



Protection Analysis

May 2022

3.097 million

refugees fled the armed
conflict in Ukraine

1.069 million

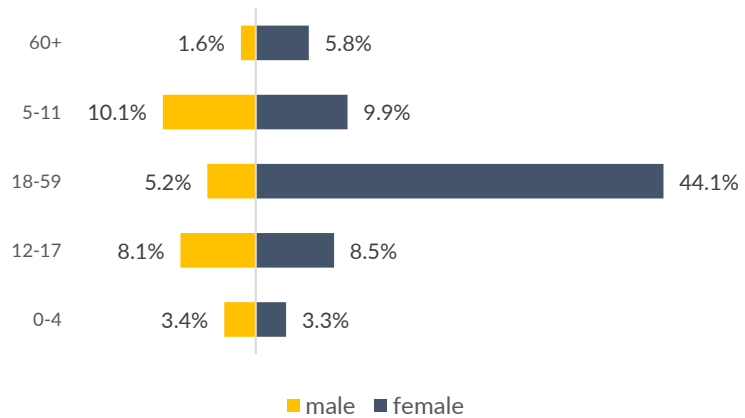
people registered for
Temporary Protection in Poland

195,900

Ukrainian children enrolled in
schools and kindergartens

- From 24 February to 2 May 2022, 3.097 million refugees have fled the armed conflict in Ukraine and have arrived in Poland. 96% of refugees are women and children. Poland has opened its borders and demonstrated unprecedented generosity, hospitality and solidarity towards those fleeing the conflict in Ukraine.
- On 4 March 2022, for the first time in its history, the [EU activated the Temporary Protection Directive](#), establishing a regional legal framework to offer quick and effective assistance to people fleeing the conflict in Ukraine throughout the European Union.
- On 12 March 2022, the Government of Poland (GOP) adopted the [Act on Assistance to Ukrainian Citizens in the Context of the Armed Conflict in Ukraine](#). The law provides broad protections to Ukrainian nationals and their spouses (to the exclusion of third country nationals) who fled the conflict in Ukraine after 24 February, including extended legal stay, access to employment, healthcare, education and, through PESEL (national social security system) registration, financial assistance.
- In contrast, third country nationals and stateless persons have access to legal stay through the Temporary Protection Directive (if they held legal stay in Ukraine and are unable to return safely to their country of origin or country of former habitual residence), through international protection procedures, or through other visa regimes (i.e. work visa).
- Poland inclusive policies facilitated the access of many refugees to accrued protections in a timely manner. For instance, integration into schools has been granted from the date of issuance of the Act of Assistance with more than 195,900 Ukrainian children enrolled as of 2 May. Others continued their studies through an online-based remote curriculum.

Age & sex breakdown (PESEL registration)

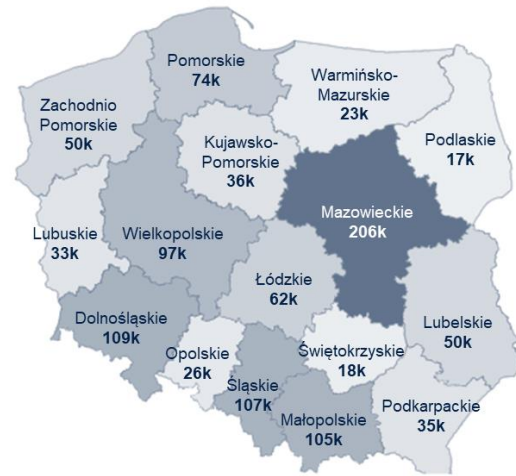




KEY FINDINGS

Where are refugees staying?

- Urban areas: after crossing the border, many refugees moved to the main urban centres where access to employment and services is perceived as easier. The PESEL registration dataⁱ indicates that top 5 voivodships of destination are: Mazowieckie (which includes Warsaw), Śląskie (which includes Katowice), Małopolskie (which includes Kraków), Dolnośląskie (which includes Wrocław) and Wielkopolskie (which includes Poznań).
- While early arrivals largely found shelter with relatives and friends, interviews at the border highlight that most refugees do not arrive with a clear destination, suggesting a higher degree of vulnerability for those without family or community-support networks in Poland. According to REACH, 27% of refugees were staying with family or friends, 27% found a host through social media/volunteer, 16% rented an accommodation, 9% did not know yet where to stay and 8% were hosted in accommodation centres provided by the authorities.ⁱⁱ



Map 1 Number of Ukrainians registered for PESEL by voivodship. [See full data](#)

Reported accommodation type in destination country by respondents

Staying with family/friend	27%	■
Found host through social media/volunteer	27%	■
Rented accommodation	16%	■
Don't know yet	9%	■
Accommodation provided by authorities	8%	■

Movement and intentions

- Refugees fleeing the conflict in Ukraine envisaged various destinations. According to REACH, 48% of interviewed refugees intended to stay in Poland. Others shared intentions to go to Germany (17%), Spain (5%), Denmark (3%), Italy (3%), France (3%), Czechia (2%), others (2%), or did not know (2%).
- The choice of destination country was driven by family/friends in the location of arrival (39%), destination being close to Ukraine (31%), advice received at reception centers (17%), and to meet displaced family or friends (8%).
- For refugees who intend to stay in Poland, 53% plan to stay as long as the conflict in Ukraine continues and 31% did not know how long they would stay, followed by 6% reporting that they will stay in Poland longer than for a month and 6% reporting that they will stay between a week and a month.

Cross-border movements

- While the conflict in Ukraine continues to drive the largest displacement crisis in Europe since 1945, some refugees take the decision to cross the Polish border back to Ukraine because of their individual circumstances. From 24 February to 6 May 2022, 924,000 Ukrainian nationals returned to Ukraine despite the highly volatile and unpredictable situation. Interviews with refugees highlighted that many such returns were for short periods, for instance to go and see their properties, visit relatives who were left behind, or to bridge a period of extreme hardship when they did not have sufficient resources to sustain their stay and meet their basic needs in Poland. In addition, some men of conscription age returned because of the expected adoption by the Government of Ukraine of sanctions against men who left the country despite the ban preventing them to do so.



Given the significant risks for civilians across Ukraine, cross-border movements should not be interpreted as an indication that the conditions are conducive for refugees' sustainable returns in safety and dignity.

PROTECTION RISKS

Family separation: Most women and children were separated from their husbands and fathers who remained behind because of the ban preventing Ukrainian men of conscription age (18-60 years old) to leave Ukraine, alongside other conflict-related drivers of separation. Among refugees enrolled for cash assistance, UNHCR identified 1% as unaccompanied and separated children. During the first weeks of the crisis, private initiatives such as uncoordinated humanitarian evacuation of children from state care facilities, many of whom still have family members, have contributed to family separation and additional child protection risks, including high levels of institutionalization.

Key protection risks:

- Family separation and child neglect
- Discrimination and barriers for marginalized groups to access services
- Mental health and Psychosocial Support
- Gender-based Violence
- Limited access to assistance and services
- Human trafficking
-

Gender-based violence

High risk of gender-based violence (GBV) were reported in the country of origin, during flight, in the country of asylum, and during onward movement to other countries. Risk factors include the armed conflict in country of origin, profile of (IDPs and) refugees, who are predominantly women and children, as well as older women and women and children with disabilities. The intersectionality of the above risk factors with marginalized groups such as Roma people and persons with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity were observed. Anecdotal information highlighted reports of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence including forced witnessing amongst children in Poland. Given the sheer scale of the displacement within a short period of time, regular systems for oversight, vetting and coordination are disrupted, lacking or altogether absent in some situations. Nevertheless, despite the elevated risks, protection actors have identified only a few cases of GBV to date. GBV incidents are usually underreported but known to happen in all contexts.

Discrimination and practical barriers to access services: Some groups of refugees such as third-country nationals, stateless persons, and minorities (e.g. Roma people) face additional barriers accessing national services due to a less protective legal framework and discriminatory practices. Third-country nationals and stateless persons do not enjoy the same rights as Ukrainian nationals; with the exception of spouses of Ukrainian citizens, they are excluded from the 12 March [Act on Assistance to Ukrainian Citizens in the Context of the Armed Conflict in Ukraine](#).

Some refugees face challenges accessing national protection services and assistance due to their individual or circumstantial risk factors. Services are also very localized and vary from one location to another. Furthermore, eligibility conditions also contribute to restricting access to assistance such as proof of entry into Poland from 24 February. Although 100% of refugees interviewed by REACH reported having a passport, border guards did not systematically stamp the passports of those who fled after 24 February.

100%

Refugees interviewed report having a passport



Mental health and psychosocial support needs: High levels of psychological distress associated with the conflict and family separation are reported by the community. UNHCR reported that 14% of queries at the blue dots in Warsaw and Krakow from 23 March to 6 May were related to psychosocial concerns. Caregivers were often seeking advice related to children changing behaviours like frequent aggression and withdrawal. Emotional reactions for adults included anxiety attacks and sleeping disturbances. In general, refugees were affected by family separation, loss, fear and worry about the future. Older persons expressed a fear to die outside of their home country. According to IMC MHPSS assessment¹, stress factors included inability to meet basic needs, lack of clear information, and lack of access to long-term accommodation. Identified coping responses included the human interactions and new friendships, empathy and mutual support, religious practices, keeping active, and limiting the amount of time searching for information and watching the news. Also, 9% of health issues identified by the medical team (INTERSOS) in Korczowa were related to mental health concerns. Of these, 58% concerned female patients aged 18-64 years old. Access to treatment for adults and children with pre-existing severe mental health conditions and psychosocial disabilities remains of concern due to the not clearly established referral pathways, language barriers, and access requirements for clinical reassessment.

Human trafficking: The risks of human trafficking increase in times of conflict and displacement. In Poland, family separation has resulted in high numbers of single mothers as well as children being separated and unaccompanied from parents and other relatives, leaving them at heightened risk. Poverty and the inability to rely on community-support networks were additional risk factors. According to PESEL data, the majority of refugees are women and children, with adult women making up 48% of those enrolled, and children making up 47% (24% female and 23% male). In border and other transit areas, risks of human trafficking were closely associated with promises of free transport, accommodation, employment or other forms of assistance. Owing to the hidden nature of human trafficking, data is difficult to ascertain, and it is impossible to gauge how many Ukrainian refugees might have been preyed upon by human traffickers.

GROUPS AT HEIGHTENED RISK

Groups at heightened risk:

- Unaccompanied and separated children
- Older persons without support
- Persons with serious medical conditions
- Persons with disabilities
- Third country nationals
- Stateless persons
- Minority groups

According to UNHCR cash enrolment data, as of 5 May, almost 22% of enrolled persons have specific needs. Fourteen per cent are single parents without family support. Four per cent are women at risk. Two per cent are persons with disabilities. Around 46% of children with specific needs are separated or unaccompanied.

Children at risk, including unaccompanied or separated children:

A significant crisis of child protection and care has resulted from displacement-related family separation coupled with existing high levels of institutionalization of children at risk in Ukraine and uncoordinated evacuation of UASCs from Ukraine at the onset of the crisis. High levels of distress of children and caregivers have added additional risk factors that expose children to neglect, abuse and potential separation. Though children have access to the Polish educational system, a significant number of children from Ukraine have remained in an online, remote system as the

¹ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/92210>

Polish education system is gradually adapting and parents prefer for children to finish the school term using the Ukrainian curriculum.

Older persons without support: Older persons without support are particularly at risk of abuse and neglect. A number of older persons at risk have shared their limited access to information and feeling of disorientation that makes them particularly vulnerable to risks, including abuse, neglect or exploitation. Unaccompanied older persons have faced challenges to find adequate accommodation and protect their belongings in transit. Some have chronic health problems and specific nutritional needs. Older persons also shared feelings of hopelessness after having left behind in Ukraine all their belongings and the home they lived in for decades. Their lack of mobility, diminished vision and chronic illnesses can make access to support difficult. Older persons may also face challenges accessing information online or using digital self-referral tools for assistance. In Poland, many older persons are caring for children whose parents remained in Ukraine. According to PESEL registration, older persons make up only 7.4% of the population registered, with older women being 5.8%. This may be an underestimate in light of the proportion of older persons in Ukraine before the crisis. According to HelpAge², older people in Ukraine are a significant demographic, with 1 in 4 people over 60.

Persons with serious medical conditions, including chronic diseases: UNHCR reported that 62% of queries received at Blue Dot centres from 23 March to 6 May related to access to health services in Poland. Refugees inquired about access to medical support to address chronic and other serious medical conditions is the most reported concern at Blue Dot centres. For instance, some refugees with chronic diseases have used all their prescribed medications obtained in Ukraine and are finding it difficult to navigate the Polish health system to receive treatments or medicines. Furthermore, INTERSOS reported that over 20% of the people who visited the Korczowa medical point suffered chronic diseases. Of these, 47% reported having hypertension, 12% have diabetes, 6% have asthma, 3% have hypothyroidism, 2% have epilepsy, 4% have two or three chronic diseases and 26% have other chronic diseases.

Persons with disabilities: UNHCR reported that almost 15% of individuals supported through the Blue Dot centres were persons with disabilities. Beyond health and medical needs, additional information needs relate to accessing support to access disability certification processes and pensions. The State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled People (PFRON) has opened a program on “Assistance to citizens of Ukraine with disabilities” for the replacement or purchase of damaged or loss medical and assistive devices, and developed procedures to access a disability pension in Poland, which are progressively being rolled out.

Third-country nationals: Third-country nationals - except for the spouses of Ukrainian citizens – do not enjoy the same rights in Poland and face additional barriers accessing national services despite the pathways created under the Act of 13 June 2003 Law on Protection. During the first days of the crisis, some third-country nationals faced challenges accessing the territory of Poland.

Stateless persons: Poland is not party to the 1954 and 1961 Statelessness Conventions, which causes challenges both in law and in practice. Discrepancies in the definitions of a “stateless person” applied by various government entities may in some cases hinder the identification of stateless persons. Since there is no dedicated statelessness determination procedure in Poland, the assessment of nationality or statelessness arises principally in relation to immigration procedures. The lack of legal status constitutes an obstacle for stateless persons to obtain a

² <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Needs%20of%20Older%20Refugees%20in%20Poland-%2002-04-22%20-%203-Page%20.pdf>

residence permit, access social assistance, employment opportunities, and may lead to detention.

Minority groups: Anecdotal reports suggest that some minority groups have faced challenges in accessing services in Poland. Members of the Ukrainian Roma community have reported discriminatory attitudes in accessing schools or food assistance. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) persons also risk experiencing harm resulting from stigmatization, discrimination, sexual and gender-based violence and reduced access to services.

RESPONSE CAPACITIES

Local actors and diaspora organizations: Poland's initial response was spearheaded by municipalities with the support of volunteers and local NGOs, which provided immediate relief and access to basic services such as emergency shelters, food assistance and core relief items. Ukrainian community-based organizations and volunteers also played an important role to address immediate needs. Furthermore, Ukrainian diaspora-based organizations traditionally focus on cultural and education projects and may be a resource after the emergency phase with regard to education and integration issues.

This quick response supported the immediate needs of the new arrivals, in particular food and housing. However, concerns were raised by first-responders about the sustainability of this response given the large-scale crisis.

Private sector: Complementing national and humanitarian services, private sector initiatives have provided free data and telephone roaming, accommodation and transportation in Poland to those fleeing from Ukraine.

Access to employment: On 5 April, the Minister of family and social policy announced that 30,000 Ukrainian nationals, including 75% of women, had accessed employment in Poland since 24 February. An income will contribute to supporting refugees in meeting their basic needs in Poland, contributing to the local economy and saving the resources necessary to rebuild their life in Ukraine when it is safe to return.

30,000
Ukrainian nationals
have accessed
employment

ADVOCACY MESSAGES

Access to territory and international protection

- Maintain generous refugee policy, including on access to the territory and services.
- Ensure access to territory and safety for people fleeing persecution and conflict, irrespective of their status, nationality, profile, or the way in which they crossed the border.
- Ensure effective access to international protection procedures for all persons, irrespective of nationality.

Protection of persons with specific needs

- Ensure equal rights and access to national services for all refugees fleeing from Ukraine, irrespective of nationality, age, sexual orientation and gender identity or disability.
- Strengthen the identification of stateless persons and implement safeguards to prevent arbitrary detention of stateless persons.



- Ensure services address the specific needs of all persons at heightened risk, including for unaccompanied or separated children as well as survivors of gender-based violence in line with global standards.

Prevention of human trafficking

- Establish mechanisms to screen, register and monitor practices of volunteers, volunteer organisations, and private company providing free services to refugees, including accommodation and onward transportation.

Child protection

- Ensure the early identification of unaccompanied and separated children and prevent secondary or prolonged family separation.
- Provide appropriate temporary care arrangements for unaccompanied and evacuated groups of children without suitable adult care, ensuring safe placement in temporary accommodation sites and reception areas, strengthening family-based alternative care and reducing large-scale institutionalization.
- Prevent and avoid adoption of refugee children in an emergency situation and increase access to family tracing and reunification services.
- Enhance identification and support to children at risk of violence, neglect and exploitation in accessing national child protection systems.

Voluntary repatriation

- Returns to the country of origin should be voluntary and based on a free and informed decision.

For volunteer organizations and private actors

- Carry visible identification, clearly indicating registration with the authorities.
- Establish basic vetting procedures in place, as well as complaints mechanisms in case any concerns are raised by refugees.
- Uphold the highest humanitarian principles and protection standards to avoid doing harm, including through active capacity development of staff and volunteers.
- Engage with inter-agency coordination mechanisms established at the local and national levels.

For humanitarian actors

- Raise awareness among refugees on known risks for refugees, and information on where and how to report abuse or exploitation, including potential criminal activities or incidents.
- Capacitate and support municipalities and local actors acting as first-responder in the refugee response.
- Support inter-agency efforts to map services for refugees across Poland, including at the municipality level, to facilitate refugee referrals to specialized services.
- Promote and support refugee social and community support mechanisms, social cohesion within the refugee community and with the host community, and the conditions enabling refugee resilience.



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ⁱ https://dane.gov.pl/en/dataset/2715,zarejestrowane-wnioski-o-nadanie-statusu-ukr/resource/38389/table?page=1&per_page=20&q=&sort=

ⁱⁱ <https://reliefweb.int/report/poland/refugee-arrivals-ukraine-poland-update-20042022>