UNHCR 2024 Participatory Assessment
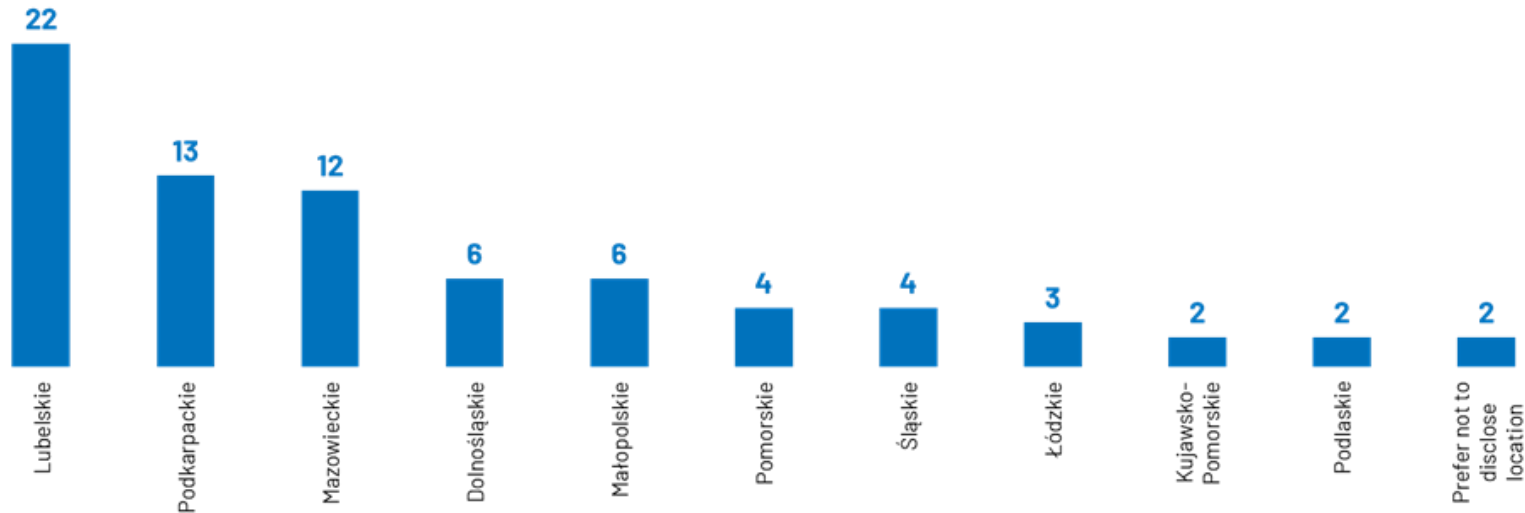
Key findings and recommendations

Participatory approach

- A process of engaging with communities of all age, gender and diverse backgrounds through a set of structured consultations to gain a better understanding of the **protection risks** faced by displaced people, their **causes**, existing community's **capacities**, and proposed **solutions**.

- Participatory nature of the assessment aims at empowering refugees by recognizing their agency and expertise. Refugees have impact on humanitarian programs and decisions that affect their lives.

Background & Methodology

- **76 sessions** conducted in cooperation with local partners and authorities, including 65 focus group discussions (FGDs) and 11 key informant interviews (KIIs)
- Data collection between January 2024 – January 2025
- 10 voivodeships covered

Profile of participants

- **577 participants**
  - **18 nationalities:** majority Ukrainian (86%)
  - **Different legal statuses:** TP holders, IP holders, asylum seekers
  - **Age:** ranging from 10 to 60+
  - **Specific needs groups:** people with disabilities (35%), Roma refugees (8%), LGBTIQ+ refugees (2% of all participants)

GENDER GROUPS

43%

41%

1% another gender

14%

MAIN NATIONALITY

86%
Ukrainians

5%
Belarusians

2%
Russia

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Main findings: Access to services and information

CHALLENGES:

- **Language barriers** hinder communication and access to healthcare, social welfare, and education.
- **Lack of clear information/guidance about available services and rights** (e.g. in healthcare, social welfare system and education system).
- Refugees unaware of the full range of **social assistance programmes available or criteria for eligibility.**
- Less access to information and support in **smaller towns or rural areas** than big cities.
- NGOs fill information gaps but **support is shrinking** due to changing funding situation.

"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"

(Pomorskie, female refugee 60+)

"There is no such information available. Not everyone is arriving to someone they already know."

(Kujawsko-Pomorskie, female refugee)

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Main findings: Access to services and information

SOLUTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Improve access to public services and healthcare**: Recruit more doctors/psychologists speaking refugee languages, especially in rural areas.

- **Improve digital literacy**: Offer training to help refugees use online services, fill forms, and access e-healthcare tools.

- **Create centralized information system**: strengthen existing centralized databases to find services and information on different topics (legal, employment, social protection). Regularly update the database.

- **Increase language support**: Expand volunteer interpreter networks to support system navigation and assist refugees in contacting public services.

Main findings: Social cohesion & Inclusion

CHALLENGES:

- **Instances of discrimination in daily life**: cases of unequal treatment at work (reports of lower pay, limited advancement, and under-recognition of qualifications). Verbal abuse in public and negative reactions when speaking native languages fuel a sense of otherness.

- **Bullying**: Refugee children report experiencing social isolation from peers, verbal harassment, and emotional distress.

- **Solidarity fatigue**: Initial solidarity is fading, with reduced openness from some host communiy members.

"Once at the doctor's waiting room I heard 'There are too many of you here' [Ukrainian refugees in Poland]."

(Pomorskie, female refugee 60+)

Main findings: Social cohesion & Inclusion

SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Community engagement events** that bring together refugees and local communities. They facilitate building connections and practice language skills.

- **Language exchange**: Polish proficiency identified as key to social inclusion. Set up conversation clubs with Polish speakers to boost language skills in a practical social setting, and strengthen social ties.

- **Public awareness campaigns targeting host community**: Run campaigns to highlight refugees' contributions and combat stereotypes.

- **Cultural competence trainings**: for police, public institutions, healthcare providers and schools to improve interactions with refugees.

Main findings: Legal status and Documentation

CHALLENGES:

- **Complex bureaucracy**: Refugees face confusing, shifting rules for obtaining and renewing documents and legal status. Long rocesses/waiting times at the offices.

- **Inconsistent information**: Conflicting guidance received causes uncertainty and mistrust. Inconsistent interpretation of regulations by officials.

- **Precarious legal status**: Instances of losing temporary protection status due to system errors, creating fear of travel and instability.

- **Legislative changes**: Frequent policy shifts deepen confusion, affecting long-term integration.

"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"

(Slaskie, male refugee)

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Main findings: Legal status and Documentation

SOLUTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Streamlining and clarifying procedures:** simplifying procedures for legalizing stay, obtaining documents and accessing services, and providing clear, **step-by-step guides** in languages understood by refugees on how to navigate administrative procedures.

- **Trainings on refugee rights:** provide legal advice and training on refugee rights in Poland, and advocate for more transparent and consistent interpretation of laws by different officials.

- **Legal support:** The existing local legal aid system is not sufficient and there is a need to increase legal support available in languages understood by refugees.

Main findings: Economic inclusion & Housing

CHALLENGES:

- **Precarious economic and employment situations:** short-term contracts, low wages, informal jobs. Elderly and people with disabilities face higher access barriers.

- **Housing instability**: Shortage of affordable housing, increased vulnerability especially after reducing availability of collective centers.

- **Discrimination in housing market**: Refugees face rental bias, especially families with children or no stable income.

- **Insufficient language support** for children & limited language courses for adults, particularly at more advanced level & job-related.

"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."

(Podkarpackie, female refugee)

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Main findings: Economic inclusion & Housing

SOLUTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Job fairs and support 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.

- **Skills & training**: Increasing the offer of vocational and skills trainings tailored to market needs.

- **Entrepreneurship support**: Expand grants for refugee-run businesses and artists.

- **Housing support for vulnerable groups**: Establish financial support programmes for vulnerable groups to help with housing costs.

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

Access full report: data.unhcr.org