



PROTECTION BRIEF

POLAND

Operational Context

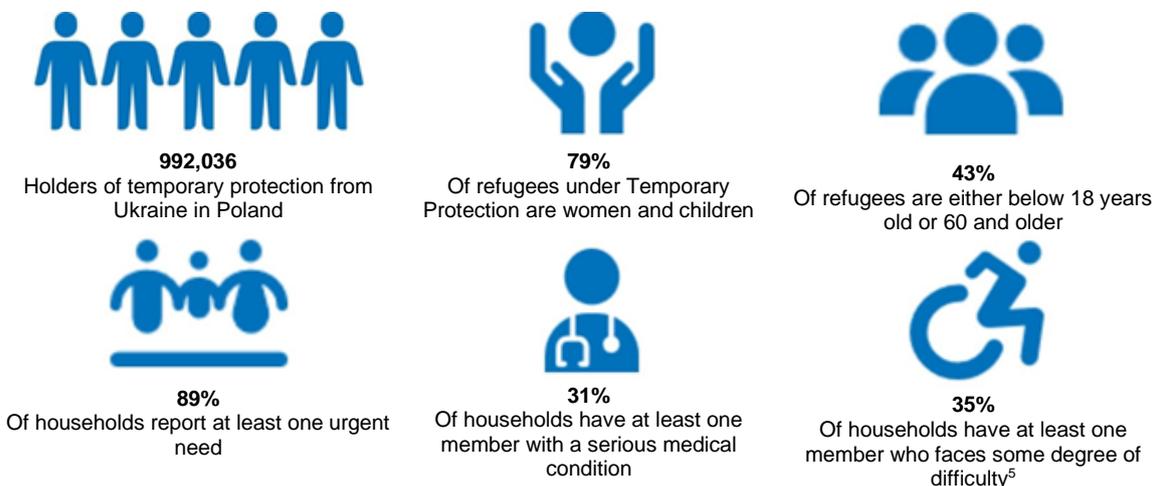
This Protection Brief presents an overview of the demographic profiles and forced displacement patterns as well as the main findings on the protection risks and priority needs of refugees from Ukraine in Poland. Based on UNHCR's continuous protection monitoring activities which included **3,190 interviews with refugees from Ukraine**, the Protection Brief covers the findings from the period of **1 July 2024 to 31 December 2024**. Interviews were conducted in seven regions (voivodships) in Poland namely, Dolnośląskie, Lubelskie, Małopolskie, Mazowieckie, Podkarpackie, Pomorskie, and Wielkopolskie.

In addition to the findings from the protection monitoring activities, the results of the 2024 Social and Economic Inclusion Survey¹ (SEIS) and Participatory Assessment² are included in this Protection Brief and referred to where relevant contributing to the provision of additional information and further analysis of the identified protection risks.

Since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation on 24 February 2022, Poland has shown **exceptional hospitality to refugees from Ukraine**, notably with the activation of the EU's Temporary Protection Directive. Since February 2022, 1,900,554 refugees from Ukraine have registered for temporary protection (PESEL UKR registration) in Poland, with **992,036 people possessing an active PESEL UKR registration** as of 14 January 2025. Among active PESEL holders, the overall majority are women aged 18 years and above accounting for 43% and children below the age of 17 years old accounting for 36%.³ The top 5 destination regions in Poland are Mazowieckie, Dolnośląskie, Śląskie, Wielkopolskie and Małopolskie, hosting 62% of the refugee population.

On 1 July 2024, amendments to *the Act on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine in the Context of the Armed Conflict in Ukraine* (hereafter referred to as "the Special Act") came into force. While temporary protection was extended until September 2025, the amendments introduced several **key changes** related to housing and accommodation, education and social protection provided to refugees by the Polish government.⁴ The Protection Brief also aims to provide further analysis on the impact of some of these changes on refugees.

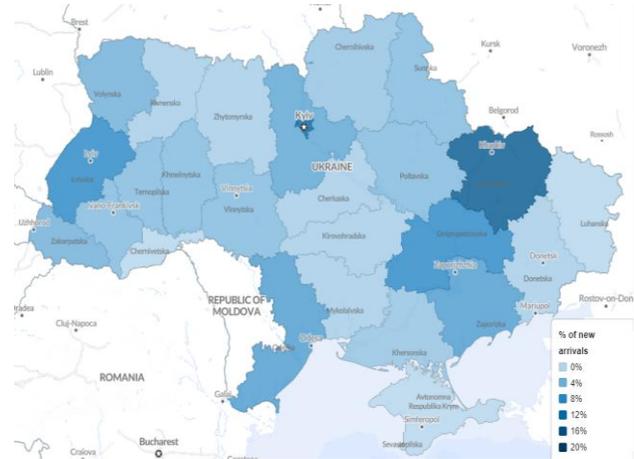
Key Figures (as of 31 Dec 2024)



Profiles of new arrivals

Protection monitoring data continues to show that refugees arriving from the frontline/eastern areas of Ukraine comprise a significant number of new arrivals and they continue to report the **security situation** as the main reason for fleeing Ukraine. During the reporting period, the power outages lasting 7–8 hours daily in Ukraine, added to the general insecurity and obstacles in accessing services leading refugees to leave Ukraine.

From those interviewed as part of protection monitoring, 42% of new arrivals originate from Kharkivska (18%), Dnipropetrovska (10%), Donetsk (7%), Zaporizka (7%) oblasts. Some 57% of new arrivals report intending to **remain in Poland** while 35% report intending to **move onwards** (with 54% indicating Germany as their final destination) and 8% reported having no clear plan at the time of the interview.

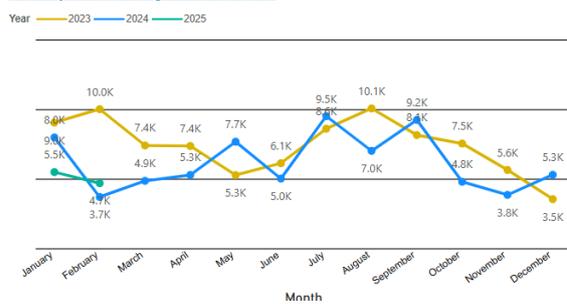


Gender

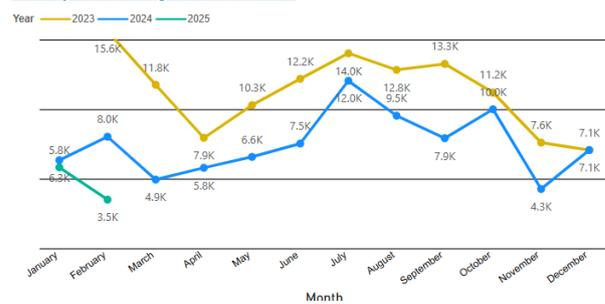
In relation to gender, this reporting period saw an **increase of men** aged 18-60 newly arriving in Poland. They accounted for over 17% of PESEL UKR holders by the end of 2024⁶, a slight increase in comparison to 16% recorded in 2023 and 11% in 2022⁷. Analysis of publicly available Government data on PESEL registration similarly indicates a significant increase in the number of men and boys applying for temporary protection (TP) in Poland. Additionally, there was a higher proportion of single-person households among new arrivals, rising from 23% in 2023 to 33% in 2024. This gradual increase is a trend noted and highlighted in previous Protection Briefs released in October 2023⁸ and April 2024.⁹

Graph I: New registrations by gender by month¹⁰:

An analysis on new registrations of Male



An analysis on new registrations of Female



In addition to applications for temporary protection, a significant increase has been noted in the number of Ukrainian nationals, including **men of conscription age**¹¹ seeking international protection through the Act of 13 June 2003 on Granting Protection to Foreigners within the Territory of the Republic of Poland. From 1 January to 31 December 2024, **7,060** Ukrainian citizens applied for **international protection** in Poland, a 299% increase compared to 2023 where 1,771 applications were received. Men aged 18-65 made up 46% (3,279) of the total applicants in 2024 highlighting a 416% increase of male applicants compared to 2023 in which 635 of the total applicants were men. It should be noted that the increased applications do not translate to an increase in the number of new arrivals, as most were already in Poland in February 2022 and were seeking long-term and stable legal status therefore opting to shift from temporary protection to international protection. Furthermore, some applicants had resided in Poland prior to 2022 and sought a change in legal status given the changing landscape in Ukraine particularly around military conscription.

Adolescents

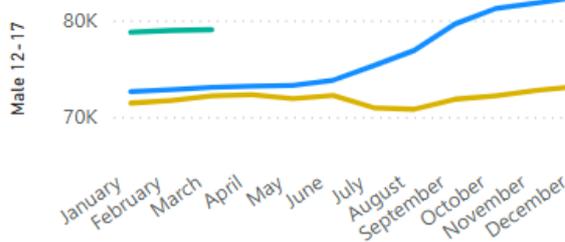
A notable **increase in the number of adolescent boys** (aged 12-17) registering for temporary protection from June 2024 has been observed.¹² The number of boys aged 12-17 rose from 69,668 (7%) by the end of 2022 to 73,755 (8%) in 2023 and now 83,593 (8%) by the end of 2024. Qualitative information gathered through UNHCR's protection monitoring interviews indicated a possible link to heightened fear of military conscription due to Ukraine's mobilization law, may be influencing the increase in registrations among adolescent boys.

Graph II: Active registrations of adolescents¹³:

12-17 years

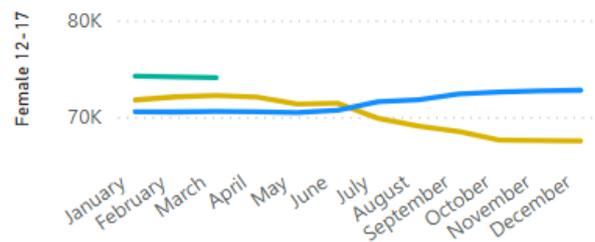
Male

Year — 2023 — 2024 — 2025



Female

Year — 2023 — 2024 — 2025



Protection risks

This section aims to present data and findings in relation to two key protection risks identified by UNHCR and partner organisations during the reporting period, therefore requiring further consideration on protection responses and solutions.

Limited access to safety nets for persons with specific needs¹⁴

Findings through UNHCR's assessments and protection monitoring activities continue to indicate that people with **specific needs** including people with medical conditions, disabilities and older people continue to face barriers impacting their ability to integrate and build self-reliance. Such barriers also previously reported continue to require much focus to ensure inclusive access to protection.

Access to Accommodation: While around 42% of refugees interviewed as part of protection monitoring continue to report **renting accommodation independently**, 23% report residing in accommodation provided by the government (collective site or hotel/hostel) particularly people with medical conditions (47%), people with some degree of difficulty (44%) and older people aged 60 and above (41%). This information aligns with data received by UNHCR from the Ministry of Interior which indicates that refugees living in accommodation provided by the government continue to be considered some of the most vulnerable.¹⁵

On 1 July 2024, legislative amendments to the **Special Act** resulted in **cessation of benefits** received by those hosting refugees. As noted in the previous Protection Brief, reduced support without safeguards, particularly for people with specific needs, may heighten vulnerability and potentially increase the risk of involuntary returns. Moreover, many of the government-run collective sites offered to refugees are in **remote locations** with movement sometimes hindering access to services that may be available in bigger cities.

Access to Social Benefits: From all households interviewed, 46% reported having at least one family member with a medical condition and/or person with some degree of difficulty, while 28% of households reported having at least one older family member (60+ years old). Over 90% of those households applied for social protection benefits in Poland, however some reported facing **challenges in accessing benefits** including 28% with medical condition, 31% with some degree of difficulty and 22% with an older family member in the household. The key reasons provided included lack of information

on rights to programs and the application process, and language barriers. These findings are consistent with information gathered from refugees during the 2024 Participatory Assessment where similar obstacles were noted.

Access to Employment: Around 60% of households with at least one member with a medical condition and/or some degree of specific need **do not work**. More than 30% are retired more than 10% are unemployed. while another 10% reported family responsibilities. The findings from the Participatory Assessment further highlighted finding suitable employment opportunities by people with disabilities and chronic diseases to be a significant challenge.

Access to Healthcare: Access to medical treatment and essential items was reported as an urgent need by 26% of refugees without specific needs, compared to nearly 50% among refugees with specific needs. Accessing healthcare was also the second most common reason for refugees visiting Ukraine (14% among the general refugee population), with significantly higher rates reported among vulnerable groups: 23% among households with medical conditions, 22% among those with functional difficulties, and 15% among households with older persons. Although Ukrainian citizens with active PESEL UKR registrations in Poland have a right to healthcare services, rising public support for reducing refugee benefits and initiatives to limit healthcare access to those paying insurance contributions place the most vulnerable groups at heightened risk of exclusion if such changes are introduced.

Disability Certification: A May 2024 report by the State Fund for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons (PFRON)¹⁶ estimates that around 14,000 Temporary Protection holders in Poland are people with disabilities, including 38% children under 16. Among adults, 20% had significant disabilities, 30% moderate, and 12% slight. Most applications for disability certification were lodged in 2022, with a 92% approval rate. The findings corroborate UNHCR data showing persistent **barriers to accessible housing, specialized healthcare, legal aid, and inclusion services**. Many refugees are unaware of available support systems, and gaps in disability recognition and adapted services hinder their integration and self-reliance.

Additionally, according to SEIS, 10% out of the 1,290 households reported having at least one family member with a disability, whereas out of 3,093 individuals interviewed, 5% were identified as having a level three disability, meaning they experience either a lot of difficulty or are entirely unable to perform certain activities.

Increase in social cohesion challenges and barriers

UNHCR and partner consultations with refugees echo recurrent obstacles to integration including limitations to Polish language courses, tailored employment opportunities, lengthy and complex administrative procedures and long waiting periods to access specialized healthcare for refugees with specific needs. Additionally, the key areas below were noted to be the most prevalent for refugees.

Host Community Support: The decline in support provided to refugees from Ukraine noted by the amendments to the Special Act is found in the sentiments among the host community in Poland. The results of a survey conducted in November and December 2024 and published by the Mieroszewski Institute, showed that 30% of respondents express **negative opinions** about Ukrainians while 41% are neutral.¹⁷ Also, a growing proportion of Poles – 51% believe that the scale of assistance provided to Ukrainian citizens in Poland is too high (compared to 44% in February 2024) with only 5% reporting assistance is not sufficient (the same as February 2024). Despite a stable number of Polish people who are in favour of the continuation of assistance provided to Ukrainian refugees (42% in February and 40% in December 2024), there is an increasing number of those who oppose it (33% in February to 37% in December 2024). Moreover, 56% of Polish people expect Ukrainians to return to their country after the war ends. Additionally, a survey conducted by the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) in October 2024¹⁸ indicates the lowest rate of support by Polish people since March 2022, as only 53% of the respondents declared support for accepting refugees from Ukraine into Poland, a drop from 80% in 2023 and 94% in March 2022. Furthermore, the number of those opposing the admission of Ukrainian refugees is growing from 3% in March 2022 to 40% in October 2024.

Growing tensions within local communities, decreasing humanitarian assistance provided by NGOs and the government were highlighted as challenges to effective integration indicated by refugees during Participatory Assessment consultations. The significant decline in public support may continue to lead

to increased social tensions and hinder integration efforts, especially if coupled with rising misinformation and/or reduced political will.

Hostility towards Refugees: SEIS data indicates that while most refugees from Ukraine report experiencing no tensions with the host community (57%), around 39% reported experiencing some hostility, with **verbal aggression** as the most common, affecting around 78% of affected households. Additionally, 45% reported experiencing discriminatory behavior, particularly in the context of job search or securing accommodation. Hostile or aggressive comments on social media were also prevalent, reported by 27% of respondents, while 21% encountered such behavior in online news forums. Though less common, 7% of households reported physical attacks, indicating that while most hostility is verbal or discriminatory, concerns about physical safety persist for some individuals.

The possible reasons for the hostility reported varied and included reference to nationality by 65% of households, followed by refugee status by 58% and language differences by 53%. Other reasons included cultural differences (24%), competition for resources (25%) or jobs (23%). These findings suggest that both identity-based factors and economic pressures contribute to tensions between displaced individuals and the host community.

Discrimination and Bullying: Protection monitoring data shows that among those without work, when asked about barriers to employment, 14% claim to face discrimination, whereas 11% of households are not sending their children to a Polish school and 13% mention discrimination, bullying or harassment. Bullying and exclusion of refugee children in schools, verbal harassment and social isolation from peers were also indicated by refugees during Participatory Assessment interviews. Moreover, failure to adequately address these issues by school personnel leaving **refugee children vulnerable** in the school environment was also highlighted as a key concern.

Calls to Action

Limited access to safety nets for persons with specific needs

UNHCR recommends the Government of the Republic of Poland to:

- Tailor available support programmes on **social benefits and social housing schemes** for refugees with specific needs and those at heightened risk of exclusion (including older persons, persons with disabilities and persons with medical conditions) and secure continued care either by introducing systemic and procedural changes or providing financial support to civil society organizations that assist persons with specific needs to enhance their inclusion opportunities.
- Strengthened **cooperation** between local social services institutions and NGOs to enhance information exchange on needs, activities and interventions with the aim of complementing the delivery of timely and tailored services promoting self-reliance of refugees with specific needs.
- Increase **Polish language opportunities** for people with specific needs and education for adults with disabilities, particularly in smaller towns and rural locations where such opportunities are limited. This could be done either by providing such courses/education at local level through employment offices or creation of an online platform for self-learning that would meet the needs of these groups.
- Consider staff capacity enhancement or increasing financial support provided to institutions and/or organizations in terms of **interpretation and translation** services available to persons with specific needs. Alternatively, establish a network of volunteer interpreters for various services and provide them with relevant training.

UNHCR recommends humanitarian actors to:

- Ensure that people with specific needs have **access to information** about available services and programs and advocate for their inclusion where possible, working in close cooperation with national institutions.
- Working in **collaboration** with national institutions to support refugees with disabilities residing in remote locations given the various obstacles mentioned above. Consideration can be given to

continued mapping exercises, provision of information and field visits in the respective areas of responsibility.

- In consultation with national institutions, continue to fill in systemic gaps to assist people with specific needs - such as through **case management and social assistance/volunteer support**, fundraising activities to meet the needs of this group - while actively advocating for procedural changes.

Reduced support and social cohesion challenges

UNHCR recommends the Government of the Republic of Poland to:

- Conduct **public awareness campaigns** at the country level regarding refugee contribution to Polish society to alleviate tension between the refugee and host community and to improve chances for refugee integration.
- Ensure that adequate support is available for refugee children experiencing bullying and discrimination in schools by **capacitating school personnel**. This could be done in cooperation with civil society organizations that have experience in working with refugee children.
- Foster **interactions** and understanding between refugee and Polish students and their parents by providing training/information sessions on cultural diversity in a refugee/forced displacement context.
- Promote **economic inclusion** initiatives that facilitate refugees' access to the labour market, including recognition of qualifications, vocational training, and support for entrepreneurship. Economic empowerment is crucial for self-reliance and can significantly enhance social cohesion by demonstrating the positive contributions of refugees to host communities.

UNHCR recommends humanitarian actors to:

- Increase focus on activities and services which promote **social cohesion and integration** that benefit both refugees from Ukraine, asylum-seekers and refugees of other nationalities and the host community.
- Support in identified capacity building needs by public service providers, with a strategic focus on supporting the education system.

Previous Briefs and UNHCR Dashboard



Poland Protection Monitoring Brief #1 (June to August 2022)



Poland Protection Monitoring Brief #2 (August to November 2022)



Poland Protection Monitoring Brief #3 (23 November - 31 March 2023)



Poland joint protection analysis October 2023



Poland Protection Monitoring Brief #4 (January to March 2024)



UNHCR Poland protection monitoring dashboard

With thanks to the critical support of donors to UNHCR in Poland:



For more information:
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- ¹ Poland Socio-Economic Insights Survey was conducted between 16 May and 24 June 2024 while results analysis was published in November 2024, full analysis available at: [SEIS Poland 2024](#)
- ² The Participatory Assessment was conducted by UNHCR Poland with refugees and asylum seekers from Ukraine and other countries between January 2024 and January 2025. The report is available at: [Poland: Participatory Assessment 2024 Report](#)
- ³ Government opensource data from the Ministry of Digitalisation (Ministerstwo Cyfryzacji), Registered applications for the UKR status due to the conflict in Ukraine, February 2025, available at: [Open data](#)
- ⁴ See UNHCR's public comments on the amendments here: UNHCR Comments and Observations on the Draft Law amending the Act on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine in the Context of Armed Conflict in Ukraine ("the Special Act"), April 2024, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/natlegcomments/unhcr/2024/en/147928>.
- ⁵ The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) defines persons with disabilities as those who have 'long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others'. For the purpose of Protection Monitoring, data collection on disability follows the Washington Group tool where questions about carrying out a few basic, universal activities such as vision, hearing, mobility, cognition and communication are asked with answers defined as 'some difficulty', 'a lot of difficulty', or 'cannot do at all' being counted in this Brief as persons facing some degree of difficulty.
- ⁶ Due to data limitations, it was not possible to see data for males aged 18-59 by the end of 2024.
- ⁷ The change is also visible in exact numbers, starting from 103,949 by the end of 2022, to 139,554 by the end of 2023 to 173,359 by the end of 2024.
- ⁸ Protection Sector, Poland: Joint Protection Analysis, October 2023, available at: <https://bit.ly/4bEyn8k>.
- ⁹ UNHCR, Protection Brief Poland, June 2024, available at: <https://bit.ly/40QiBEU>.
- ¹⁰ Government opensource data from the Ministry of Digitalisation (Ministerstwo Cyfryzacji), Registered applications for the UKR status due to the conflict in Ukraine, February 2025, available at: [Open data](#)
- ¹¹ According to the Ukrainian law as of the end of 2024 compulsory military conscription age for Ukrainian men was from 25 to 60, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2232-12/ed20241129#Text>
- ¹² See graph I and II.
- ¹³ Government opensource data from the Ministry of Digitalisation (Ministerstwo Cyfryzacji), Registered applications for the UKR status due to the conflict in Ukraine, February 2025, available at: [Open data](#)
- ¹⁴ This protection risk focuses specifically on persons with disabilities, medical conditions and older people.
- ¹⁵ Based on data received by the UNHCR from MoI.
- ¹⁶ State Fund for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons, Report on the situation of Ukrainian citizens with disabilities residing in Poland, May 2024, https://www.pfron.org.pl/fileadmin/Badania_i_analizy/2024/2024-08-07_raport_UKR/Badanie_Sytuacji_Osob_Niepelnosprawnych_Obywateli_Ukrainy_2024.pdf
- ¹⁷ The Mieroszewski Institute, Poles on Ukraine and Polish-Ukrainian relationships report, January 2025, <https://mieroszewski.pl/upload/2025/01/polacy-o-ukrainie-i-stosunkach-polsko-ukrainskich-2025-pl-www.pdf>
- ¹⁸ Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS), Polish public opinion survey, October 2024, https://www.cbos.pl/PL/publikacje/public_opinion/2024/10_2024.pdf