn by stability and opportunities. Nearly **19.0%** feel **uncertain**, reflecting the unpredictability of displacement and adolescence. A smaller portion hopes to move to a different country entirely. Outlooks are diverse — a blend of longing, adaptation, and uncertainty.

Sports are the most common interest, shared by **50.0%** of teens. **42.9%** enjoy **gaming**, and **40.5%** enjoy **music**, showing that physical activity and digital or artistic expression play major roles in emotional regulation. **28.6%** enjoy **creative activities** like drawing or design. Smaller portions enjoy reading/studying, nature, animals, or spending time with friends. Their interests reflect a wide mix of active, social, and restorative activities.

Gaming is a regular part of life for most Ukrainian teenagers in Belgium. The largest group, **28.6%**, play **daily**, making gaming one of their most consistent leisure and coping activities. Another **26.2%** play **occasionally**, using games as an intermittent source of enjoyment or connection. A further **21.4%** play **rarely**, while **11.9%** engage with games **several times a week**, demonstrating moderate but steady involvement. Finally, **11.9%** report **never** playing digital or mobile games. Overall, these patterns show that while daily gaming is common, engagement levels vary widely, reflecting differing personal interests, routines, and emotional needs among the teens.

Ukrainian teenagers in Belgium gravitate toward game types that support **social interaction, exploration, and meaningful engagement**. The most widely preferred category is **social or interactive games**, chosen by approximately **23.8%** of all selections, reflecting teens’ strong desire for connection and cooperative play. **Adventure** and **story-driven games** follow closely, each accounting for about **14.3%** of selections, highlighting the importance of narrative and immersive experiences in their emotional world. **Strategy** and **role-playing games** each represent roughly **11.9%**, showing that many teens appreciate games that allow planning, decision-making, and identity exploration. Smaller but still notable groups prefer **puzzle/logic games** or **simulation/life games**, each comprising about **4.8%** of selections. Altogether, the preferences show that teens are drawn to games that allow them to connect, create, imagine, and think — mirroring their broader psychological needs for belonging, autonomy, and mastery.

Category	Percentage
Social / interactive	23.8%
Adventure	14.3%
Story-driven	14.3%
Strategy	11.9%
Role-playing	11.9%
Puzzle / logic	4.8%
Simulation / life	4.8%

When describing what makes a game truly engaging, Ukrainian teenagers emphasize **emotion, connection, and challenge**. The most influential factor is the **story**, valued by about **23.8%** of respondents, who look for games with meaningful plots, emotional depth, or hidden messages that allow them to immerse themselves fully. Close behind, roughly **19.0%** highlight **social play**, explaining that games are most enjoyable when they can experience them with friends, whether online or in person. Around **16.7%** appreciate games that stimulate **thinking or strategic problem-solving**, seeking mental engagement and a sense of mastery.

Another **10%** point to **game mechanics, progression, or interface quality**, showing that smooth gameplay and clear structure also matter. Smaller but notable groups value **exploration or novelty** (about **7%**) and **visual appeal or graphics** (also around **7%**). Finally, approximately **12%** are unsure what makes games interesting to them. Overall, teens prefer games that offer **connection, depth, cognitive stimulation, and emotional resonance**, reflecting their desire for meaningful experiences in both digital and real-world environments.

Ukrainian teens most often value **friendship** and **kindness**, with each selected by **28.6%** of respondents. Qualities tied to fairness and integrity also stand out: **honesty**, **freedom**, and **justice** are each valued by **19.0%**. Traits that support healthy relationships — **respect**, **responsibility**, and **humor** — are each appreciated by **16.7%**. Overall, teens place the highest importance on warmth, trust, equity, and reliability in the people around them.

When Ukrainian teenagers reflect on what they want people in Belgium to understand about Ukrainians, the strongest message centers on identity. The most common theme, expressed by **23.8%** of respondents, is that **Ukrainians are not Russians** — a distinction that carries deep emotional weight given the context of war and displacement. Another **19.0%** want Belgians to recognize and appreciate **the richness of Ukrainian culture**, including its traditions, language, and unique national character. Themes of strength and resilience also emerge strongly: **16.7%** highlight Ukrainians' **bravery and perseverance**, signaling pride in their collective endurance.

Emotional warmth is another defining theme. Around **14.3%** of respondents want others to understand that Ukrainians are **kind, sincere, or warm-hearted**, countering stereotypes or misconceptions. A further **11.9%** emphasize the **hardships caused by the war**, expressing a

desire for Belgians to understand the emotional and practical burdens they carry. About **9.5%** mention issues of **stereotyping or unfair assumptions**, and another **9.5%** highlight that Ukrainians are **Europeans just like others**, hoping to be seen as equals within their new environment. Smaller groups mention **Ukrainian food or lifestyle** (**4.8%**) or say they are **unsure** (**7.1%**).

Taken together, these perspectives reveal a strong desire for **recognition, respect, and accurate understanding**. Teens want Belgian society to see them not only as newcomers, but as individuals with a proud identity, a rich culture, and a lived experience shaped by extraordinary challenges.

The most appreciated aspect is Belgium's **polite, calm, and respectful social atmosphere**, mentioned by about **31%**. Safety and stability appeal to **23.8%**, while **19%** value nature, parks, and clean public spaces. Food, culture, and freedom also emerge. About **16.7%** say they haven't discovered anything specific.These preferences show that Belgian daily life, especially its serenity and order, holds strong appeal.

Family is the strongest source of support, helping **33.3%** of teens remain positive, while **28.6%** rely on **friends** for encouragement and emotional balance. Music also plays an important role for **16.7%**, and **14.3%** turn to **sports or physical activity** to cope with stress. A smaller group, **11.9%**, depend on their **own mindset** and optimism. Yet **14.3%** say **nothing helps** or they are unsure, highlighting the emotional strain many displaced teens experience.

When they need advice or emotional support, Ukrainian teens in Belgium overwhelmingly turn to **family**, with **66.7%** naming parents or relatives as their primary source of help. More than half, **54.8%**, also rely on **friends**, reflecting the importance of peer connection during adolescence. A smaller share, **14.3%**, turn to **online communities**, while only **9.5%** seek help from **psychologists, social workers, or other professionals**. Around **7.1%** say they have **no one** they can turn to, highlighting a vulnerable minority who may require additional support structures.

When imagining a game that could help teenagers feel more confident and connected, the largest share of teens — **26.2%** — envision a **multiplayer or communication-based experience**, where they can interact, collaborate, and feel less alone. Creative features such as **building, customization, or world-making** appeal to **16.7%**, while **supportive or meaningful storylines** resonate with **14.3%**. Smaller groups mention **team activities**, **strategy**, or **competition** as helpful elements. Nearly **30%** say they are **unsure** or offered no specific ideas, suggesting that designing supportive game experiences may not yet be intuitive for all teens.Overall, they imagine a game that is **social, hopeful, and creative**, offering connection rather than isolation.

Messages of hope dominate: **33.3%** encourage peers not to give up and to believe things will improve. **23.8%** emphasize that no one is alone; **21.4%** highlight strength and resilience; and

16.7% encourage self-confidence. Smaller portions stress kindness or Ukrainian pride. About **19%** are unsure. Collectively, teens express warmth, solidarity, and emotional courage.

CONCLUSION

Ukrainian teens in Belgium are navigating a complex mix of emotional, social, and cultural challenges. While many are enrolled in school and developing local friendships, their strongest emotional ties remain with family and pre-existing social circles from Ukraine. Gaming, sports, music, and creative outlets serve both as coping mechanisms and sources of joy. Their values emphasize kindness, honesty, and emotional warmth, and they express a strong desire to be understood — not as victims or strangers, but as individuals with rich identities, enduring resilience, and dreams for the future.

When comparing the survey results with the insights provided by youth workers, Youth workers confirm many of the same observations from the survey. They describe Ukrainian teens as respectful, observant, and emotionally complex. Most teens remain in a "neutral zone" socially — participating but not yet fully bonded with peers. Family, especially mothers, is a central emotional anchor, while friendships are still forming slowly.

Youth workers note that digital and long-distance relationships offer safety and continuity. Emotional integration is happening in small steps. Teens frequently recreate pieces of their culture to stay emotionally grounded — music, food, and traditions matter. Like the survey reveals, youth workers see great resilience but also uncertainty: many teens are unsure about their futures, torn between hope for returning to Ukraine and settling into life in Belgium.

Ultimately, youth workers emphasize the need for **empathy, emotional support, culturally responsive programming**, and **safe, creative environments** where teens can express themselves and connect on their own terms.

*****This survey was a part of the AntiLimbo project. The KA2 Small-Scale Partnership project "AntiLimbo" is run by Grem, Latvia in cooperation with MoreMosaic, Sweden and Bessonova Outdoor Immersion School, Belgium within Erasmus+ programme framework. The project aims to enhance the sense of belonging among young Ukrainian refugees in Belgium, Latvia, and Sweden, connecting them to the European Union and its cultural heritage. Through gamification and digital tools, we aim to raise awareness of European cultural history and values, fostering a deeper sense of identity with their new environment and European society. Project reference number 2024-3-LV02-KA210-YOU-000269071. Young people under 18 completed the survey with permission and under the supervision of their teachers or youth workers.

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