



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

COMMUNICATING WITH COMMUNITIES SURVEY REPORT

UNHCR Poland

August 2024

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This report provides an analysis of the Communication with Communities (CwC) survey conducted by UNHCR in April 2024, focusing on refugee communities in Poland.

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Executive summary

The information needs of refugees in Poland vary by age, gender and diversity groups. Nonetheless, the top three areas where they seek more information across the groups are legal stay, employment, and health services. Currently, only 43% respondents indicate feeling informed or very informed about their rights, obligations, and the assistance available in Poland. Despite the range of communication channels provided by UNHCR Poland, nearly half of the respondents (43%) have never utilized them.

Refugees access information from various sources, but not all are considered reliable. While

refugees primarily rely on personal networks, they place the highest trust in official Polish government institutions. Approximately 20% report encountering false information or scams. Their preferred methods for receiving information are text messages, messaging apps, and email, with preferences varying by age.

Regarding feedback and complaints, a majority (76%) are unaware of the feedback channels offered by UNHCR and partners. They prefer to report issues via telephone helplines, followed by email and messaging apps. Detailed AGD analysis may be found in the report.

Introduction

Background

This pilot Communicating with Communities (CwC) survey was conducted to assess communication, and information needs of refugees and asylum-seekers from various nationalities and backgrounds residing in Poland.

The top three nationalities of the respondents match those of the leading groups of refugees and asylum-seekers in Poland.

The primary objective was to understand their information needs, preferred communication channels, trusted sources for information, and feedback and complaints channels. The findings will support evidence-based decisions for revising, adapting and enhancing communication and feedback/complaints mechanisms utilized by UNHCR and its partners.



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Methodology

The survey, conducted by UNHCR staff and contracted personnel, including protection monitors and counselors, took place through phone calls and face-to-face interactions in April 2024, reaching a total of 409 individuals—311 by phone and 98 in person.

The phone survey was sourced from the UNHCR Poland database of individuals enrolled in the 2023 Cash Assistance Programme. This highlights some limitations of the qualitative data, such as refugees who previously received SMS instructions from UNHCR about cash assistance equally preferring text messages and messaging apps for receiving information.

The sample was designed to reflect the proportional representation of refugees in 16 voivodships. The in-person surveys were conducted at various service delivery points for refugee and asylum-seekers in Warsaw.

The questionnaire comprised 5 sections: 1) Demographics; 2) Language and Educational background; 3) Sources of information; 4) Information and Communication Needs; and 5) Complaints and Feedback.

The survey conducted in Ukrainian, Belarusian, Russian, and English included both multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions. Consistent with UNHCR's Age Gender, and Diversity (AGD) policy and approach¹, the data represent the diversity characteristics of the interviewed individuals.

¹ [UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity, 2018](#)

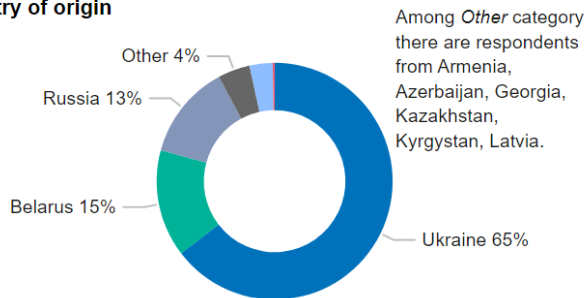
Profile of the Consulted Population

Country of Origin

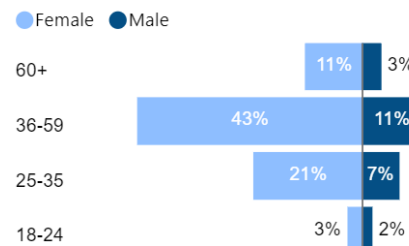
Among the 409 participants of the survey: Ukraine, as a country of origin represent 65% of the respondents (with 264 individuals). Other countries of origin represented 35% of the respondents including Belarus with 15% (60 individuals), Russian Federation with 13% (53

individuals), Tajikistan with 3% (13 individuals); followed by 3% (19 individuals) from various countries of origin: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia and Türkiye.

Country of origin



Age & Gender



Gender

From Ukraine, 86% of the respondents were female and 14% male while from non-Ukrainian respondents, 59% were females and 41% were males, indicating an overall representation of 77% by females and 33% by males in the survey.

Age

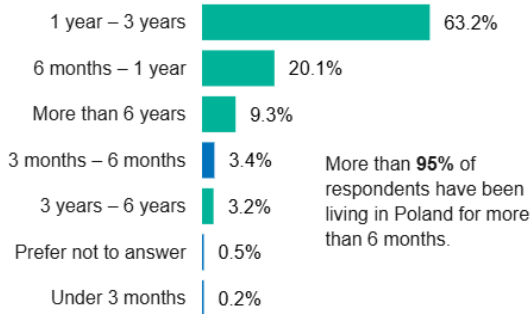
In terms of age distribution², most respondents fell within the age range of 36-59 (54%), followed by the age group 25-35 (27%), those aged 60 and above (14%) and those within 18-24 (5%). The age group 36-59 was the most represented among both female respondents (43%) and male respondents (11%).

Duration of Stay

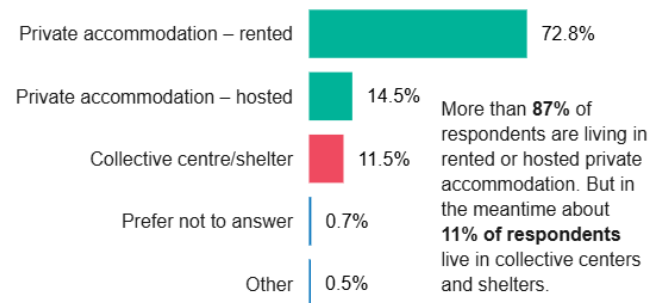
63% of respondents have lived in Poland for a period ranging from 1 to 3 years. 20% reported living in Poland for 6 months to 1 year.

² The survey did not include children under 18.

Duration of stay in Poland



Type of accommodation

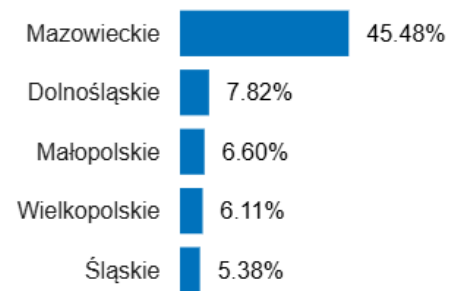


Place of Residence

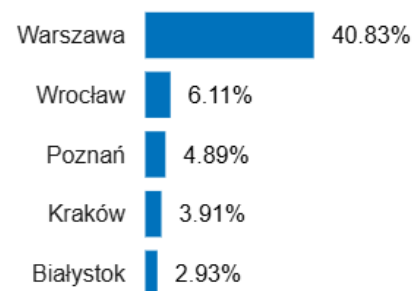
Mazowieckie is the voivodeship where the largest number of respondents currently live (45%: 30% females and 15% males). followed by Dolnośląskie and Małopolskie (8% and 7% respectively), Wielkopolskie, Śląskie, Lubelskie, Łódzkie (5% to 6%), Podlaskie and Pomorskie (4%), Kujawsko-Pomorskie, Lubuskie, Zachodniopomorskie, Świętokrzyskie, Podkarpackie (all under 4%).

Warsaw is the most inhabited city amongst respondents with 167 responses (41%), followed by Wrocław and Poznań (both 6%), Kraków, Białystok, and Łódź (~3% each).

TOP - 5 voivodeships by respondents' residency



TOP - 5 cities by respondents' residency



Type of Accommodation

The survey reached respondents residing in rented private accommodation (73% of all respondents), hosted in private accommodation (14%) collective sites or shelters (11%).

In collective centers and shelters, the demographic breakdown indicates that 77% of residents are female, and only 5% of respondents living in such accommodation are in major cities such as Warsaw, Wrocław, Krakow, Poznań, and Białystok.

Collective accommodation primarily houses Ukrainian refugees, as they make up the majority of those seeking temporary shelter in Poland. However, some non-Ukrainian asylum-seekers and refugees are accommodated in reception centers, which differ from collective shelters in terms of services and access. This reflects variations in housing solutions available to different groups based on nationality, status, and access to assistance.

Additionally, 15% of refugees expressed the need for more information on available accommodation options, highlighting a need for improved communication regarding housing resources.

Language

Among the languages spoken by the respondents, the most common were: Russian (79%); Polish, Ukrainian (72% each); English (28%); Belarusian (11%); Chechen (5%); German, Turkish (2%); Farsi/Persian, French, Azerbaijani, Arabic, Tajik (1,5% each).

55% of refugees indicated a basic understanding of Polish, while 32% were at an intermediate conversational level and 8% were advanced users of Polish. Almost 6% had no knowledge of Polish at the time of the interview. Among all the age groups, the youngest respondents (age 18-24) indicated the highest level, while the oldest group (aged 60+) indicated the lowest level of Polish language proficiency.

Education

The survey demonstrated a high level of education of the respondents, with 47% having a university degree or higher, 28% technical or vocational education, and 24% high school or secondary school completion.

Disabilities

Among the respondents, over 5% indicated having at least one type of disability that could inhibit information acquisition (2.9% - visual impairment, 2.4% - physical disability, 0.24% - hearing impairment).

Main Findings

Preferred information sources

There is a divergence between the sources which respondents received their information from and the sources they trust.

Regarding the **primary sources of information** about the rights, obligations and assistance available in Poland, most (32%) relied on personal community networks such as friends, family and neighbors, followed by online groups of refugees (22%), UN agencies and NGOs (15%), and Polish government and public institutions (14%).

Contrastingly, in response to a related question on the **most trusted sources of information**, most respondents (32%) indicated the Polish government and public institutions. Friends, family, and neighbors were placed as the second most trusted source (20%), followed by UN agencies and NGOs (15%), and online refugee community groups (14%).

The level of trust may be influenced by more than just experiences or the context at hand. For example, even though respondents from Russia reported not receiving any information from Russian authorities, they still showed a high level of trust (10%) in the government of their country of origin as a source of information. This could potentially be attributed to community culture or public image.

Notably, respondents from Belarus answered questions on trusted sources of information and needs quite adversely, with some directly specifying that the most trusted sources of information for them are Belarusian community-based organizations (such as the Belarus Solidarity Center in Warsaw). They indicated being unsure if the information provided by other sources is also relevant to Belarusian nationals and hence their preference to seek information directly with the Belarusian community.

Fraud and disinformation

20% of respondents indicated having encountered fraud or intentional misinformation, which may be attributed to insufficient content moderation in social media groups and channels that target refugees and migrants. When planning the adoption of new communication channels, including social media and messaging apps, it is crucial to consider information technology risks. These channels can both enhance and complicate dialogue and trust.

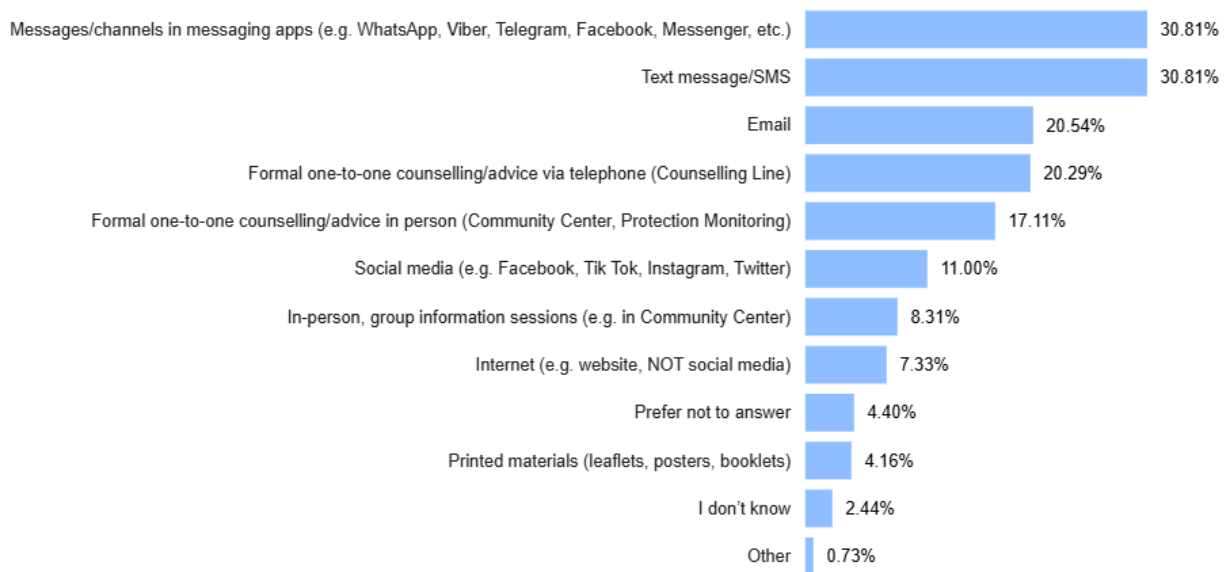


Preferred information channels

In terms of the preferred channels for receipt of information for refugees in Poland from UNHCR and other humanitarian actors, participants of the survey identified their preferred channels as follows: 31% - text messages/SMS, 31% - messaging apps, 21% - email, 20% - telephone, 17% - face-to-face counseling, 11% - social media, 8% - group information sessions, 7% - Internet websites, 4% - printed materials³.

Particularly, for the respondents aged 60+, telephone consultation (28%) and in-person counseling (24%) were selected more often compared to other age groups, while the messaging apps were considered most popular among the group aged 25-35 (38%).

Preferred ways to receive information from UNHCR and humanitarian actors about rights, obligations, and available assistance



The preferred communication channels for refugees vary by gender and country of origin. For female refugees, the top channels are text messages (33%), messaging apps (32%), and the telephone (21%). Male refugees prefer in-person communication (27%), messaging apps (26%), and text messages (25%).

Among Ukrainian refugees, females prefer messaging apps and text messages (both 37%), while males mostly prefer text messages (44%). Belarusian refugees show a different pattern, with females preferring email (41%) and males preferring messaging apps (45%).

For refugees from other countries, the telephone is the top choice for females (39%), while in-person communication is the top choice for males (41%).

³ The preference for messaging apps is also confirmed by the initial results of 2024 Socio-Economic Insights Survey (SEIS) Poland and the [Regional 2023 Multi-Sector Needs Assessment \(MSNA\) findings](#). However, while SEIS Poland reported social media/Facebook as the most preferred channel (38%), according to the CwC Survey, they were only the 6th preferred channel (only 11%). The website communication was also ranked high in SEIS (28%), while in the CwC survey, it was one of the least preferred options (7%).

Preferred UNHCR Communication Channels

Among the most popular UNHCR communication channels, 23% respondents indicated using the UNHCR Counselling Line, 18% mentioned in-person one-to-one counselling, e.g., in Community Centers or via Protection Monitoring, and 8% mentioned group information sessions (8%).

43% of respondents reported that they have never used any communication channels provided by UNHCR Poland, with the biggest proportion in the group aged 25-35 (50%). Only 7% of respondents indicated that they have used UNHCR Poland-produced printed materials, and merely 3% indicated that they have used the UNHCR Poland Help website.

Awareness Levels

More than 55% of respondents do not feel informed about their rights, obligations, and the assistance available to them in Poland (this includes 7% feeling “*very uninformed*”, 15% “*not feeling informed*”, and 34% “*not sure/neutral*”). At the same time, almost 34% indicate feeling “*informed*” and 10% feeling “*very informed*”. The primary reasons for not feeling informed are lack of knowledge about available communication channels (35%)⁴, lack of information in the language spoken (22%) and outdated information (13%).

Information Needs

The top three areas where refugees seek more information on are legal stay⁵, employment, and health:

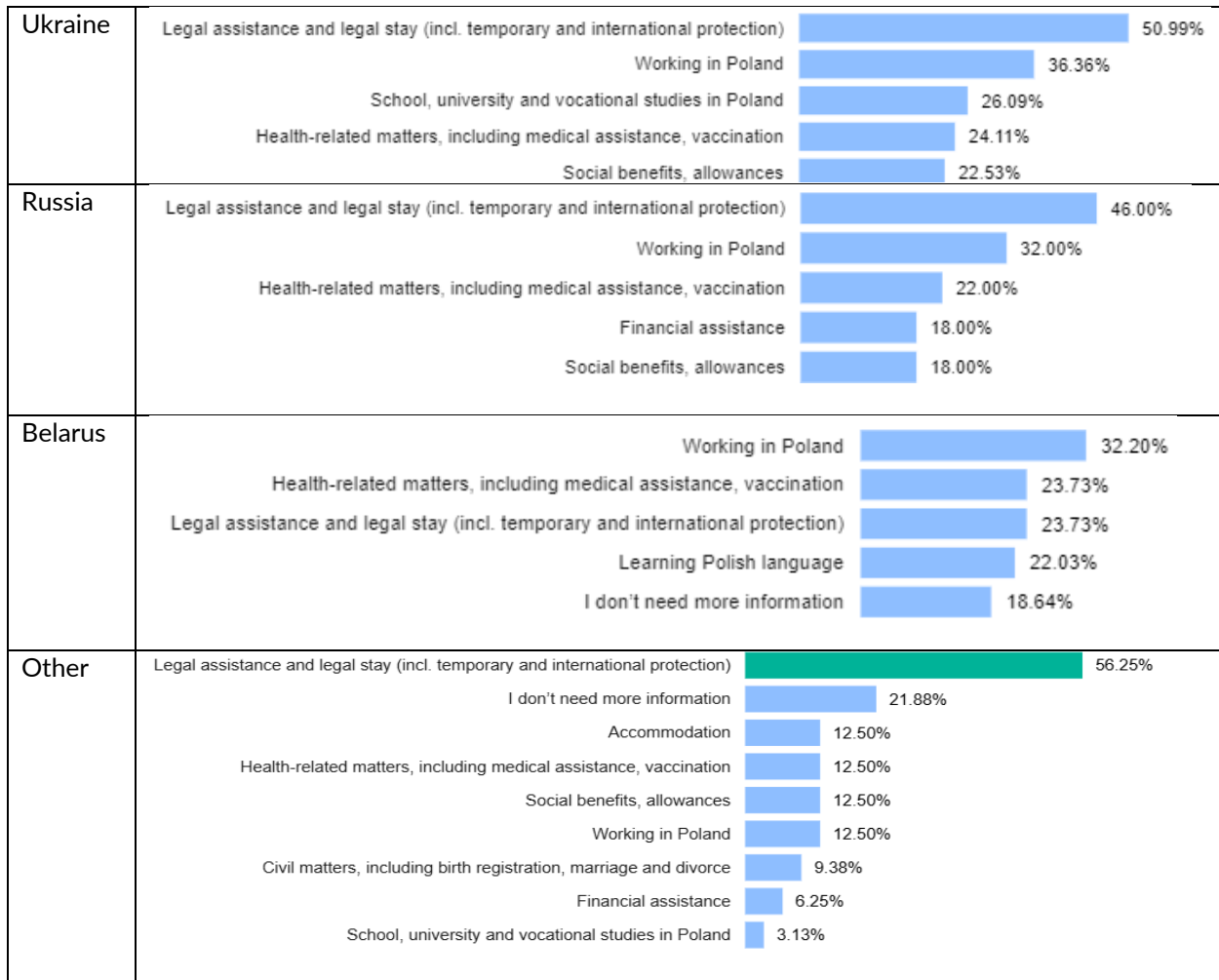


Other areas of interest include education and vocational training, social benefits, accommodation, financial assistance, and learning Polish. A smaller percentage of respondents indicated they do not need more information, suggesting either a satisfactory level of knowledge or no interest.

⁴ This data correlates with information collected as part of the [MSNA Poland 2023](#) and the initial findings of SEIS Poland 2024. Among those who indicated facing challenges in accessing information, most pointed out the “lack of knowledge where to look for information” as the main obstacle (65% and 55% respectively).

⁵ The strong need for information on legal assistance seems to stand out in Poland. According to MSNA 2023, the top three needs in the region were employment (28%), healthcare (27%), and accommodation (24%).

Information needs by country of origin:



Respondents from Belarus (22%) and Ukraine (10%) mentioned interest in information on learning Polish language, while most of them already indicate basic or intermediate proficiency (Belarus: 48% basic, 37% intermediate, 12% advanced but not proficient; Ukraine: 60% basic, 28% intermediate, 6% advanced but not proficient). Given the high interest in employment opportunities (32% and 36% respectively), the overall high level of education among the respondents, and their average age, this may suggest a significant need for information on services that provide professional intermediate and advanced Polish courses to enhance career opportunities.

Information needs differ across age and gender groups. Legal stay emerges as the most popular topic across all age groups, particularly among those aged 36-59 (50%). 60+ refugees exhibit a marked preference for social protection and benefits (38%). All genders prioritize legal stay and employment, with females slightly more interested in legal stay (49%), and males in employment (44%).

When considering country of origin, Ukrainian refugees of all genders prioritize legal stay and employment. However, a difference is observed in the interest in employment between male (65%) and female (32%) Ukrainian refugees. Belarusian refugees of all genders show comparable interest in employment (29% for

females, 40% for males), but females exhibit a higher interest in health (29%). Refugees from other countries prioritize legal stay, with males showing a higher interest (54%) than females (47%).

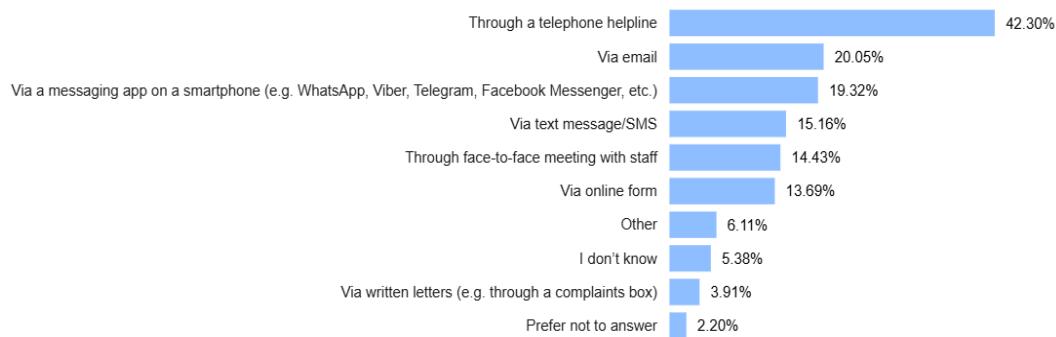
Feedback and Complaints Channels

Among the respondents who know at least one complaint and feedback mechanism of UNHCR Poland, the UNHCR Counselling Line was mentioned most frequently (56%), followed by the UNHCR email address (14%).

A significant majority of the respondents (76%) are however not aware of the UNHCR and partners' channels for providing feedback and complaints⁶. The percentage is even higher for those aged 60+ (81%).

In terms of the community's preference on how to share complaints and feedback, the telephone helpline is the most favored option (42%), followed by email (20%) and messaging apps (19%)⁷.

How would you prefer to share feedback and complaints about the support you receive from UNHCR and its partners?



Interestingly, Belarusian respondents indicate telephone hotline as less favored than other groups (18%), while the most preferred channels for them are email (42%), online form (37%), and messaging apps (35%).

For all **age** groups, the telephone helpline is the most preferred channel, with 47% for ages 18-24, 42% for ages 25-35, 40% for ages 36-59, and 50% for ages 60 and above. Messaging apps and online forms are also popular among younger age groups (18-24 and 25-35), while email becomes more preferred in the 36-59 age group. In-person feedback becomes more common in the 60+ age group.

The telephone helpline remains the most preferred channel also for all **genders**. However, male refugees prefer at second place email (27%) more than female refugees (18%), while females show a slightly higher preference for messaging apps (18%) compared to males (22%). All genders show similar preferences for in-person feedback, online forms, and text messages/SMS.

⁶ This presents an increase as compared to 62% reported by the MSNA 2023.

⁷ The preference for helpline and messaging apps is confirmed by the Regional MSNA 2023 results (32% and 24% respectively). Nonetheless, the 2023 MSNA results specific for Poland emphasize a very strong preference for social media (45%). Interestingly, according to the CwC Survey, there is a higher interest in the email channel in Poland as compared to the region because it is the most preferred complaint and feedback mechanism among refugees of other nationalities than Ukrainian (34%).

Recommendations

1. **Increase Awareness of CwC Channels:** Future strategies should raise awareness about accessible government-led information channels and utilize the most used communication channels.
2. **Utilize Community Preferred Channels:** For better reach and engagement, promote messaging apps, streamline communication trees, strengthen two-way channels (emails, social media, hotlines).
3. **Improve and Increase Awareness of Complaints and Feedback Mechanisms (CFM):** Hotlines and email as primary CFM are crucial, but innovative outreach strategies are needed to enhance awareness and accessibility, especially for sensitive complaints.
4. **Leverage Trusted Sources:** efforts should focus on enhancing official communication channels through increased collaboration with key government bodies and local authorities.
5. **Diversify Communication Languages:** Invest in multi-language communication materials.
6. **Ensure Accurate Information:** To raise trust in available sources, regularly update relevant topics such as legal stay, assistance, employment, health, education, and social benefits, ensuring information remains accurate and useful, while keeping FAQs and resource packages current.
7. **Diversify Channels by AGD:** Adjust strategies to meet preferences for age and gender, collaborate with community-led and refugee-led organizations, especially those trusted by specific nationalities.

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