

# Poland

## Participatory Assessment

April 2025



UNHCR staff supporting refugees at a clothing distribution point / UNHCR © Anna Liminowicz

## Acknowledgements:

This report is based on the Participatory Assessment conducted by UNHCR Poland with refugees and asylum seekers from Ukraine and other countries between January 2024 and January 2025. It is important to note that in this report, the term "refugee" is used in a broader rather than strictly legal sense. It encompasses individuals with various statuses, including those under temporary protection, international protection, subsidiary protection, and other categories of forcibly displaced persons. This approach aims to reflect the diversity of experiences and legal situations of people who have sought refuge in Poland regardless of their formal status.

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### Contact us:

UNHCR Representation in Poland

Ul. Przemysłowa 30

00-450 Warsaw

polwa@unhcr.org

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2024 Participatory Assessment in Poland, conducted between January 2024 and January 2025, reveals a complex landscape of challenges faced by refugees, mainly from Ukraine and Belarus. While many highlight the support they have received since arriving in Poland, significant barriers to full integration remain. Based on 76 interviews across 10 voivodships, the assessment highlights six key areas of concern: legal status and documentation challenges; economic inclusion and housing stability; access to services and information; social integration, education and language acquisition; and mental health and psychosocial well-being.

Refugees struggle with bureaucratic processes and often face uncertainty about their legal status prospects and difficulties in accessing clear information. Economic inclusion remains a major challenge, with many refugees facing discrimination in the labor and housing markets. The language barrier is proving to be a pervasive problem, affecting all aspects of integration, from access to healthcare to participation in children's education. Social inclusion is hampered by instances of discrimination and cultural misunderstanding, although there are positive examples of community acceptance.

The assessment identifies several vulnerable groups facing compounded challenges, including people with disabilities, older people, families with children and LGBTIQ+ refugees. These groups often require tailored support to overcome specific barriers to integration. The report also identifies a changing support landscape, with a reported decline in NGO activity and a depletion of funding for refugee assistance, adding to the insecurity faced by many.

Crucially, the assessment underlines the importance of actively listening to refugees and involving them in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. This participatory approach ensures that assistance is tailored to their real needs and preferences, rather than imposed from the top down. Based on these findings and the principle of refugee participation, the report proposes a number of solutions and recommendations. These include streamlining administrative procedures, increasing language learning opportunities, improving access to the job market, developing programs supporting social cohesion, and developing targeted programs for vulnerable groups. The recommendations emphasise the need for a coordinated approach involving government agencies, humanitarian partners, and UNHCR, in close cooperation with refugee communities, to address the multiple challenges they face in Poland and to promote their successful inclusion into Polish society.

	Key concerns	Refugees' recommendations
Legal Status and Documentation Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complexity of documentation processes</li> <li>• Unexpected loss of temporary protection status</li> <li>• Long waiting times for residence permits</li> <li>• Inconsistent interpretation of laws by different authorities</li> <li>• Uncertainty about long-term status in Poland</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simplify and streamline procedures for legalizing stay</li> <li>• Provide clear, step-by-step guides in multiple languages</li> <li>• Offer more legal advice and support services</li> <li>• Advocate for consistent interpretation of laws across all agencies</li> </ul>
Economic Inclusion and Housing Stability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discrimination in employment and housing markets</li> <li>• Difficulty finding jobs matching qualifications</li> <li>• Precarious employment situations (short-term contracts, low wages)</li> <li>• Housing insecurity, especially after reducing the availability of collective accommodation</li> <li>• Challenges in having foreign academic and professional qualifications recognized</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organize job fairs for vulnerable groups (elderly, people with disabilities)</li> <li>• Support recognition of foreign qualifications</li> <li>• Provide vocational trainings tailored to the Polish job market</li> <li>• Support refugee entrepreneurship through participation in art fairs and grant programs</li> <li>• Introduce financial support programs for housing costs</li> </ul>
Accessing Services and Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language barriers in accessing healthcare and other services</li> <li>• Long waiting times for medical appointments</li> <li>• Lack of clear information about available services and rights</li> <li>• Digital divide hindering access to online services</li> <li>• Difficulties in navigating complex administrative systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the number of Ukrainian-speaking healthcare providers</li> <li>• Establish a network of volunteer interpreters for various services</li> <li>• Create a centralized, multilingual information platform at the national level, with options for regional and local customization</li> <li>• Offer digital literacy training for refugees</li> </ul>
Social Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instances of discrimination and cultural misunderstandings</li> <li>• Difficulty building meaningful connections with local community</li> <li>• Bullying and exclusion of refugee children in schools</li> <li>• Sense of isolation, especially for vulnerable groups</li> <li>• Growing tensions with local communities over time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organize more cultural exchange events and activities involving both refugees and the host community</li> <li>• Implement mentorship programs pairing refugees with locals</li> <li>• Provide cultural competence training for public service providers</li> <li>• Support initiatives fostering interaction between refugee and Polish children</li> <li>• Conduct public awareness campaigns about refugee contributions to Polish society</li> </ul>
Education and Language Acquisition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulties understanding and navigating the Polish education system</li> <li>• Challenges of dual education system (Polish and Ukrainian online)</li> <li>• Language barriers affecting academic progress and social integration</li> <li>• Limited availability of advanced Polish courses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop educational support programs for refugee children to ensure their academic success</li> <li>• Provide specialized language training for professional contexts</li> <li>• Provide comprehensive language courses that take into account the specific learning needs of various groups of refugees (e.g. elderly persons, teenagers)</li> </ul>
Mental Health and Psychosocial Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited access to mental health services in native languages</li> <li>• Stigma surrounding mental health issues</li> <li>• Lack of culturally competent mental health professionals</li> <li>• Ongoing stress and anxiety related to displacement and uncertainty</li> <li>• Psychological impact of leaving behind homes and family members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase availability of mental health services in refugees' languages</li> <li>• Establish support groups for refugees to share experiences</li> <li>• Create safe spaces for vulnerable groups to access mental health support</li> <li>• Offer mental health awareness workshops to reduce stigma</li> </ul>

# I. Introduction

## Context

Since the start of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 until February 2025, 1.9 million refugees have cumulatively registered for temporary protection<sup>1</sup> in Poland, mainly women and children. As of 11 March 2025, there was a total of 994,153 refugees from Ukraine with active PESEL UKR status. As of 30 November 2024, there were additional 18,951 individuals in Poland with international protection status. Of these, 73% held subsidiary protection, 16% had refugee status, and 10% were granted humanitarian stay<sup>2</sup>. Nearly half of the international protection holders were Belarusians, while Ukrainians made up one quarter of this group.

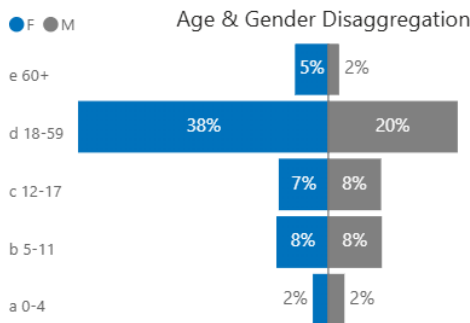
The demographic breakdown of refugees from Ukraine with active PESEL UKR status in Poland shows a predominance of women and children. Adult women (18 and older) constitute 43% of the refugee population, while children (17 and younger) make up 35%. Adult men represent a smaller proportion at 22% of the total.

**994,153** (active registration\*)

Refugees from Ukraine with active registration for temporary protection (PESEL UKR)\* as of 11 March 2025

**1,917,549** (cumulative\*\*)

Refugees from Ukraine who applied for temporary protection in Poland

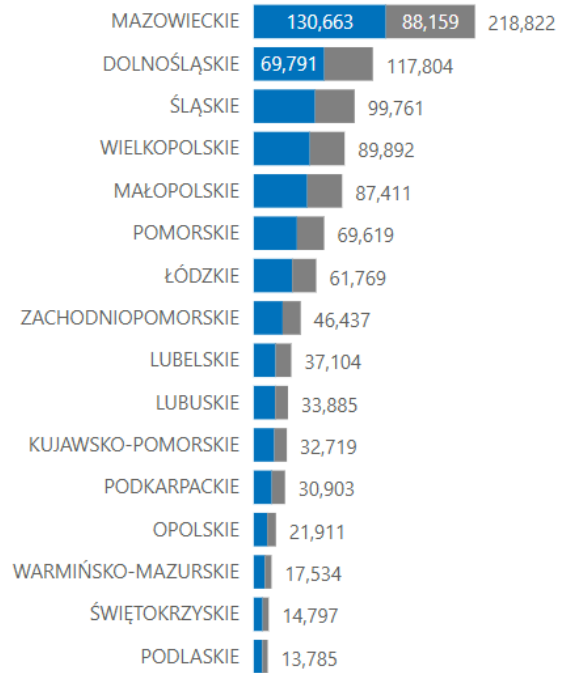


\*The number reflects the total of persons with active registration in the register of citizens of Ukraine and their family members who have been assigned a PESEL number under the special law.

\*\*The cumulative number of persons registered so far including those whose records were inactivated due to leaving Poland for more than 30 days.

## Refugees by Gender and Voivodship/powiat\*

● Female ● Male



Ukraine Refugee Situation / Poland, Operational Data Portal (<https://data.unhcr.org/>)

The distribution of refugees from Ukraine in Poland's voivodships shows significant regional differences, with a pronounced concentration in urban and economically developed areas. Mazowieckie

<sup>1</sup> Temporary protection is a special status granted to people fleeing the war in Ukraine, based on the European Union's Temporary Protection Directive. It was adopted in response to the large-scale displacement caused by the war and provides key rights, including access to employment, social welfare and education.

<sup>2</sup> These terms refer to different forms of international protection in Poland: refugee status is granted to those fleeing persecution; subsidiary protection is granted to those facing serious harm if returned; while humanitarian stay is for exceptional cases not covered by the other two categories.

Voivodeship, which includes the capital Warsaw, hosts the largest number of refugees, with 218,822, or 22% of the total. This is more than twice the number of any other region, highlighting its role as a major centre for refugee settlement. The second largest concentration is in Dolnoslaskie with 117,804 refugees (12%), closely followed by Slaskie with 99,761 (10%).

The variation in population size, combined with the geographical location, may influence the challenges and experiences of refugees from Ukraine in each region, as well as the resources available for their integration and the broader geopolitical context in which these processes take place.

Education plays a crucial role in the integration of refugee children. According to the most recent data<sup>3</sup>, 198,240 refugee students from Ukraine are enrolled in the Polish education system, with 15% in pre-school education and 85% in primary and secondary schools.

Based on the comprehensive analysis provided in the National Bank of Poland's research report on Ukrainian population in Poland in 2024<sup>4</sup>, a complex picture of the demographic, economic and social landscape of this group emerges. The study shows that Ukrainians in Poland are predominantly women, the majority of whom are of working age. While employment rates are generally high (78% overall), there are notable differences in job types and wage levels between two groups highlighted in the NBP report: pre-full scale war arrivals and more recently arrived refugees. The report also highlights uneven levels of social integration, with language barriers remaining for many despite increasing participation in Polish language courses. A significant challenge remains in the form of much higher unemployment rates among refugees compared to the overall economy. The structure of labor demand results in higher wages for immigrant labor in occupations where men are more likely to be employed. The ability to work and support oneself and one's family is a factor that encourages longer stays in Poland.

Belarusians in Poland are predominantly well-educated and relatively young, with half under the age of 34<sup>5</sup>. Their arrivals increased significantly after 2020, with political reasons cited as the main motivation for majority of post-2020 arrivals. Taking into account the labor market situation in Poland, employment rates for Belarusians are relatively high, but their unemployment rate remains higher than the overall rate in the country. The majority express satisfaction with their lives in Poland and plan to stay long-term or permanently. However, challenges remain, particularly in legalizing their stay and overcoming language barriers. Overall, while this group shows strong potential for integration and contribution to the Polish economy, there remain areas where targeted support could improve their situation and retention in Poland.

Quantitative data from a survey conducted by UNHCR between October 2024 and February 2025<sup>6</sup> provide valuable insights that complement and reinforce the observations from the Participatory Assessment. The survey, which included 2418 interviews across Poland, provides a broader context to the challenges and experiences shared by refugees during the qualitative assessment.

In terms of housing, 67% of respondents lived in rented accommodation, but 14% of those who rented did not have a rental contract with the owner. Of those without a contract, 17% reported that the

<sup>3</sup> Dane.gov.pl - Uczniowie uchodźcy z Ukrainy w podziale na typy szkół, klasy i powiaty\_ stan na 31.12.2024

<sup>4</sup> Data and analysis based on the National Bank of Poland's research report "Sytuacja życiowa i ekonomiczna migrantów z Ukrainy w Polsce w 2024 r."

<sup>5</sup> Data and analysis based on the National Bank of Poland's research report "Sytuacja życiowa i ekonomiczna migrantów z Białorusi w Polsce w 2024 r."

<sup>6</sup> UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe, "Protection Profiling & Monitoring: Protection Risks and Needs of Refugees from Ukraine", survey conducted between October 2024 and February 2025, covering 4,884 interviews in various host countries, including Poland. Interviews took place in a variety of locations, including transit centres and reception centres. 100% of the respondents were of Ukrainian nationality. While respondents were randomly selected to reduce bias, non-probability sampling was used. Results cannot necessarily be extrapolated to all refugees from Ukraine.

landlord had refused to provide one, highlighting potential vulnerabilities in housing security. The survey also found that 26% of respondents identified housing as one of their most pressing needs, which is consistent with the housing challenges identified in the Participatory Assessment.

Economic integration remains a major challenge, with 14% of employed respondents lacking a contract and 18% reporting excessively long working hours. In addition, 51% of employed respondents considered themselves to be overqualified for their current job, confirming the difficulties in finding employment that matches their skills.

The survey also provided insights into temporary visits to Ukraine, with 38% of respondents having visited at least once since their initial departure. The main reasons for these visits included visiting relatives (54%) and accessing healthcare (14%). Notably, 10% of those who visited Ukraine experienced difficulties on their return to the host country, mainly related to suspension of legal status (55%) and suspension of benefits (51%). These findings reflect the complex realities of displacement and the ongoing links that refugees maintain with their home country.

Finally, the survey highlighted the urgent needs of refugees, with employment (39%), information (27%), health care (26%) and accommodation (26%) being the most frequently mentioned. These are in line with the key concerns identified in the Participatory Assessment and underline the multiple challenges refugees face in their integration process.

## Rationale

Participatory Assessment is a cornerstone of UNHCR's community-based approach, which aims to build partnerships with refugees and involve them meaningfully in decisions that affect their lives. The main purpose of assessment is to gain a deeper understanding of the protection risks faced by refugees of different ages, genders and backgrounds, while identifying their capacities and proposed solutions. By fostering structured dialogue with refugee communities, UNHCR and its partners are able to gather accurate information on specific protection challenges, underlying causes and community-driven recommendations.

The participatory nature of these assessments not only enhances the quality and relevance of the data collected but also empowers refugees by recognizing their agency and expertise. This approach is critical to developing sustainable solutions and fostering resilience within refugee communities.

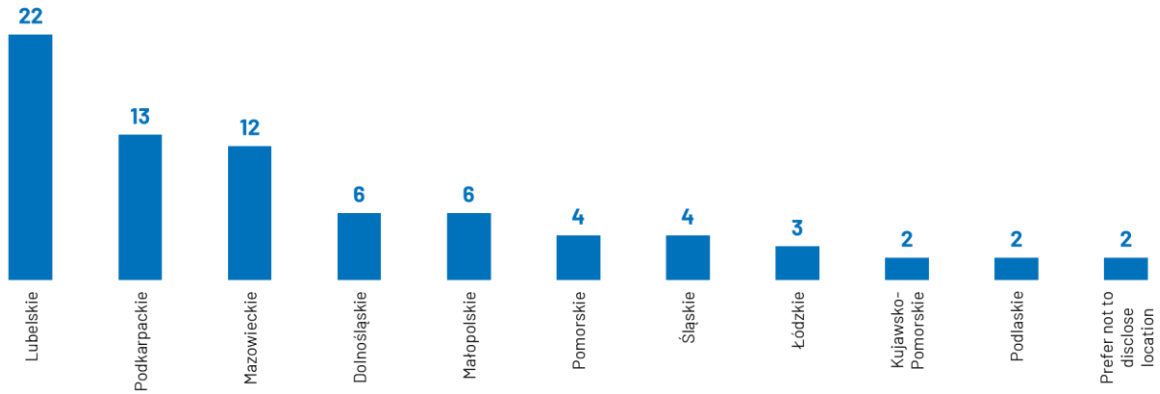
## Methodology

The 2024 Participatory Assessment in Poland was conducted using a comprehensive approach that combined focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs). This mixed-methods approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of the challenges and experiences of refugees and asylum seekers across the country.

A total of 76 interviews were conducted between January 2024 and January 2025. The data collection was spread over the year, with 22 interviews conducted from January to June 2024, 9 interviews from September to November 2024, and the majority (45) in December 2024 and January 2025. These interviews covered 10 voivodships.



### Number of interviews in each voivodeship<sup>7</sup>



The interview scenarios were designed using an age, gender and diversity (AGD) sensitive approach to ensure that different profiles of people felt comfortable sharing their experiences freely. In some cases, separate sessions<sup>8</sup> were held with different groups, such as young people, older people, people with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ people and members of minority groups. Some interviews that were not specifically dedicated to people with disabilities included participants with disabilities or their carers, further enriching the diversity of perspectives. A number of interviews included only residents of collective accommodation or institutions (such as hotels provided for refugees), while others were carried out with people living independently, providing insights into different living situations.

The interviews covered a wide range of topics, with the most frequently discussed being:

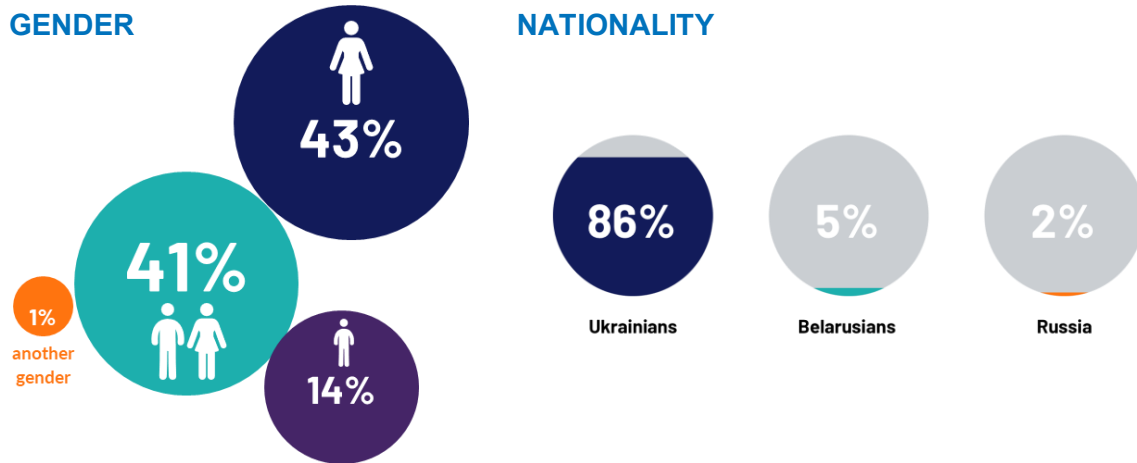
1. Local integration and other local solutions
2. Access to territory, documentation and asylum
3. Community engagement and women's empowerment
4. Self-reliance, economic inclusion and livelihoods

Several themes (categories) were raised during the discussions, the most common being Social protection; Civil and travel documentation; and Peaceful coexistence and social cohesion. Other categories such as Wage-employment; Skills and qualifications; Housing and accommodation; Health; Information, communication, feedback and response; Access to territory were also frequently mentioned.

<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting that in some voivodeships the interviews were conducted in a single city, while in others they were spread over several different towns. For example, in Dolnośląskie all the interviews were conducted in Wrocław, while in Lubelskie the interviews took place in several locations, including Lublin, Chelm and Biala Podlaska.

<sup>8</sup> 20 dedicated interviews.

### General profile of participants:



The majority of participants (at least 86%) were Ukrainian, with smaller numbers from Belarus (at least 5%), the Russian Federation (at least 2%), and other countries, including host community members. Most refugees (at least 82%) held Temporary Protection status, while at least 7% were granted International Protection. The study also included asylum seekers who were in the process of applying for international protection.

Of the 577 participants, the gender distribution was diverse, with 35 all-female interviews (43% of participants), 16 all-male groups (14%) and 24 mixed-gender groups (41%). In addition, there was a group of 8 participants who identified with another gender designation.

The age of the participants varied, ranging from teenagers to elderly people. 53 interviews were conducted with adults aged 18 to 60 and older (63% of participants). Young people aged between 10 and 24 made up a significant proportion of the participants (20%) and were involved in 10 interviews. Senior citizens aged 60 and older made up 9% of the participants, with 7 dedicated interview sessions. In addition, 6 interviews included a wide age range from 10 to 60 and older, representing 7% of the participants.

Each region independently selected target groups and topics for their Participatory Assessments, tailoring their approach to local contexts and priorities.

### Limitations

Limitations include, first and foremost, the selectivity of the material collected, in particular the inability to generalize the findings to the wider population. However, despite this limitation, the data obtained are an important part of a wider research framework. They can help to identify areas where further research should be conducted and data should be collected more systematically.

In addition, it is important to note that the research was based on partially structured and open-ended discussions, which has the following limitations:

- Lack of or only partial standardization, which may lead to inconsistencies in the questions asked and the answers obtained, making it difficult to compare results.

- The subjectivity of the moderator, who may unconsciously influence the course of the discussion, the interpretation of responses or the choice of topics.
- Dominance of certain participants, where more outspoken individuals may steer the discussion, limiting the diversity of perspectives.
- Social pressure, which may lead participants to adjust their statements to meet group expectations, potentially leading to self-censorship and incomplete honesty.
- Data analysis challenges, as loosely structured conversations generate a large amount of unstructured data, making categorization and comparison difficult.

Despite these challenges, this approach provides valuable insights that can guide more systematic and comprehensive research in the future and inform the development of more targeted and effective support strategies for refugees. The findings from the research can contribute to the refinement of policies and programmes, ensuring that they are more responsive to the actual experiences and priorities of refugee communities in Poland.

## I. Main findings

The 2024 Participatory Assessment in Poland revealed a complex landscape of challenges faced by refugees, mainly from Ukraine and Belarus, who now make up a significant proportion of the country's displaced population. The findings highlight a multifaceted set of issues that, when layered on top of each other, have a profound impact on the lives of these individuals and families seeking safety and stability in Poland.

The experiences shared by participants paint a picture of **compounded vulnerability**. At the heart of their challenges is their status as refugees – having fled conflict, persecution or dire circumstances in their home countries. Many have endured traumatic experiences related to war or political repression and arrive in Poland with few or no resources and limited access to the assets they left behind. This baseline of displacement is further complicated for those with disabilities, chronic illnesses, elderly and children, who face additional barriers to self-sufficiency and integration.

In addition, some refugees face **additional layers of discrimination and misunderstanding** due to their ethnic background, sexual orientation or gender identity. This can be particularly challenging for individuals whose sexual or gender identity differs from societal norms, as they may face prejudice both within refugee communities and in wider society.

Individual characteristics such as personal sensitivity and self-esteem also play a role, meaning that even people in similar situations may react differently and require tailored support. The intersectionality of these factors – being a refugee, belonging to an ethnic minority and possibly identifying with a marginalized sexual or gender group – can create unique and complex challenges that require nuanced and individualized approaches to support and integration.

The assessment also revealed a **changing support landscape** and growing tensions with local communities. Participants frequently mentioned a decline in NGO activity and the depletion of government and local resources allocated to refugee assistance. This has manifested itself in the reduction of free language courses and the looming possibility of shelter closures, adding to the insecurity faced by many refugees. Participants also reported feeling an increased sense of resentment from some groups in the local population, particularly those who receive social assistance. These local beneficiaries often perceive refugees as competitors for limited resources, believing that support given

to refugees reduces what would otherwise be available to Polish citizens in need. This competition for resources, whether real or perceived, adds another layer of challenge to integration efforts and highlights the need for clear communication about resource allocation and the benefits of refugee integration to the wider community.

These challenges are compounded by **persistent fears for personal safety and the well-being of family members** left behind. Ukrainian refugees express concerns about military mobilization, while Belarusians worry about possible reprisals against their families still in Belarus. There is also an underlying fear that the conflict could spill over into Poland, leading some to question the long-term viability of their integration efforts.

The influx of refugees has also **exposed weaknesses in Polish systems**, particularly in health care, social welfare, administration and education. Long waiting times for medical appointments, complicated bureaucratic procedures and overburdened social services highlight the strain on these systems. In education, the limited availability of support for non-Polish speaking students and instances of discrimination highlight areas for improvement.

These multi-layered challenges create a complex environment for refugees trying to rebuild their lives in Poland. From basic needs and legal status to employment, healthcare and social integration, the issues are interrelated and often mutually reinforcing. Understanding this complexity is crucial to developing comprehensive and effective support strategies that address both immediate needs and long-term integration prospects.

The following sections present the key challenges and issues faced by refugees, categorized into six main areas. Each section explores the specific difficulties encountered by refugees in these domains, highlighting the interconnected nature of these challenges and their impact on the overall integration process.



### [Caught in Bureaucracy. Legal Status and Documentation Challenges](#)

Refugees in Poland often find themselves **entangled in a complex and shifting web of bureaucratic processes** as they struggle to obtain, renew or maintain essential documents. The challenges begin at the border, where inconsistent information and varying interpretations of rules by border officials can set the tone for a refugee's journey through the Polish legal system. Many reported confusion and anxiety about the specific requirements for different statuses or documents, and the far-reaching consequences these choices could have on their freedom of movement, access to support services and long-term integration prospects.

The precariousness of legal status emerged as a major concern. Refugees shared stories of losing their temporary protection status unexpectedly, sometimes due to minor oversights or misunderstandings. One participant recounted the distressing experience of having their status revoked even though they had not left Poland, resulting in a months-long process of contacting multiple border points to prove their continuous presence. This uncertainty leaves many feeling vulnerable and reluctant to travel, even for short periods, for fear of losing their legal status.

The complexity and opacity of the documentation process add a further layer of stress. Many refugees expressed frustration at **the lack of clear, accessible information on the procedures**. The high costs associated with document processing and legal assistance create additional barriers, particularly for those struggling with economic inclusion.

Refugees often find themselves in paradoxical bureaucratic situations. For example, some reported that they needed to return to their home country to obtain certain documents or update information but were unable to do so due to their current legal status or financial constraints. This dilemma is particularly acute for men of military age from Ukraine, who face additional risks if they return.

Changes in legislation and inconsistent interpretations by different government authorities further complicate the situation. Refugees reported receiving conflicting information, leading to confusion and mistrust.

For some, these challenges culminate in a **constant state of uncertainty and preparation for potential upheaval**. This sentiment encapsulates the profound impact that documentation challenges can have on refugees' sense of security and ability to build a stable life in Poland.

- *“Our status was rescinded despite the fact that we did not leave Poland. We had to write to multiple border points to receive confirmation in writing that we did not cross the border.” (FGD: Slaskie, male, 25-60+)*
- *“I do not feel 100% safe, there is a fear that they will be deported. So I withdrew all the money from my bank cards and put down my emergency suitcase. I have four evacuation plans from Wroclaw.” (FGD: Dolnoslaskie, male, 18-59)*



### **Building Foundations. Economic Inclusion and Housing Stability**

The financial situation of refugees is often precarious, with many struggling to meet basic needs. Some refugees still lack basic necessities and are largely **dependent on benefits that are disproportionate to the cost of living in Poland**. This financial burden affects not only the adults but also the integration and well-being of the children. One parent described how their children are often unable to participate in school activities and trips due to the family's lack of financial resources, forcing them to stay in the shelter while their classmates go on excursions.

The disparity in opportunities between large urban centres and smaller towns or rural areas further complicates the economic situation of refugees. This geographical divide often forces refugees to make difficult choices between affordability and access to services and employment opportunities.

Housing stability is also a challenge, with **many refugees struggling to find affordable accommodation**. The situation is particularly dire for those living in collective centres, where privacy concerns and inadequate living conditions are often mentioned. One refugee described the overcrowded conditions in the shelter and the lack of proper cooking facilities for the large number of residents.

The end of the 40+ scheme has exacerbated the housing crisis for refugees. This programme previously provided financial support to Poles hosting refugees from Ukraine. Its end has left many facing sudden housing insecurity and financial strain. **Discrimination in the private housing market** adds another layer of difficulty. Participants reported instances of landlords refusing to rent housing to refugees without proof of stable income. Families with children or pets are also likely to face obstacles in securing housing. This perpetuates a cycle of dependency on collective centres, making it difficult for refugees to achieve self-sufficiency.

Sudden changes in legal status or legislation can have an immediate and severe impact on refugees' financial situation. For example, the loss of temporary protection status can lead to the loss of access to

free accommodation in collective centres and block access to free medical care provided by the government. This instability creates a constant state of anxiety and uncertainty as refugees fear that their current economic situation could change at any time due to factors beyond their control.

Refugees in Poland face significant challenges in securing stable employment, which is fundamental to their integration and well-being. The struggle for economic integration is particularly acute for older people and people with disabilities, who often face limited job opportunities. **Many refugees find themselves in precarious employment situations**, working without contracts or for lower wages than their Polish colleagues.

Recognition of foreign qualifications remains a significant barrier, forcing many highly qualified professionals to take low-skilled jobs. The struggle to find employment that matches their skills and experience is not only an economic challenge but also affects refugees' self-esteem and integration into Polish society.

- *“I earn around 500 PLN per month and I receive 400 PLN from MOPS. My flat rent costs 850 PLN. How can I survive for 50 PLN a month?” (FGD: Pomorskie, female, 60+)*
- *“I work as a cleaner without a contract because my employer refuses to hire me officially. My employer said that if I do not like it, I can leave. But I have a family to feed, so I have no choice.” (FGD: Podkarpackie, female, 18-59)*
- *“Ukrainians are often denied rental opportunities unless they provide proof of income. Families with children or pets are particularly discriminated against, making it a vicious cycle that prevents us from leaving the shelter.” (FGD: Podkarpackie, female, 18-59)*



### Navigating Systems. Accessing Services and Information

Access to essential services, particularly healthcare, is a priority for many refugees in Poland. Language is a major barrier, preventing effective communication with healthcare providers and limiting access to vital information. Many refugees report long waiting times for medical appointments, especially for specialists, which can have serious consequences for those with chronic conditions or urgent health needs.

The complexity of the Polish healthcare system often leaves **refugees feeling lost and frustrated**. One refugee described the difficulty of understanding which doctor is responsible for which function, noting that even simple tasks take considerable time and effort. This confusion is compounded by a lack of clear information about available services and patients' rights, leaving many unsure of what medical care they are entitled to and how to access it.

Disappointingly, some refugees have experienced inappropriate behavior from medical staff. One participant recounted an experience where a doctor asked them to end an appointment early because of their lack of Polish language skills. Another participant described an incident in which emergency services allegedly refused to assist a newborn in need of care<sup>9</sup>, highlighting the potential for discrimination in emergency care situations.

These negative experiences, coupled with the challenges of navigating an unfamiliar system, have led some refugees to consider **returning to Ukraine for medical treatment**. As some participants pointed out, it is often easier to travel to Ukraine for treatment and then return to Poland than to seek medical

<sup>9</sup> While these reports were raised during the discussions, UNHCR could not independently verify individual cases.

care in their host country. This trend raises concerns about continuity of care and the potential risks associated with travelling to a conflict zone for health services.

The situation is particularly problematic for minority groups. LGBTIQ+ refugees, for example, report facing discrimination in healthcare settings and difficulties in accessing specialized care that meets their specific needs. Some have experienced doctors refusing to provide necessary treatment or referrals, such as hormone therapy for gender reassignment, due to policy restrictions or personal bias.

The social welfare system presents similar difficulties. Many refugees are **unaware of the full range of social assistance programmes available to them or the criteria for eligibility**. This lack of information can lead to missed opportunities for support and increased stress as refugees try to piece together their entitlements from fragmented sources.

Education is another area where clear information is often lacking. **Parents struggle to understand the Polish education system**, including enrolment procedures, grading systems and the support available for non-native speakers. This information gap can have long-term consequences for children's integration and academic success.

The issue of access to information is further complicated by the digital divide. While some information is available online, it is often not in languages that refugees can easily understand, or it requires digital literacy skills that not all refugees have. This can lead to a reliance on word-of-mouth information, which, while helpful, can sometimes be inaccurate or incomplete.

In response to these challenges, many refugees have turned to community networks and NGOs for information and assistance in navigating these complex systems. These informal support structures often fill critical gaps in official information channels, providing refugees with accessible information in their own language and offering personalised advice. However, the availability of these support services can vary significantly depending on location, with **refugees in smaller towns or rural areas often having less access to information and support** than those in larger cities.

The discontinuation or reduction of certain NGO programmes due to funding constraints has exacerbated the information gap in some areas. This has led to a reduction in support services, particularly in areas such as language courses and integration activities, which were previously more widely available and served as important sources of information for refugees.

- *“Following a surgery, a patient receives rehabilitation. But I do not know how to access information about it – where and when I am entitled to it.” (FGD: Pomorskie, female, 60+)*
- *“There is no such information available. Not everyone is arriving to someone they already know.” (FGD: Kujawsko-Pomorskie, female, 18-59)*



### **Finding Common Ground. Social Inclusion**

The path to social inclusion for refugees in Poland is a complex tapestry of challenges and opportunities, marked by both instances of discrimination and heartening examples of community acceptance.

**Discrimination manifests itself in various forms and settings**, affecting different groups of refugees in distinct ways. In the workplace, refugees may face unequal treatment, with some reporting being paid less or being denied promotions despite their qualifications.

In education, refugee children often bear the brunt of social tensions. **Incidents of bullying and exclusion** are not uncommon, with some children facing verbal harassment or social isolation from their peers. One

parent gave a distressing account of her child refusing to go to school and hiding under her desk because of persistent bullying. Such experiences can have long-lasting effects on a child's mental well-being, sense of belonging and academic performance.

Public spaces can also be sites of discrimination. Some refugees report verbal abuse or hostile attitudes when speaking their mother tongue in public. While these incidents are not universal, they contribute to a sense of otherness and can make it difficult for refugees to feel comfortable in their new communities.

Despite these challenges, there are factors that can significantly facilitate integration. **Language acquisition emerges as a crucial element**, with many refugees finding that improved Polish language skills open doors to better employment opportunities and social connections. Community engagement initiatives, such as cultural exchange events or joint volunteering, have proved effective in bridging cultural gaps and fostering mutual understanding.

Positive examples of integration offer hope and direction for future efforts. Some refugees report forming close friendships with Polish colleagues, particularly in diverse work environments. Others have found acceptance and support through participation in local community activities or clubs. For example, a group of elderly refugees spoke warmly of their experiences in a senior citizens' club, where they interact with Polish seniors, improving both their language skills and their social connections.

**Local initiatives that bring together refugees and members of the host community have shown promise.**

Cultural festivals, sports events and community projects where both groups work side by side have been cited as effective ways of breaking down barriers and building mutual trust. These interactions not only help refugees feel more connected to their new communities, but also provide opportunities for Poles to learn about and appreciate the cultures and experiences of their new neighbors.

However, barriers to integration remain. Some refugees report a sense of fatigue or diminished openness from the Polish community over time, making it more difficult to form new connections as the initial wave of solidarity wears off. The geographical concentration of refugees in certain areas, while creating a sense of community, can sometimes hinder wider integration with the local Polish population.

- *“After work, I grab a couple of beers with Polish co-workers, but I have little contact with neighbours or other locals.” (FGD: Kujawsko-Pomorskie, male, 25-59)*
- *“Once at the doctor's waiting room I heard ‘There are too many of you here’ [Ukrainian refugees in Poland].” (FGD: Pomorskie, female, 60+)*
- *“We were walking, and seven Poles got loud after hearing Ukrainian.” (FGD: Dolnoslaskie, male, 15-17)*



### **Learning to Belong. Education and Language Acquisition**

Education and language acquisition are crucial for refugee integration but pose significant challenges. For refugee children, adapting to the Polish education system is often a daunting task. Many face significant language barriers that hinder their academic progress and social integration. One parent described their child's struggle with weak Polish language skills, insufficient homework support and feelings of isolation as the only Ukrainian in the class, despite the efforts of some teachers to help after school hours. This sentiment is echoed by many families, highlighting **the need for more comprehensive language support in schools.**



Interestingly, many refugee families have opted for a dual approach to education, with children attending both Polish schools and continuing their Ukrainian education online. While this strategy is potentially beneficial for maintaining cultural ties and ensuring educational continuity, it also presents challenges. Some parents explained that this approach is due to uncertainty about their length of stay in Poland and want to ensure that their children can complete their education in Ukraine when they return. However, this dual approach can lead to increased stress and workload for the children.

**The role of intercultural assistants in schools was identified as crucial** but often lacking. Where present, these assistants play an important role in helping refugee children navigate the Polish education system and bridge cultural gaps. However, their availability is uneven across schools and regions.

For adult refugees, access to Polish language courses is a critical issue. Many participants expressed frustration at the limited availability of language courses, particularly at intermediate and advanced levels. One refugee described trying to attend free Polish classes offered by a local project, only to find them fully booked for months. This **lack of accessible language learning opportunities** significantly hampers refugees' ability to integrate into the labor market and wider society.

The quality and structure of available language courses was also a concern. Some refugees reported that courses were too short or lacked a practical dimension, particularly in speaking practice. Some emphasised the **importance of practical, job-related language training**. This highlights the need for more comprehensive, long-term language learning programmes that focus on practical and communicative skills.

Students and adults seeking to improve their employability face many challenges. Some encounter difficulties in having their qualifications recognized in Poland, often requiring additional training or re-qualification. An engineer described the complexity of Polish technical terminology and expressed the need for specialized courses to apply their knowledge professionally in Polish. This underlines the need for specialized language courses that focus on professional terminology and sector-specific communication skills.

**Geographical disparities in education and language learning opportunities are evident.** Refugees in larger cities often have access to a wider range of courses and support services, while those in smaller towns or rural areas have more limited opportunities. This disparity can have a significant impact on integration prospects and future opportunities.

Despite these challenges, there are positive examples of educational integration and language learning. Some refugees reported supportive teachers who provided extra help and others mentioned beneficial integration activities in schools. One participant described how he felt comfortable in his Polish school and quickly made friends with his classmates, demonstrating **the potential for schools to be effective integration environments** when appropriate support is provided.

- *“My Polish is still rather weak. I do not have enough support to do my homework. Some teachers care a lot and stay after classes to help me. But I need more support with, for instance, writing an essay in Polish. It is very difficult for me to be the only Ukrainian in the class, especially since my Polish is not good. I feel isolated and alone.” (FGD: Podkarpackie, female, 10-17)*
- *“I already speak Polish, I understand everything. But for work at my level, Polish is not enough. I am an engineer, and the terms in Polish are very complicated. I need to take courses to learn, maybe then I will be able to use my knowledge somehow if I speak Polish at a professional level.” (FGD: Podkarpackie, female, 60+)*



### ***Healing Invisible Wounds. Mental Health and Psychosocial Well-being***

The mental health and psychosocial well-being of refugees in Poland is often overlooked, despite being a critical aspect of their overall integration and quality of life. The need for mental health support varies between different groups of refugees, with some expressing more urgent needs than others.

Adults, particularly those who have experienced trauma related to war or displacement, often report a need for psychological support. Some refugees describe feeling constantly on edge and even preparing “emergency suitcases” for fear of deportation or the conflict spreading to Poland. The psychological impact of leaving behind homes, family members and established lives weighs heavily on many, contributing to **ongoing stress and anxiety**.

For children and young people, the need for mental health support is often identified by parents. **In schools, the availability and quality of psychological support can vary considerably**. Some pupils report positive experiences with school psychologists who have helped them to cope with the challenges of adjustment and integration. However, others describe a reluctance to seek help due to stigma or fear of being perceived negatively by their peers.

Language barriers emerge as a significant barrier to accessing mental health services. Many refugees express a **preference for psychological support in their mother tongue**, as they find it difficult to express complex emotions and experiences in Polish. This language gap has led some to discontinue their use of mental health services, feeling that the communication barrier hinders the effectiveness of the support.

The availability of mental health services specifically tailored to the needs of refugees is often limited, particularly **in smaller towns or rural areas**. Some refugees report long waiting times for appointments with specialists, while others describe a lack of cultural competence among mental health professionals in understanding their specific experiences and challenges.

For LGBTIQ+ refugees, access to appropriate mental health care can be particularly challenging. They often face discrimination in health care settings and struggle to find professionals who understand their specific needs and experiences. This lack of specialized support can exacerbate feelings of isolation and stress.

Despite the challenges of accessing formal mental health support, some refugees have developed informal support systems that contribute to their psychological well-being. In some collective centres, residents have created social media channels to share credible information and support each other. This **peer-to-peer support** extends to practical help, such as assistance with medical appointments, particularly among groups with specific needs such as refugees with hearing impairment. While these informal support networks don't replace professional mental health services, they are a valuable source of community support and information sharing. These initiatives **demonstrate the resilience of refugee communities and their ability to create supportive environments** in difficult circumstances.

- *“We witnessed military offensives and occupation firsthand. My 11-year-old daughter began fainting during air raids and refused to eat. Here at the shelter, she feels better, has resumed eating, and attends a Polish school where she has made friends.” (FGD: Podkarpackie, female, 18-59)*
- *“I was helpless when I arrived. Someone helped me. I knew nothing about shelters. My husband was working in another part of Poland. I had a lack of information and was lonely, it depressed me. I started to eat a lot of sweets, I got diabetes. I felt a lack of community meetings to find support. Then I found Caritas, met other women, attended language courses, found friends, step by step found myself here.” (FGD: Lodzkie, female, 25-59)*

## VULNERABLE GROUPS

While the challenges faced by refugees in Poland are often universal, certain groups within the refugee population face unique obstacles that exacerbate their integration difficulties. These groups often **require tailored support and interventions** to overcome barriers they face. By understanding their unique experiences, we can better address the diverse needs within the refugee community and work towards more inclusive and effective integration strategies.



### People with disabilities and health problems

Refugees with disabilities and chronic illnesses face **significant challenges in accessing suitable employment opportunities** in Poland. Many report that available jobs involve physical labor, which is incompatible with their health conditions. This limitation not only affects their economic stability, but also hinders their social integration, as employment is considered a crucial factor for active participation in society. However, there have been some positive developments in this area. Some refugees with disabilities have found temporary employment in specialized settings, such as working as school assistants in a center for children with disabilities. Some are also pursuing further education in Poland to improve their employment prospects.

The healthcare system poses particular challenges for this group. Long waiting times to see specialists, sometimes for years, are a major hardship. The **high cost of specialized medical services** and the complexity of the Polish healthcare system add to their difficulties. However, some refugees with disabilities report better access to rehabilitation and equipment in Poland than in Ukraine, indicating certain positive aspects.

The process of **obtaining disability recognition in Poland is reported to be lengthy and complex**. One refugee described the process as taking 1.5 years and being very complicated for her family. Even those with existing disability cards face difficulties in having their conditions accurately assessed and categorized within the Polish system. This bureaucratic hurdle can delay access to necessary support services and accommodation. Interestingly, some women reported that they had no problems obtaining Polish disability certificates for their children, suggesting that experiences vary.

Language barriers compound these challenges, with some refugees reporting **problems communicating their health needs to Polish-speaking doctors**. This can lead to misunderstandings or inadequate treatment. In addition, some refugees with disabilities reported a lack of information about their rights and available services, such as the possibility of receiving free medical equipment from hospitals.

Education for children with disabilities presents a mixed picture. While some children with disabilities are successfully integrated into local Polish schools, with support such as assigned assistants for those with physical disabilities, others face significant barriers to accessing education. For children with severe health conditions or complex disabilities, face-to-face schooling is often not feasible, highlighting the **critical need for specialized, accessible educational alternatives**.

Peer support within shelters has proven to be a crucial factor for many refugees with disabilities, providing assistance with childcare, transport and other daily needs. This community support helps to alleviate some of the problems faced by this vulnerable group.



### Older persons

Language acquisition is particularly difficult for the elderly, with many reporting that despite attending classes they struggle to learn Polish effectively. This language barrier severely limits their ability to interact with the local community and access services independently. In addition, older refugees often find it difficult to build new social networks in Poland, especially outside of organized activities. While some participate in senior clubs and find them beneficial, **opportunities for meaningful interaction with the local Polish community remain limited.**

Discrimination in employment is another major concern for older refugees. Many report being **turned down for jobs simply because of their age**, regardless of their qualifications or experience. When they do find work, it is often temporary, part-time and without formal contracts. The resulting financial instability is acute, with some reporting that their combined income from part-time work and social assistance is barely enough to cover basic living costs.

The complexity of administrative procedures, particularly in relation to pension transfers from their home countries to Poland, adds another layer of difficulty. Many express confusion and frustration at the lack of clear information about this process. On the other hand, relying on Ukrainian pensions alone is not a solution, as they are insufficient in the Polish context.

Many older refugees struggle with **housing stability and meeting basic needs**. Some live in collective accommodation that may not be suitable for their age-specific needs. Others face challenges in the private rental market due to limited financial resources.



### Families and children<sup>10</sup>

The education system emerges as a key concern for families with children. While the difficulties in understanding the Polish school system have been mentioned earlier, it is important to highlight the specific impacts on children and parents. Many families adopt a dual education approach, with children attending Polish schools while continuing Ukrainian education online. This strategy, while preserving cultural ties, increases stress and workload for children.

The language barrier, though less problematic for children who adapt quicker, still poses challenges, especially in subjects like biology and mathematics. For parents, it hinders effective communication with schools and teachers.

Integration difficulties at school persist, with reported incidents of bullying and discrimination. The **inadequate response from teachers and school psychologists** to these issues leaves refugee children vulnerable. Financial constraints further limit children's participation in school trips and extra-curricular activities, potentially isolating them from peers.

**Childcare remains a significant obstacle, particularly for single parents, affecting their ability to work full-time or participate in integration activities.** The choice between staying home with children or using unreliable childcare impacts both the parents' economic integration and the family's overall stability.

<sup>10</sup> In the course of this study, an amendment dated 15 May 2024 to the Polish Act on assistance to Ukrainian citizens due to the armed conflict on the territory of that country was introduced, along with the Regulation of the Minister of Education dated 26 August 2024, amending the Regulation on the organization of education, upbringing and care of children and youth who are citizens of Ukraine. As of 1 September 2024, children and adolescents from Ukraine with temporary protection status are required to be enrolled in the Polish school system. This change may have an impact on some of the educational challenges discussed in this report.



### Refugees with different legal statuses

Legal status has a significant impact on refugees' integration and access to services. Unexpected loss of temporary protection status due to minor errors or misunderstandings has been reported, even when refugees have not left Poland. This leads to a complex process of proving their continued presence and regaining their legal status. The transition to other forms of legal status, such as permanent residence, is frequently described as complex and unclear, with **many refugees not understanding their options and procedures**. Exceptionally long waiting times for residency permits lead to frustration and distress.

This **uncertainty about legal status** affects refugees' ability to make long-term decisions about employment, housing and education. Taken together, these issues create a constant state of anxiety and preparation for potential upheaval, profoundly affecting refugees' sense of stability and their ability to build a secure life in Poland.



### Ethnic Minorities

Ethnic minorities among refugees face unique challenges that exacerbate their integration difficulties in Poland. In particular, **Roma refugees from Ukraine face specific barriers due to their distinct cultural background and societal prejudices**.

These refugees often experience double discrimination, both as refugees and as members of the Roma community, which can lead to increased social isolation and difficulties in accessing services. Education is a particular challenge for Roma children. There are reports of Roma children not attending school regularly, either due to cultural factors or difficulties in enrolling. **This educational gap may have long-term implications for their integration and future opportunities in Poland**.

The language barrier significantly hinders inclusion and social cohesion, particularly for those groups of Roma who speak Romani dialects as their primary language, which adds to the communication problems. Additionally, Roma parents report that their children typically learn Polish only at a basic level for simple communication and are usually uninterested in acquiring proficiency in the language.

Access to information and services can be more difficult for Roma refugees, especially if they have lower literacy levels or are less familiar with administrative procedures. This challenge is exacerbated by **limited digital literacy** among some members of the community. As many support services and application processes move online, this digital divide creates an additional barrier. **Some Roma refugees struggle with tasks such as filling in online forms, accessing digital information platforms or using apps** required for certain services. This digital divide not only limits their access to critical information but also hinders their ability to apply for various forms of assistance or engage with digital citizen services.

Cultural misunderstandings between Roma refugees, host community and other refugee groups can lead to tensions and further isolation. While Roma children and teenagers are willing to participate in recreational activities when opportunities are provided, the lack of inclusive initiatives often leads them to limit their interaction only to obligatory courses, without attending any facultative or extra-curricular activities. This further isolates them from their peers and the broader community.

 **LGBTIQ+ Refugees**

One of the main concerns for this group is a lack of safety and acceptance. LGBTIQ+ refugees report feeling **unsafe in collective centres** where they may face hostility or discrimination from other refugees. This can lead to isolation and a reluctance to seek support or engage with the wider refugee community.

While access to healthcare is a challenge for many refugees, LGBTIQ+ people face additional barriers. They struggle to access specialized care, such as hormone therapy for transgender people, with some doctors refusing treatment due to political restrictions or prejudice. Discrimination in healthcare settings is particularly problematic for this group. Mental health support is crucial for LGBTIQ+ refugees, who are often dealing with trauma from their home countries as well as the stress of being in a new environment. However, **finding LGBTIQ+-friendly mental health professionals who understand their unique experiences can be challenging**. Many report unstable psychological state due to displacement-related stress, limited access to psychiatric and psychological services, financial hardship, and difficulties in adapting to a new environment.

Economic challenges are particularly acute for LGBTIQ+ refugees. Some report having to resort to sex work and illegal employment due to the lack of legal job opportunities, which puts them at risk of exploitative conditions and is harmful to their physical and mental health. Many are unable to break the cycle of illegal employment due to the fear of deportation and other related threats.

**The intersectionality of being both a refugee and LGBTIQ+ creates unique challenges** that require specialized support and understanding. Many feel caught between their ethnic or national community and the local LGBTIQ+ community, struggling to find a space where they fully belong. Some have severed relations with families in their countries of origin who do not accept their sexual identity and/or orientation, and they struggle to make new friends in Poland.

## II. Solutions Proposed by Participants

### Legal Status and Documentation Challenges

**Streamlining and clarifying procedures:** simplifying procedures for legalizing stay, obtaining documents and accessing services, and providing clear, step-by-step guides in refugees' mother tongues on how to navigate administrative procedures. Participants reported difficulties in obtaining and restoring their PESEL UKR status after returning from Ukraine. Procedures related to legalizing their stay, obtaining documents for newborn children and accessing social benefits such as the 800+ programme were also problematic. They complained about the lack of clear information, long queues at the offices and inconsistent interpretation of regulations by officials.

**Legal support and rights education:** provide legal advice and training on refugee rights in Poland, and advocate for more transparent and consistent interpretation of laws by different government agencies. Regular legal clinics and workshops could help refugees make informed decisions about their status and integration process. Participants expressed the need for more comprehensive legal support, particularly in relation to labor rights, regularization of stay procedures and access to social benefits. The existing legal aid system, even at the gmina level, is not always sufficient, and refugees often do not know where to seek help. In addition, the language barrier makes it difficult for them to access available services.

**Document translation assistance:** facilitating pro bono translation services for official documents through NGO partnerships. Working with NGOs to provide free or low-cost translation services could alleviate the financial burden many refugees face when dealing with official documentation

requirements. Participants reported problems with the translation of documents such as university diplomas, medical certificates and disability documents. The cost of translation is often beyond the means of refugees, and access to free translation services is limited.

**Dissemination of information:** implementing a comprehensive multi-channel information campaign on services, legal updates and procedures for refugees. Participants suggested television, posters in municipal offices, digital platforms and social media groups as potential channels for disseminating information. It is important that the information is in their language and easy to understand.

**Transparent and consistent interpretation of laws:** advocating for more transparent and consistent interpretation of laws by different government agencies. A need to standardize how the law is interpreted and to provide clear and consistent information to refugees was identified.

### Economic Inclusion and Housing Stability

**Targeted employment initiatives:** organizing job fairs specifically for vulnerable groups such as older people and people with disabilities. Promoting inclusive and non-discriminatory recruitment practices to ensure equal opportunities for all refugees.

**Advocating for stable employment:** advocating for stable, long-term employment contracts and flexible working hours. This could help refugees, especially those with health conditions or caring responsibilities, to maintain stable employment.

**Skills development and training:** providing vocational training and upskilling courses tailored to the Polish labor market. This could include language courses focusing on professional terminology and sector-specific skills training.

**Supporting refugee entrepreneurship:** facilitating the participation of refugee artisans in general art fairs (not just refugee-specific events) and expanding grant programmes for small business initiatives. This could help refugees to utilize their skills and create self-employment opportunities.

**Supporting career development:** creating internship programmes and offering workshops on setting up a business and understanding the Polish tax system. This could help refugees, including the elderly and those with disabilities, to better integrate into the Polish labor market.

**Housing support for vulnerable groups:** Establish financial support programmes for vulnerable groups to help with housing costs. Develop targeted housing support initiatives, particularly for those leaving collective centres, to ensure stable and affordable accommodation.

### Accessing Services and Information

**Improving access to healthcare:** increasing the number of Ukrainian-speaking doctors and psychologists, especially in rural areas. Establishing a network of volunteers to provide interpreters for medical appointments and official meetings. This could help overcome language barriers in healthcare.

**Improving medical communication:** promote the use of prepared medical histories and medication lists in Polish for medical appointments. This could facilitate better communication between refugees and healthcare providers, ensuring more accurate diagnosis and treatment.

**Digital service platforms:** develop user-friendly digital platforms to access information on available services, ensuring accessibility for people with disabilities. This could include mobile apps or websites

with comprehensive and up-to-date information on health, education, employment, legal issues and social services available to refugees.

**Digital literacy support:** providing digital literacy training to refugees to help them navigate online services and applications. This could include workshops on using government websites, filling in online forms and accessing digital health services.

**Centralized information system:** creating a centralized database of services and support available to refugees in different regions. This could act as a one-stop-shop for refugees to find information on different services, reducing confusion and improving access to support.

**Language support in services:** establishing a network of volunteer interpreters for various services beyond healthcare, such as education, employment and administrative procedures. This could help refugees better understand and navigate complex systems and procedures.

### Social Integration

**Community engagement activities:** organizing cultural events, school picnics and social activities that bring together refugees and local Polish communities. This could promote mutual understanding and create opportunities for meaningful interaction between refugees and members of the host community.

**Mentorship programmes:** implement mentorship programmes that pair refugees with Polish residents. These initiatives could provide refugees with local insights, language practice and support in navigating Polish society and culture.

**Language exchange opportunities:** establishing conversation clubs and language exchange programmes with native Polish speakers. This could help refugees improve their language skills in a practical, social setting, while also fostering links with members of the local community.

**Public awareness campaigns:** conduct public awareness campaigns highlighting the contribution of refugees to Polish society. This could help to combat stereotypes, promote understanding and demonstrate the positive impact of refugees on local communities and the economy.

**Cultural competence training:** provide cultural competence training for police, public institutions and health care providers. This could improve interactions between refugees and service providers, reduce misunderstandings and improve the quality of support offered.

**Child-focused integration initiatives:** support initiatives that promote interaction between refugee children and their Polish peers. This could include after-school programmes, sports activities, or cultural exchange events specifically designed for young people to promote integration from an early age.

### Education and Language Acquisition

**Improving language learning:** improving the quality of language teaching and providing free learning materials. This could include developing more effective Polish language curricula tailored to the needs of refugees and ensuring accessible, high-quality learning resources. The need for more advanced Polish language courses, especially at B1-B2 level, to improve employment prospects and integration was highlighted. The importance of practical language learning opportunities, such as conversation clubs or language exchange programmes, to improve their speaking skills and confidence was also mentioned. In addition, tailored language courses for specific professions (e.g. medical terminology for healthcare workers) were identified as important.



**Supporting NGOs and private tuition:** supporting local NGOs offering Polish language courses and exploring ways to make private tuition more accessible. This could include providing funding to NGOs, establishing partnerships with language schools or offering vouchers for private tuition to refugees.

**Educational support programmes:** develop educational programmes for Polish parents, school administrators and teachers on how to support refugee children. This could include training on cultural sensitivity, strategies for overcoming language barriers, and methods for creating inclusive classroom environments.

**Additional academic support:** providing additional support for refugee children in schools, such as tutoring or homework help. This could include after-school programmes, peer mentoring initiatives or dedicated support staff to help refugee pupils navigate the Polish education system.

**Vocational language training:** offering language courses tailored to professional needs to improve employment opportunities. This could include sector-specific vocabulary training, business Polish courses or language certificates recognized by employers.

### Mental Health and Psychosocial Well-being

**Specialized training for professionals:** provide specialized training for mental health professionals on refugee-specific trauma and challenges. This could include workshops on cultural sensitivity, understanding the impact of displacement and dealing with complex trauma experienced by refugees.

**Peer support initiatives:** establishing support groups for refugees to share experiences and coping strategies. These groups could provide a safe space for refugees to connect with others facing similar challenges and build resilience through shared experiences.

**Safe spaces for vulnerable groups:** creating safe spaces for vulnerable groups, such as LGBTIQ+ refugees, to access mental health support. This could include setting up specialized clinics or support groups that cater to the specific needs of these communities and ensure a non-judgmental and accepting environment for seeking help.

## III. Recommendations

### Advocacy messages for the Government (on policy or practice change)

- Streamline and simplify procedures for legalizing stay, obtaining documents and accessing services. Provide clear, step-by-step guidance in languages commonly understood by refugees on how to navigate administrative procedures independently.
- Improve the efficiency and transparency of the disability recognition process to ensure timely access to necessary support services, taking into account the lengthy and complex experiences reported by refugees.
- Streamline and simplify the process of recognising foreign qualifications and diplomas to facilitate refugees' access to jobs that match their skills and experience.
- Strengthen the implementation of existing safeguarding standards and anti-discrimination policies in schools. Develop and implement similar comprehensive policies to workplaces and public institutions to address reported incidents of bullying, unfair treatment, and unequal pay.
- Introduce cultural competency training for public service providers, including health workers, educators, law enforcement officers and administrative staff, to improve interactions with refugees.

- Expand the provision of Polish language courses, with a focus on practical, conversation-based learning and specialized professional language training, to meet the need for more advanced and sector-specific language skills.
- Establish a centralized, multilingual information platform providing clear guidance on legal procedures, available services and integration programmes for refugees, addressing the reported lack of accessible information.
- Expand and improve affordable childcare services to enable refugee parents, especially single parents, to work full-time or attend language and integration courses.
- Develop targeted employment programmes for vulnerable groups such as older refugees and people with disabilities, including incentives for employers to recruit from these groups.
- Address housing challenges by introducing financial support schemes for housing costs and developing targeted housing support initiatives, especially for those leaving collective centers. For those unable to leave collective centers, improve living conditions and provide support services within these facilities to enhance quality of life and integration prospects.
- Enhance and strengthen coordination of the various forms of support offered to refugees at national, regional and local levels to ensure coherence and complementarity rather than competition between initiatives.

#### Advocacy messages for humanitarian partners

- Develop mentoring programmes that match refugees with local professionals in their field of expertise to facilitate professional integration and recognition of skills.
- Organise regular cultural exchange events and activities that bring together refugees and local Polish communities to promote mutual understanding and social cohesion.
- Establish support groups and peer-to-peer networks for different refugee groups (e.g. parents, elderly, youth, LGBTIQ+) to share experiences and coping strategies.
- Expand and improve upon existing resources to create comprehensive, easy-to-understand guides in multiple languages. Ensure these guides cover all aspects of the Polish administrative, health, education, and social welfare systems.
- Expand legal aid services to help refugees understand their rights, obligations and pathways to more permanent forms of residency, addressing reported confusion about legal status and procedures.
- Conduct public awareness campaigns to educate the local Polish population about the contributions and challenges of refugees to foster empathy and support, and to address reported instances of discrimination and social tensions.
- Develop and implement digital literacy training programmes for refugees to help them navigate online services and applications, addressing the digital divide reported particularly among certain groups such as Roma refugees.

**FIELDWORK:** UNHCR Poland

**DATA ANALYSIS AND REPORT:** Ipsos Poland and UNHCR Poland