



Q1 2024  
Styczeń – Marzec  
**Protection  
Monitoring  
Report**



# Protection Monitoring Report

## 03.

CONTEXT

## 05.

METHODOLOGY &  
LIMITATIONS

## 06.

DEMOGRAPHICS

## 07.

HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

## 09.

SITUATION IN THE HOST COUNTRY

## 17.

KEY FINDINGS

### 17. PROTECTION RISK 1: THE RISK OF EVICTION AND/OR HOMELESSNESS

- 22. Threat's effects on the population
- 23. Capacity
- 24. Recommendations

### 25. PROTECTION RISK 2: DENIED OR RESTRICTED ACCESS TO LEGAL IDENTITY

- 28. Threat's effects on the population
- 29. Capacity
- 30. Recommendations

### 31. EFFECTS OF THE THREAT ON POPULATION

- 31. Older Refugees  
& Recommendations

**More than two years have passed since the full-scale war in Ukraine began, and ten years since the Russian Federation began occupying Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, resulting in prolonged displacement and a humanitarian crisis.**

**As of the end of March 2024, there are approximately 5.9 million refugees from Ukraine in Europe. Around 80% of refugees consist of women and children, and 15% of displaced refugee households include an elderly person over 60 years old (UNHCR, 2024). There are currently about 952,106 refugees registered in Poland (UNHCR, 2024).**

Studies indicate a positive impact of refugees on the host country's economy, largely due to their rapid entry into the labor market and its accessibility. Currently, between 225,000 and 350,000 Ukrainian refugees are employed in Poland (Deloitte, UNHCR, 2024). At the same time, UNHCR data highlights critical socioeconomic challenges faced by Ukrainian refugees.

The data for Poland indicates a significant disparity in poverty rates between Ukrainian refugees and host country nationals. Specifically, 46% of Ukrainian refugees in Poland live below the poverty line, compared to just 9% of the host country nationals (UNHCR, 2024). This highlights the economic challenges faced by Ukrainian refugees in Poland, who are much more likely to experience poverty than the local population.

This report presents an analysis of the current situation of Ukrainian refugees in Poland, focusing on their most urgent needs and key challenges. It aims to provide an understanding of the living conditions, access to services, documentation, or safety, as well as to highlight the areas that require urgent attention and intervention.

The most significant current needs of respondents in the IRC Protection Monitoring remain relatively unchanged, revolving around accommodation, access to healthcare, and employment.

In this quarter, the IRC's Protection Monitoring (PM) Report identifies critical protection risks related to accommodation, legal identity, and the specific vulnerabilities of older refugees.

### **Protection Risk 1 Insecurity of Tenure and Risk of Homelessness:**

The report identifies significant accommodation challenges faced by Ukrainian refugees in Poland. Uncertainty, overcrowding, inadequate conditions, and high costs in collective accommodations are prevalent issues. Discrimination in the housing market further exacerbates difficulties, particularly for the most vulnerable groups.

### **Protection Risk 2 Restricted Access to Legal Identity:**

The report highlights significant risks associated with the legal identity of Ukrainian refugees in Poland, emphasizing the issue of documentation. Recent legal changes have intensified these issues, particularly for men aged 18-60 who face movement restrictions and complications in accessing consular services and legal documents.

### **People at risk Older refugees:**

In this cycle, the impact of threats on vulnerable populations, particularly older people, has become increasingly evident. Their situations have been highlighted, and a dedicated section of the report addresses their unique challenges. Older individuals play a vital role in supporting their communities by sharing values, memories, culture, and solidarity.

## Legal Environment

In March 2024, the Polish President signed an amendment to the Special Act concerning the rights of Ukrainian refugees, following the European Union's decision in October 2023 to extend temporary protection until March 4, 2025. The new law extends the legal stay of Ukrainian citizens in Poland until June 30, 2024. This includes the extension of national visas, residence permits, and deadlines for voluntary return and departure from Poland.

It also prolongs the validity of "permit for tolerated stay" documents, residence cards, Polish foreigner's identity documents, and Schengen visas. Furthermore, it maintains the right of Ukrainian citizens to work, run businesses, and establish sole proprietorships until June 30, 2024. Ukrainian citizens can also obtain a temporary residence permit for one year even if they do not meet standard requirements or cannot justify a stay longer than three months. Additionally, special provisions for Ukrainian healthcare professionals have been extended, allowing them to practice in Poland for up to 28 months from February 24, 2022.

While the March amendments to the Special Act were technical, the Polish Government introduced more significant changes in early April 2024, intended to take effect in July 2024. As of the preparation of this document, the draft law on these amendments has already passed voting in both the Sejm and the Senat and has been sent for the President's signature.

The new amendments are expected to extend temporary protection from June 30, 2024, to September 30, 2025. Additionally, temporary protection will be expanded to cover two additional categories of foreigners: minor children of Ukrainian citizens and minor children of spouses of Ukrainian citizens who do not have Ukrainian citizenship.

Moreover, these amendments will allow certain groups of Ukrainian citizens in Poland to apply for a three-year temporary residence permit with access to labor market through a simplified procedure. However, this solution will not provide the same scope of rights and benefits as temporary protection (e.g. access to free healthcare). The new legislation will introduce the obligation for Ukrainian citizens to submit an application for PESEL UKR immediately upon arrival in the Republic of Poland, instead of within the previous 30-day window.

Additionally, Ukrainian citizens will be required to update their information in the PESEL UKR register and confirm their identity using a valid travel document at any municipal authority. This applies to individuals who were issued a PESEL UKR based on an invalid passport, declaration, Pole's Card, or other documents.<sup>1</sup>

From July 1, 2024, the support system for Ukrainian citizens will likely undergo significant changes. Financing for accommodation and food assistance for refugees from Ukraine, particularly those in difficult situations, will only be possible through agreements signed with the relevant voivode or local government, acting on the voivode's behalf. The cash benefit compensating private premises owners for the costs of housing and feeding war refugees (40+ program) will not be extended. Support for financing one-off cash benefit of PLN 300 will be phased out.

Some significant changes will be introduced in education area. Compulsory schooling will be introduced for children of Ukrainian citizens, with compliance linked to the payment of the "800+" benefit, starting from the 2025/26 school year. It will be possible for Ukrainian citizens residing in Poland with the appropriate education obtained in Ukraine to provide psychological services to their compatriots.

<sup>1</sup> Legislative changes in Ukraine, See more at: UNHCR (2024). Legislative updates on displacement-related legislation, Ukraine. Available at: [LU\\_Jan-Feb\\_2024\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees/2024/1/legislative-updates-on-displacement-related-legislation-ukraine/) (unhcr.org)

# METHODOLOGY & LIMITATIONS

In this cycle, the IRC Protection Monitoring Team conducted 228 surveys with refugees over the age of 18. Additionally, as part of the qualitative research component, 13 expert interviews (KIs) were conducted. The monitoring was carried out in three cities: Warsaw, Katowice, and Gdynia. However, more than 80% of the respondents were refugees in Warsaw.

The IRC conducts Protection Monitoring to regularly collect and analyze data about the protection situation of refugees from Ukraine in Poland and monitor changes over time. Protection Monitoring aims at identifying and analyzing risks and trends relevant to the protection and assistance of affected populations to allow informed decision-making and the design of evidence-based humanitarian responses.

Interviews are conducted in various locations, including local NGOs' locations, community centers, collective accommodation sites, information, and assistance points, transit locations and reception/registration centers. This protection monitoring analysis is published quarterly and is mainly based on the above-mentioned information, complemented by secondary sources.

The quantitative data were further contextualized based on qualitative data, collected mainly through stakeholder interviews (KIs).

## IRC Protection Analysis Framework

Protection Monitoring is integrated with Protection Analysis Framework (PAF). PAF is an analytical process undertaken to identify and understand protection risks with the aim of informing strategies and responses.

The analytical conclusions are to guide the development of strategies for reducing protection risk.

## Sampling

Convenience, non-probabilistic sampling was used.



## Methods

Mixed approach (qualitative methods together with quantitative ones).

- Individual Household Survey
- Semi-structured interviews (KIs)
- Participant observation
- Desk Review
- Thematic and statistical analysis

## Limitations

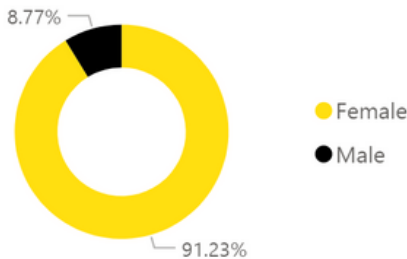
Participants are identified in the selected locations and asked for their consent to be interviewed using a harmonized questionnaire. The results presented in this report should be interpreted according to the limitations of the methodology and the context.

- Convenience, non-probabilistic sampling was used. Therefore, these results should not be generalized for the overall population and represent only the situation of the surveyed population described in detail in the “Demographics” section of this report.
- All participants are Ukrainian citizens. No third-country nationals (TCNs) were surveyed in this round of Protection Monitoring.
- Some of the participants do not live in the location where the interview was conducted. Therefore, the results may not be fully accurate for place of residence.

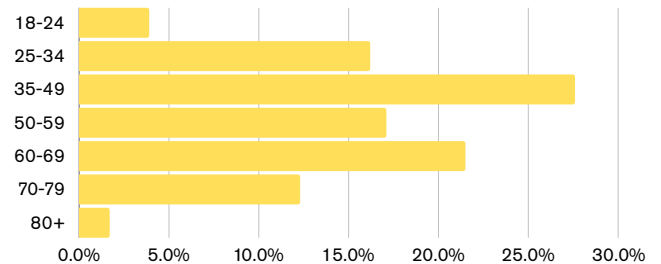
# DEMOGRAPHICS

In the Q1 Protection Monitoring cycle, 91.2% of participants were female, whilst 8.8 % were male. The largest age group represented in this report falls within the 35-49 years old category (as in previous cycles), comprising almost 27.6% of the sample. Refugees over 50 years old make up 52.6% of the sample.

## Gender



## Age



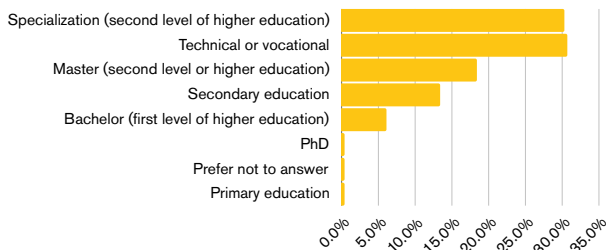
## Data of arrival

Most respondents primarily arrived at the beginning of the conflict. In this cycle 43.4% of people arrived in March, and 24% of the respondents arrived between April and July. People that arrived after January 2023 constitute 13.4% of respondents.

## Education

Almost 55.2% of respondents have higher education. In Q4 respondents declared technical and vocational level of education, comprising 30.7%.

## Level of education



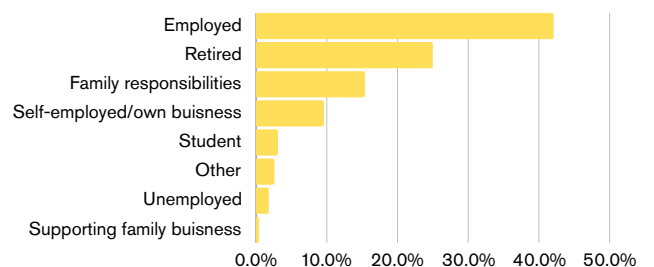
## Region of Ukraine

The data indicates that the largest group of refugees in Poland came from Kyiv, accounting for 16.2% of the total, followed by Kharkiv with 14%, and Kherson with 11%. Refugees from the Donetsk region make up 8.8%, while those from Dnipropetrovsk constitute 8.3%. The biggest number of newcomers (as of 2023) came from Kherson (17%).

## Main activity before leaving Ukraine

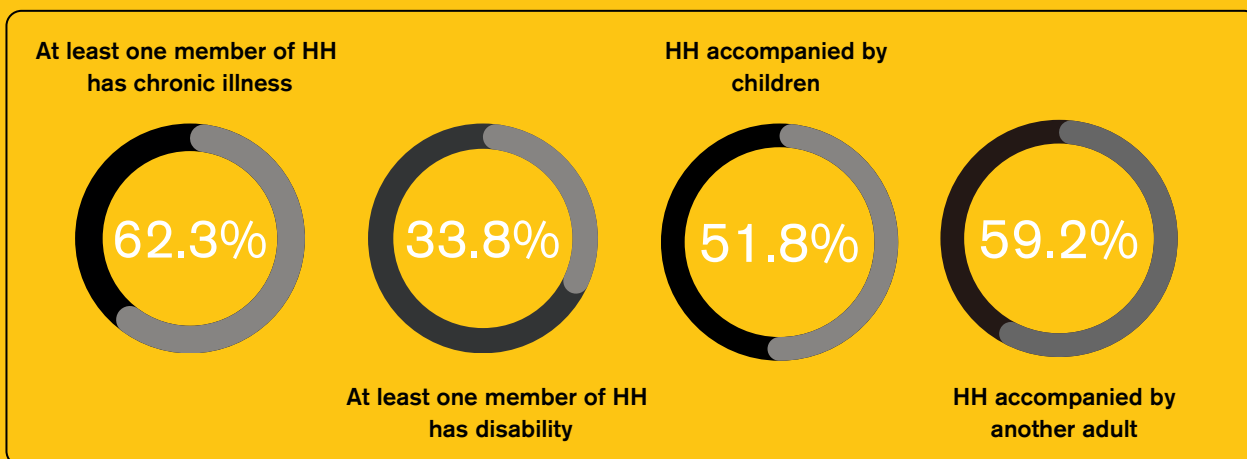
Before leaving Ukraine, 42.1% of respondents were employed. Some of the respondents were self-employed or owned a business, accounting for 9.6%. The second biggest group were respondents who were retired (25%). Almost 15.4% were occupied by family responsibilities. Only 1.8% were unemployed in Ukraine.

## Main activity before leaving Ukraine



## Household composition

The average household size is a family of 3. The largest household included 9 people..



Around 59.2% of respondents reported being accompanied by at least one other adult, and 51.8% were accompanied by at least one child. In 13% of cases, it was indicated that the child's parents are in Ukraine. Many participants were accompanied by their mother (24.1%) and husband/partner (21.4%). Other family members accompanying included daughters, wives/partners, and sons.

Around 33.8% of households include at least one person with a disability. The prevalence of households containing at least one individual with a chronic illness is 62.3%. This statistic may not exclusively reflect the respondents' health.

## Access to territory

Most Ukrainian refugees arrived directly through the Polish-Ukrainian border, while 12% of the respondents chose alternative routes, bypassing direct crossing of the Polish-Ukrainian border.

These alternatives involved transit through third countries, including Russia (20 people), Latvia (12 people), Lithuania (12 refugees), and Belarus (11 respondents).

More respondents (though still a marginal percentage) reported problems while crossing the Ukrainian border (5.3% in Q4 2023 and 2.2% in Q1 2024). Among these, 13 male respondents mentioned difficulties related to martial law. 5 participants declared other protection incidents, and another 3 mentioned difficulties due to lack of documentation.

Some of the incidents described by participants while crossing the Ukrainian border:

- Refugees faced harassment while crossing into Russian-controlled areas; for example, Russian forces tore up a child's birth certificate and mocked the family.

- Intense scrutiny at Russian checkpoints involved the close inspection of children, personal belongings, and vehicles, with reports of vehicles being shot at.
- Refugees from temporarily occupied territories in Ukraine reported particularly difficult circumstances.

Among the 27 people who crossed other borders, 8 reported encountering problems. Among these:

- Refugees experienced thorough checks and felt mentally strained by the process of being filtered at various borders.
- In Belarus, refugees were denied basic services like food and fuel, with local vendors refusing Ukrainian or Polish credit cards.
- There were reports of provocative questioning and phone checks. Specifically, in Crimea and Belarus, some individuals faced severe restrictions, including one man being barred from leaving.
- At the Russian border and entering Crimea, individuals underwent long interrogations, including a case where a man was detained for six hours, stripped, and his phone searched.

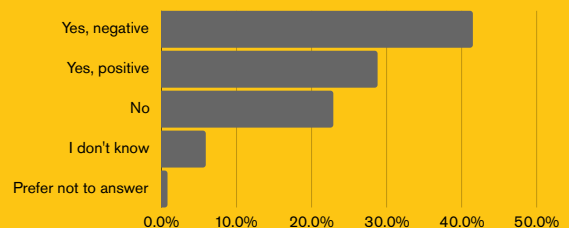
## Psychosocial Support (PSS)

The statistics reveal that a significant portion of respondents have noticed behavioral changes among household members since their arrival. For children, 40% observed negative changes, and 25% noted positive ones.

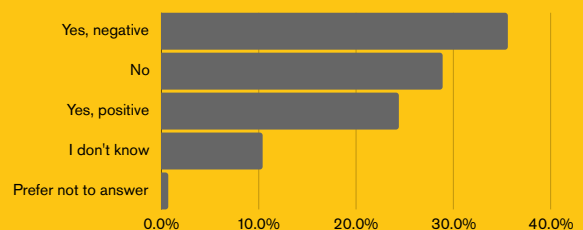
In terms of adult household members, 35% noticed negative changes, 30% saw no changes, 25% observed positive changes, and 10% were uncertain.

Regarding psychosocial support (PSS), 44.4% of respondents indicated receiving professional support, 34.6% did not receive any support, 8.6% relied on informal support from family and friends, and 6.2% received support from volunteers.

**Changes in the behaviour (children in HH)**



**Changes in the behaviour (adults in HH)**





# SITUATION IN THE HOST COUNTRY

## Education and childcare

The number of people whose pre-school-aged children access some form of childcare services has significantly decreased (44.7%, down from 80% in Q4).

More than 25% reported that their children are not enrolled in the Polish education system. The primary reasons cited for not enrolling children in school in Poland include parents' preferences to keep children in the Ukrainian (online or onsite) curriculum. Challenges included difficulties in adapting to Polish schools, noted by parents who tried to enroll their children in offline Ukrainian schools or integrate them into local Polish schools.

Some children are not in formal schooling due to logistical issues such as a lack of vaccinations, which has prevented them from being enrolled.

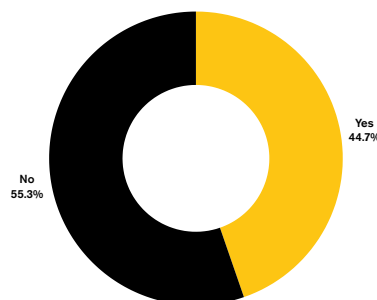
Expert interviews with representatives of the education system and schools hosting Ukrainian children highlighted several challenges.

These include the overburdening of children resulting from combined educational systems or additional classes in Polish schools. There is also a lack of intercultural assistants and staff to support activities in preparatory classes.

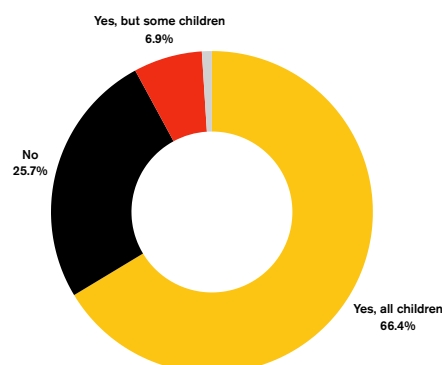
**"Teaching Polish is now six hours a week. The problem is that the children are increasingly exhausted. They have all their regular classes plus these additional six hours. We see this becoming a problem. In other schools, it happens that children stop attending classes because of this."** (KII, school representative, Katowice)

Another challenge is the rotation of children and constant changes in their places of residence. School representatives also identified issues in the transition between the eighth and ninth grades and in preparing materials for Ukrainian children, especially in the context of changes in the applicable law.

Are all pre school aged children enrolled in childcare?



Are all school-aged children enrolled in school in Poland?



See more about the children out of school in the report of IRC, Care & Save the Children.

Available at: [Out-of-School-Report\\_en.pdf \(care.org\)](#)

**"We need to address the rotation of children in the school system. We have several such cases where children leave, say goodbye, and then come back to us. They leave again, try their luck elsewhere, and then return. There are cases where this has happened three times already. Families decide to try, for example, in Finland, don't settle in, try in Wroclaw, it doesn't work there, and they return to Gdynia. This is a huge challenge for the children but also for the school."** (KII, school representative, Gdynia)

# SITUATION IN THE HOST COUNTRY

## Education and childcare

In-depth interviews reveal challenges in education, mainly related to changes in compulsory schooling communicated widely since the end of 2023. Starting from the next school year, the Polish government has intended that all refugee children from Ukraine will be subject to compulsory schooling. The aim was to address the issue of children remaining outside the education system. This is confirmed by the IRC, Save the Children, and Care report (2024).

Schools declare that they are not prepared for these changes. Moreover, there is a lack of official communication in this regard. From the perspective of those organizing education, challenges include providing learning materials, introducing the Ukrainian language in schools and the associated controversies, and the lack of staff to ensure a good level of education for all children. This is linked to the current overcrowding of schools, where classes "have as many as 29 students." (KII, school representative, Katowice)

Among the challenges children face in Polish schools are discrimination and bullying. These issues were particularly highlighted in the report monitoring the situation of Ukrainian refugee children in Poland. Instances of violence, discrimination, and bullying are also confirmed by individual interviews and comments from refugees in this cycle.

Another significant issue noted in the report from the children's perspective is the difficult economic situation of their families. Children often indicated that they cannot afford lunches in school cafeterias. This is corroborated by data from one of the interviews.

**"Not all parents can afford to pay for lunches at school. This was a tragic problem at the very beginning. If it weren't for the organizations and contributions from teachers and principals, these children wouldn't eat at school. We don't want Ukrainian children to come and watch others eat. We still have a support program for refugee children's nutrition in schools. We also have fundraisers for other needs, but the need for school lunches remains the most urgent. Poverty reaches schools. It is difficult for schools to cope with it alone."** (KII, school representative, Gdynia).

It was also pointed out that strengthening psychological support offered within schools is essential. The Polish mental health support system for children has long been considered in need of substantial changes. Children with refugee experiences (and others) require additional support in this regard. According to some respondents, strengthening this component in schools is crucial.

**"At the beginning, children faced violence in schools and bullying, mainly in the younger grades, because they simply couldn't cope with stress and their emotions. Psychological support is needed immediately. Specialist help and assessments of these children, for example, for autism, are also necessary. In Ukraine, the recognition of such traits in children is minimal. We notice a large number of undiagnosed autistic individuals in schools. They are diagnosed here. However, it will also be necessary to remove language barriers in psychological support by hiring psychologists with these language skills"** (KII, school representative, Katowice).

**"We have a girl who witnessed her family's death. She is withdrawn, traumatized, likely suffering from PTSD, and initially faced discrimination here. How is she supposed to cope without additional PSS support?"** (KII, Ukrainian school representative, Katowice).

The monitoring also includes several positive cases and examples. The highlighted challenges aim to identify potential, necessary changes. In many cases, children, as indicated by both the report on the situation of children and the Q1 data, want to stay in Poland and feel comfortable in the Polish education system.

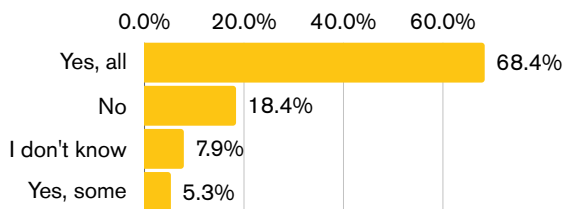
**"Some are doing exceptionally well. They are succeeding in applied computer science at Jagiellonian University, in younger grades, ballet classes, and sports competitions. Schools are inherently a good place of support for children. But we can certainly do more"** (KII, school representative, Warsaw).

# SITUATION IN THE HOST COUNTRY

## Access to documentation and benefits

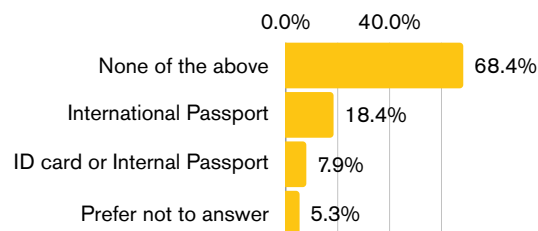
Most participants, 82.6%, possess all the necessary civil documentation, while around 15.2% reported that they did not have an international passport. Among them, 68% reported that it would be possible to obtain missing identity documentation.

### Can you obtain missing documents?



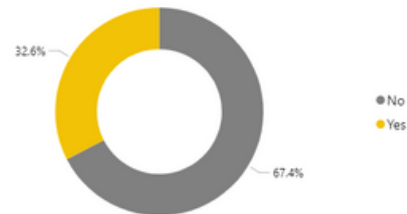
In the previous cycles, one of the main noticeable risks was the termination of PESEL UKR and the associated access to social benefits. All of the respondents have a PESEL UKR Number. Nevertheless, almost 19 % had to reapply for PESEL UKR at least once, among them 19.3% encountered difficulties in this process. The most reported issue was long waiting times or queues (65.4%), followed by a smaller number of people pointing out discrimination in the process (9.6%).

### Are you or any of the HH members missing any of the civil documentation?



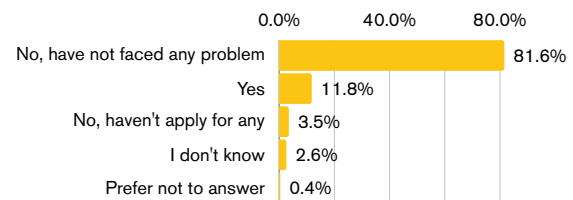
## Suspended rights

### Difficulties after return to PL, after visit in UA



A trend observed in previous cycles was the suspension of social benefits. In Q1 a smaller number of respondents (32 %, compared to the 50% in Q4) reported experiencing challenges, notably the cessation of vital support such as the 500 Plus program (replaced with 800 Plus program in February 2024), in 21 cases.

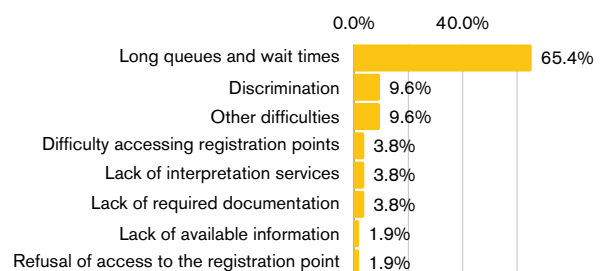
### Difficulties accessing social benefits in Poland



Typically, this arises from erroneous deprivation of status entitling individuals to medical care and social assistance. Refugees from Ukraine have reported instances of losing their UKR status, despite not having left Poland for periods exceeding 30 days (RPO, 2023).

The absence of UKR status is associated with the loss of entitlements such as access to medical care, benefits, and social assistance.

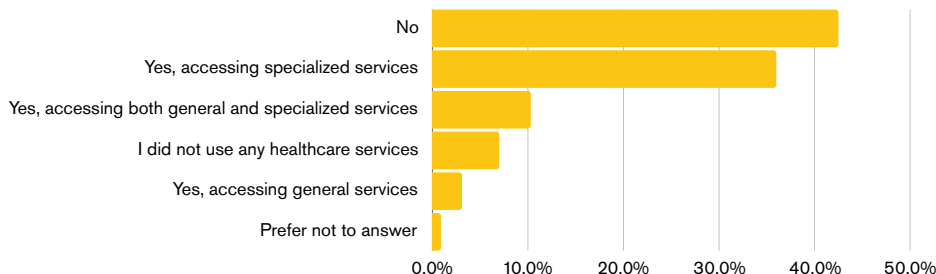
### Difficulties when applying or re-applying for PESEL



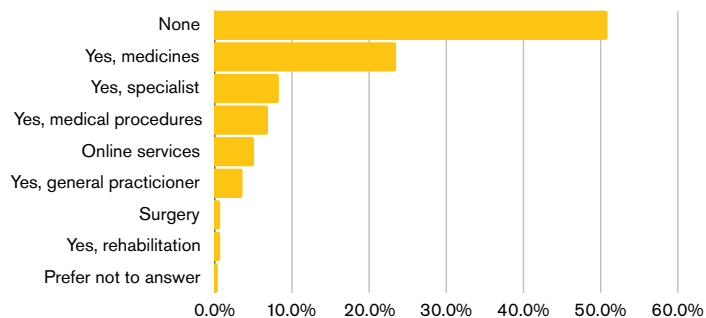
# SITUATION IN THE HOST COUNTRY

## Healthcare

Did you or any of HH members have difficulties accessing medial services in Poland?



Health services in Ukraine used by refugees, since they arrived in Poland



Over 42.5% of respondents reported no difficulties accessing medical services in Poland, but almost 50% still faced challenges with specialized services, general practitioners, specialists, or both.

More respondents in Q1 reported visits to Ukraine to access medical services (around 48%, compared to 23 % in Q4), citing perceived difficulties with access or service quality in Poland, especially linked to a long waiting time.

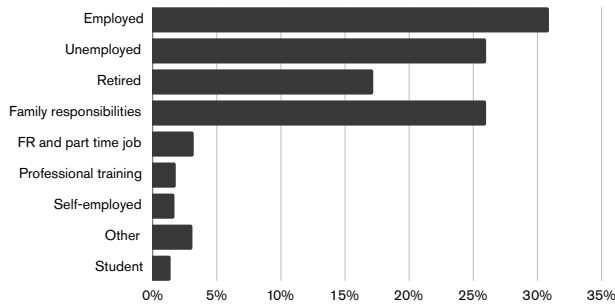
Notably, 23.5% of respondents visited Ukraine to purchase medicines.

# SITUATION IN THE HOST COUNTRY

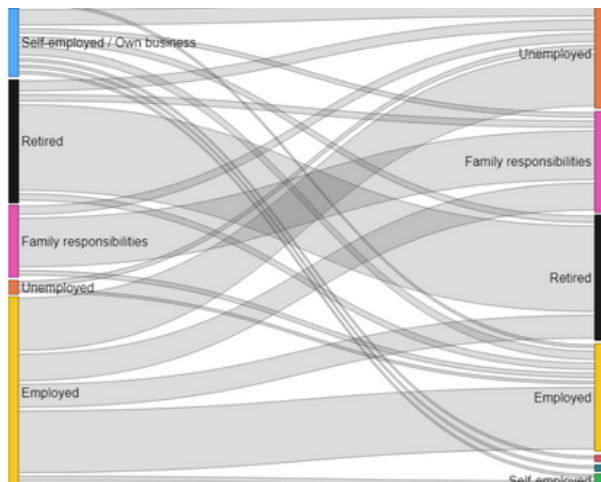
## Main activity and source of living

The data provides an insightful comparison of the main activities of Ukrainian refugees before leaving Ukraine and their current activities in Poland. The data shows the shift from employment in Ukraine to higher rates of unemployment and retirement in Poland.

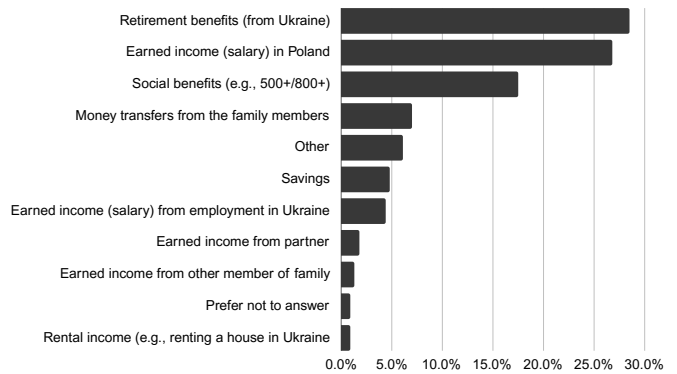
A significant portion (42.1%) of the respondents were employed before leaving Ukraine and 25.0% were retired. Only 1.8% were unemployed, and a negligible fraction (0.4%) supported family businesses. The largest group now identifies as retired (27.2%). Unemployment has risen sharply to 22.4%. Only 20.2% are employed, showing a significant decrease from the percentage who were employed in Ukraine.



According to the data, individuals who were employed in Ukraine have experienced various changes in Poland: 28 of them are now unemployed, 33 remain employed, 14 are primarily engaged in family responsibilities, and another 12 have retired. Those who were unemployed in Ukraine remain unemployed in Poland, with the exception of one person



The most indicated means of living are retirement benefits (from Ukraine) (28.5%). In second place, respondents identified earned income (salary) from employment in Poland (26.8%). Only in third place were social benefits, such as 500 plus (or 800 plus after recent changes), indicated. In previous cycles, benefits were ranked first.

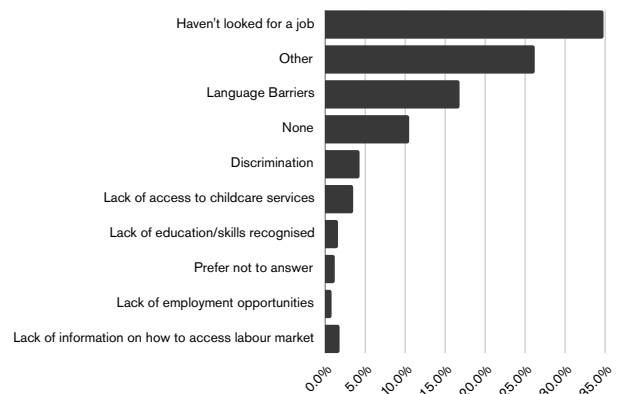


## Issues with finding employment

In some cases (34.8%), respondents indicated that they did not experience problems because they were not actively seeking employment. At the same time, language barriers remain one of the most significant challenges (16.8%). From KII interviews, it appears that the issue is not the quantity or accessibility of language courses.

In this cycle, only 12% indicated problems at the workplace related to the lack of contracts, disparities in wages or working conditions compared to others, and other forms of discrimination. In the previous monitoring cycle, this was reported by 60% of respondents.

## What issues did you faced while looking for a job?



# NEEDS

## Urgent needs

The most pressing needs in Q1 remain **medical treatment/items (14%), employment (13.5%), and material assistance (13.2%)**. **Accommodation ranks fifth at 10.8%**. In most cases, other needs were indicated (22.5%).

The comments from Ukrainian refugees gathered in the Protection Monitoring survey reveal a broad array of unmet needs that extend beyond basic necessities, encompassing various aspects of well-being, integration, and personal development:

- **Medical Services:** There is a high demand for specialized medical services, including access to specialists, medical examinations for children with autism, and treatments for conditions like epilepsy. Long wait times and high costs associated with healthcare services are significant concerns.
- **Language and Integration:** Polish language courses are frequently mentioned, indicating a need for more advanced courses (from B1 level).
- **Dental and Hearing Services:** Requests for dental treatment and hearing aids indicate specific health needs that are not being adequately met, possibly due to cost or availability issues.
- **Adequate Housing:** Many refugees express a need for stable housing and social housing options, highlighting issues with current accommodation such as inadequate facilities. This mainly concerns those staying in collective accommodation centers.
- **Private Tutors and Living Conditions:** Requests for private tutors for children and separate rooms with personal bathrooms reflect challenges in adapting to shared living spaces and a desire for more privacy and comfort.
- **Educational Support:** There are numerous calls for more educational activities for children, concerns about language barriers in schools, and the need for access to kindergartens and universities.
- **Job Training and Business Support:** Assistance with finding employment, starting a business, and additional qualifications courses are needed to improve job prospects and economic independence.
- **Financial Support:** There are requests for financial assistance to cover basic needs such as food, clothing, and diapers, as well as for specific expenses like buying tickets for evacuation or further migration (e.g., to Canada).
- **Documentation and Legal Help:** Needs for help with documentation translation, understanding local laws, and navigating the administrative procedures for refugees are crucial for ensuring their legal rights and access to services.
- **Mental Health Services:** Psychological support is crucial, as indicated by the request for psychologists and concerns about the stress of adjusting to new environments.
- **Recreational Activities:** The desire for cultural clubs, sports activities, and other social engagements suggests a need for opportunities to relax, socialize, and express themselves creatively

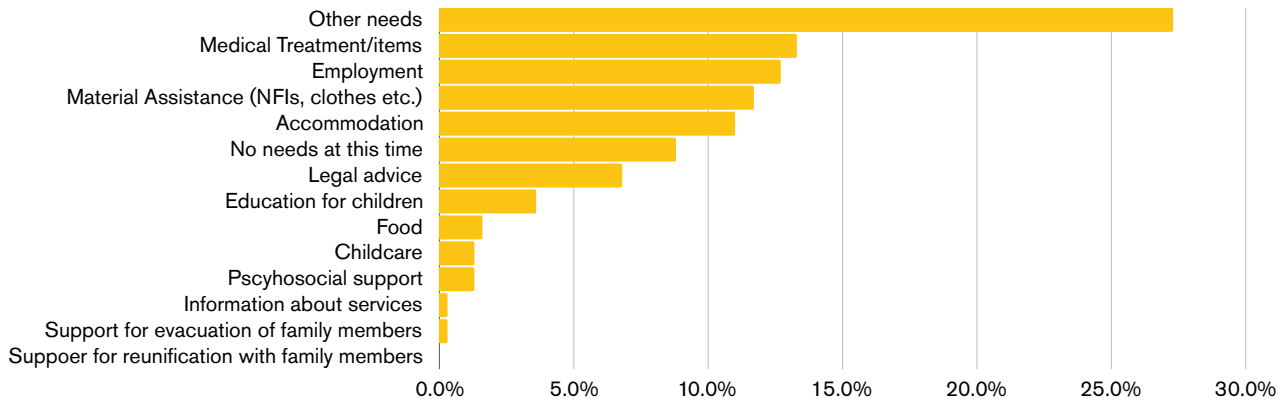
**“We need to change the housing, because my grandma is 85 years old, and I still can handle living here, but it is too hard for her” (Female, 35-49 years old, Warsaw)**

**“I need my family support” (Female, 35-49 years old, Katowice).**

**“I need to socialize more, because in the shelter there are only mothers with children, no friends, no sports, or any activities, like sport, badminton, competitions, something to not to think about bad things. Some kind of cultural club, where we could play guitar and sing. I have nowhere to release these emotions” (Female, 35-49 years old, Warsaw)**

# NEEDS

## Urgent needs



## Information needs

Continuity in informational needs is evident: along with information about employment and job offers (12.7%), financial support (13.3%), and accessing medical services (11%) being reported. However, the largest group of respondents indicated that they had no informational needs (27.3%).

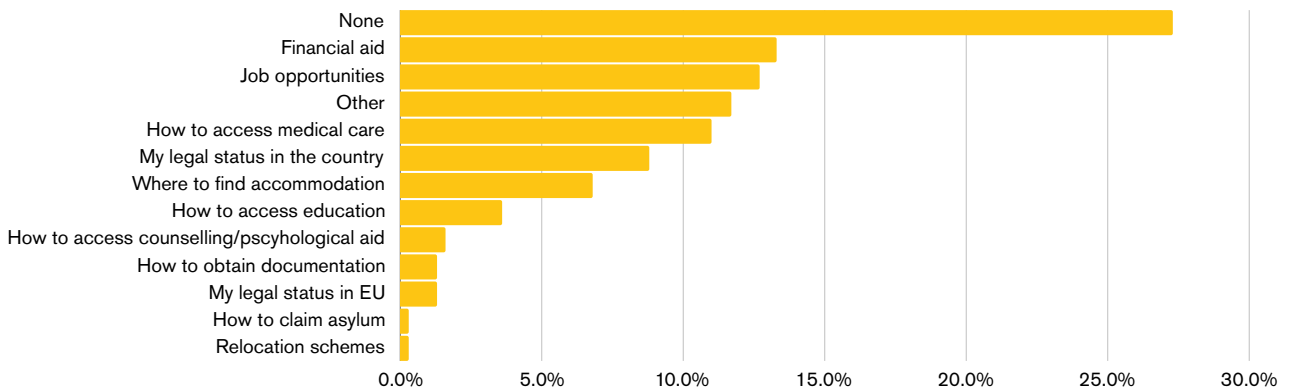
Expert interviews reveal that refugees still need information on obtaining disability certificates, the stages of recruitment for schools and universities, where to seek help in cases of domestic violence, and psychological support for children.

"People sometimes gently inquire about where to report domestic violence. Generally, however, they have become accustomed to the idea that if you have a problem, you have to solve it yourself and save yourself." (KII, local NGO, Gdynia).

In Q1, there was an increasing mention of a lack of knowledge regarding the changing special legislation and its impact on the situation of refugees in Poland. In 8 out of 13 expert interviews, greater interest in the legalization of stay was noted.

**"In the context of legalization, sometimes people don't know how to fill out the application for a Residence Card. Sometimes the process is already underway, but they don't know how to complete it. Additionally, it happens that people still don't know the difference between employment contracts, commission contracts, task-specific contracts, etc."** (KII, local NGO, Gdynia).

## Information needs



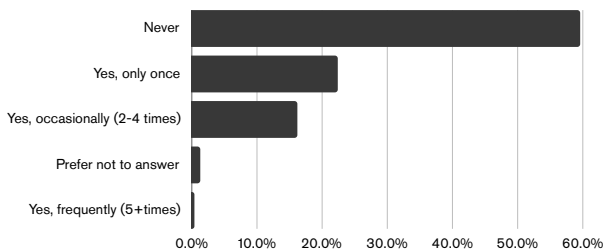


# SITUATION IN THE HOST COUNTRY

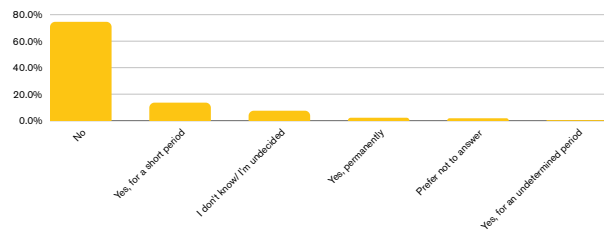
## Intentions and returns

Approximately 60% of respondents remained in Poland without embarking on a visit to Ukraine since their initial arrival. Around 22 % have gone back once, 16.2 % have visited 2-4 times (in Q4 it was 6%). The principal motivation behind these visits in Q1 was a need to visit relatives/friends, or to obtain documentation. Only 6 of refugees visited Ukraine to access healthcare in the last three months.

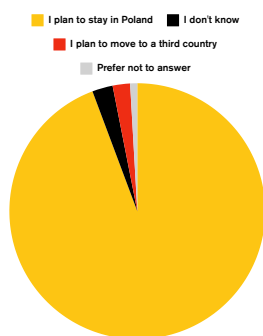
### Have you been back to Ukraine after you first left?



### Plans to go back to Ukraine in next 3 months



Currently, 74.6% of respondents don't plan to go back to Ukraine in the next three months, while around 14% aim for a short visit home. Among those not returning, 94.3% will stay in Poland.



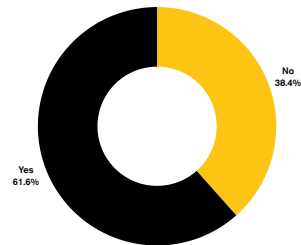
## Social cohesion

Close to 86% of respondents feel completely or mostly accepted by the local community. Notably there are significant tensions within the Ukrainian population in Poland. 36.4% have experienced conflicts or tensions within the Ukrainian community, mainly attributed to language spoken (23.4%).

Some respondents mentioned discrimination between refugees originating from different regions of Ukraine or the Roma community.

However, in most cases, tensions and disputes arose from communal living in collective accommodation, leading to resultant frustrations. Among these, a few instances of theft in collective accommodation centers were noted.

### Have you experienced any tensions/conflicts within the Ukrainian community in Poland?



**“Sometimes people say that I shouldn’t be here because I am from Lviv, but the missiles were flying above my head!” (Female respondent, Warsaw)**

„It is due to our daily lives in shelter” (Respondent, Warsaw).

## Safety

Nearly 91.6% of respondents indicated that they feel safe or very safe in Poland, while only 6% reported a lack of safety. Importantly, many respondents feel physically safe, citing the absence of military events as a key factor.

However, this physical safety is often accompanied by feelings of mental and emotional insecurity due to uncertainties about housing, legal status, employment, and access to healthcare.

Those who reported feeling unsafe expressed concerns about the future. Social insecurity is also a significant issue, especially for those living in hostels where the environment feels continuously unsafe.

Overall, while some refugees report feeling absolutely safe or generally comfortable, many express varying degrees of worry and unease about their current situation and the future.



# KEY FINDINGS

## Protection risk 1: The risk of eviction and/or homelessness

At the end of April 2024, it was estimated that there were about 40,000 people staying in collective accommodation centers in Poland, contracted by the municipal authorities or Voivodeships (UNHCR, 2024b).

Among monitoring participants, 43% indicated that they currently live in rented accommodation. The second largest group of respondents resides in collective accommodation centers (40%).

More than 37% of respondents do not have a specified time limit for how long they can stay in their current residence.

**However, nearly 37% can stay in their current place for no longer than six months. A significant portion of respondents indicated a period of less than three months (22.8%). Among these, over 84% are currently in collective accommodation centers. Furthermore, within this group, about 20% of respondents do not know how long they will be able to stay in their current location.**

Notably, even among those renting independently, over 10% state that they cannot stay for longer than six months. This means that even more stable forms of accommodation are marked by uncertainty and temporariness.

In 37% of cases, respondents are not currently paying for accommodation. None of the individuals currently residing in collective accommodation centers are paying for their stay.

Only half of the individuals renting a flat bear financial cost, while the rest benefit from support under the 40+ program. Changes or reductions in financial aid could lead to an increased risk of eviction and homelessness.

Regarding future housing plans, in the event of needing to change their current accommodation, 31.6% of respondents plan to rent a place elsewhere, around 21% do not know what they will do, 13.6% will look for other free accommodation, and nearly 17% declare that they will return to Ukraine.

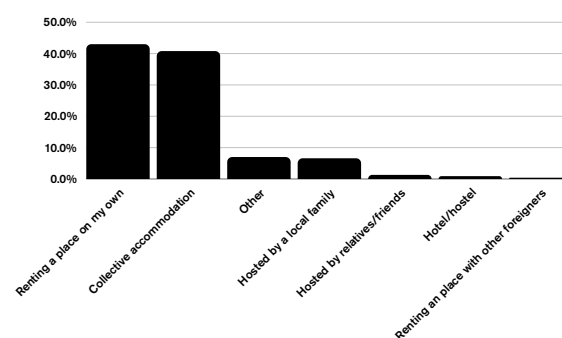
It is important to note the previous places of residence of these refugees before their forced migration to Poland. Among those declaring a return to Ukraine, five are from the Zaporizhzhia region, four from the Donetsk region, and five from Kherson.

The data reflects a high level of uncertainty among respondents, indicating significant risks related to housing instability, economic vulnerability, and a lack of long-term solutions. Reliance on free accommodation is marked by uncertainty, especially in the context of potential changes in funding and support programs for Ukrainian refugees.

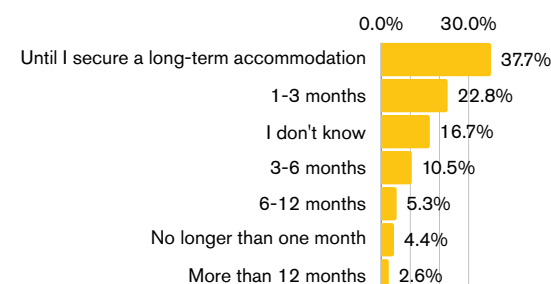
Only half of those renting accommodation pay rent independently. Changes or reductions in financial support programs (e.g., 40+) could lead to an increased risk of eviction and homelessness.

The precarious and temporary nature of current housing conditions poses serious threats to the rights and safety of refugees. This situation requires sustainable interventions to ensure stable, secure, and long-term housing solutions.

### Where do you live?



### How long can you stay in current accommodation?



# KEY FINDINGS

## Protection risk 1: The risk of eviction and/or homelessness

The data reflects a high level of uncertainty among respondents, indicating significant risks related to housing instability, economic vulnerability, and a lack of long-term solutions. Reliance on free accommodation is marked by uncertainty, especially in the context of potential changes in funding and support programs for Ukrainian refugees.

Only half of those renting accommodation pay rent independently. Changes or reductions in financial support programs (e.g., 40+) could lead to an increased risk of eviction and homelessness.

The precarious and temporary nature of current housing conditions poses serious threats to the rights and safety of refugees. This situation requires sustainable interventions to ensure stable, secure, and long-term housing solutions.

**"Housing issues are constantly swept under the rug. The closure of collective accommodation centers? Everything happens quietly. No one was evicted; suddenly, everyone decided to leave on their own – that's what we hear. Meanwhile, the fees for staying in these 'collectives' are absurd. Imagine someone living in a crowded dormitory, in a room with 8 other people, and being asked to pay 1800 PLN. The pressure to leave these places is increasing, along with the pressure to find alternative housing. There is also growing pressure on those addressing the issue of potential homelessness. Homelessness services avoid this problem 'like the plague.'" (Representative of the NGO Sector Coordination, Katowice, KII).**

The risk of homelessness and housing uncertainty has been highlighted over the past three IRC quarterly reports. Factors shaping this risk are also evident in this cycle of Protection Monitoring.

This is corroborated by data from UNHCR, IOM, and local organizations working for refugees and migrants in Poland.

Respondents in six expert interviews indicated that the situation in collective accommodation is becoming increasingly problematic. Issues include inadequate sanitary and living conditions and a lack of access to basic services and needs (such as the absence of hygiene products).

Another alarming signal is overcrowding in centers and the lack of privacy. Reports concerning collective accommodation also mention disproportionate costs for staying in these centers.

Prices range from 1600 PLN to 1800 PLN, according to respondents. This is confirmed by the Migration Consortium report, which highlights these disparities and challenges (Migration Consortium, 2023).

In addition to the pressure and challenges faced by refugees in collective accommodation, refugees are encountering obstacles in the rental market. High prices are a significant issue, which "create difficulties even for Polish citizens" (KII, representative of a local NGO, Warsaw). This problem particularly affects single mothers with children, who are often the sole breadwinners for their families, and elderly individuals living on pensions.

# KEY FINDINGS

## Protection risk 1: The risk of eviction and/or homelessness

“One mother was in such a difficult economic situation that she had to return to Ukraine. Another woman says she can't afford to rent an apartment and doesn't know what to do. We hear this from parents when they take their children out of school, they try their luck in Germany, and then they come back. It's very hard here with renting, and they face discrimination in the housing market.” (School authorities representative, Gdynia, KII).

“Let's not forget about access to housing. Those we work with at the university, who are still staying in our dormitories, would very much like to move out. But the prices in the real estate market are 'insurmountable.' They changed after the pandemic and the war. High rents are a significant obstacle for refugees.” (University representative, Katowice, KII).

Additionally, the availability of housing for people from Ukraine is becoming increasingly restricted due to discrimination. Media reports have highlighted advertisements clearly stating, “apartment for rent – not for Ukrainians”. This issue particularly affects Ukrainian Roma individuals (Amnesty International, 2023).

Respondents also highlight the lack of attention to this issue and the disregard for the importance of safe housing for refugees. There is inadequate communication regarding the closure of collective accommodation centers for refugees. One example that poses a significant risk is the sudden closure of a center for Roma refugees in Widna Góra (Kulczycka, 2024).

„Regarding the potential increase in homelessness among refugees – for which we must be prepared – we do have places available, but not for the thousands currently in collective accommodation. It's a difficult situation because it seems like the problem is disappearing from view. Those who can - return to Ukraine or go to the West. They disappear from our radar because there is no will or intention to look for them” (Social Care Point, Katowice, KII).

“There are two groups of homeless people we deal with: the homeless here and the homeless there, in Ukraine. We are preparing assistance for people in homelessness crisis along with other organizations. When distributing meals, we see that people from Ukraine are also showing up. Sometimes one meal here means 10 PLN less in expenses and significant savings for some of these people. Elderly individuals also come. We stay in contact with them through senior clubs. We also see Ukrainian refugees at medical points for the homeless. We are trying to do the same in Ukraine, where the problem is very visible.”

(NGO representative, Katowice, KII).

Experts and local authorities also point out that an additional obstacle is the lack of regulations regarding the responsibility for financing support for refugees in a homelessness crisis at the level of appropriate social care units.

“People in a homelessness crisis come to us from other cities, like Chorzów, for example.

We can't tell them to go back to their city. Someone, however, has to pay for this support. We are not going to send an invoice for 10 PLN to Ruda Śląska. So, we will cover it with our other funds. According to financing rules, from taxes and various other fees, the actions of social care regarding homelessness should serve the residents of Katowice, but they serve more than just them. I won't ask a person from Ukraine, in a difficult situation, whether they came for help from Kędzierzyn or Wrocław.

If they need help, we provide it”

(Local Authorities Representative, Katowice).

# KEY FINDINGS

## Protection risk 1: The risk of eviction and/or homelessness

There is a need for precise information about the individuals staying in collective accommodation centers, their capabilities, and available alternatives. Clear communication and an accurate picture of the situation are essential.

A significant challenge in preparing for the potential issue of homelessness among refugees is the lack of knowledge about the exact number of people residing in a given city.

"The problem is that we don't even know how many people are in each city, especially large ones like Warsaw or Katowice." (Social Care Point, Katowice, KII). This sentiment is echoed in interviews with local authorities, who also point to a lack of knowledge regarding the exact number of residents, including refugees.

**Ensuring appropriate housing conditions is protected at the international, European,<sup>4</sup> and national levels. Housing is recognized as a key element of the human rights protection system. The possibility of support in meeting the housing needs of Ukrainian citizens is also included in the Special Act (Art. 12).<sup>5</sup>**

Its first pillar is accommodation organized by public administration authorities. Under this law, the competencies of voivodes in providing assistance to Ukrainian citizens do not exclude the competencies of other authorities. The Migration Consortium report confirmed the pluralism in managing collective structures.

However, according to IRC monitoring respondents — from both the perspective of local authorities and local organizations — there is still a lack of proper information exchange and competencies in this area. This is supported by UNHCR data (2024), indicating the absence of a necessary governmental strategy for refugee housing.

UNHCR's findings also confirmed limited access to comprehensive information about the number of collective accommodation facilities and coordination processes. According to IRC data, the lack of communication also affects the refugees themselves.

Analysts and researchers highlight that support for finding housing in Poland has relied on two pillars: state structures and individuals and families hosting refugees, as well as local and international non-governmental organizations.

In the context of closing collective centers (both small ones housing up to 10 people and larger ones), plans to phase out the 40+ program, declining activity from international actors (which could mean reduced funding for local NGOs), and increasingly evident signs of discrimination and "fatigue" among the host society, the risk of homelessness and rental insecurity are becoming more apparent.

Moreover, the UNHCR data demonstrates the significant impact of accommodation rent support on the poverty rate among Ukrainian refugees. Without accommodation rent support, the poverty rate for refugees stands at 46%. However, when accommodation support is factored in as an indirect source of income, this rate drops to 29%.

This reduction highlights the crucial role of rental aid in alleviating poverty among refugees, allowing a substantial portion of low-income households to effectively live above the poverty line.

<sup>4</sup> This right is referred to in Art. 34 section 3 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

<sup>5</sup> The right to housing is legally protected under Polish law. According to Article 75, paragraph 1 of the Constitution of the Republic

of Poland of April 2, 1997, public authorities pursue policies to support the fulfillment of citizens' housing needs, particularly countering homelessness, promoting the development of social housing, and supporting citizen efforts to acquire their own homes. The protection of the right to housing in the Polish legal system also includes Article 75, paragraph 2, and Article 76 of the Constitution, which, unlike Article 75, paragraph 1, are not limited to Polish citizens. Therefore, these provisions can also protect Ukrainian citizens residing in Poland.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Protection risk 1: The risk of eviction and/or homelessness

In the latest IRC Child Protection Monitoring, children increasingly pointed to challenges associated with accommodation. Data analysis indicated a negative impact on the psycho-social condition of children, especially in collective housing.

Children reported overcrowding, inadequate sanitary conditions, and safety issues (e.g., shared showers for men, women, and children).

Frequent changes in accommodation, such as moving between different refugee centers due to closing structures, also negatively affected children. This creates risks not only for the mental health and well-being of refugee children but also for the continuity of their education.

Several places where children are housed and economic difficulties within families exclude them from additional activities offered by the Third Sector in Poland.

The development of the situation on the frontlines in Ukraine may also be a contributing risk factor here.

Data from monitoring conducted by IRC Ukraine indicate that changes on the front line over the last three months (particularly in the Donetsk area) have led to the forced displacement of over 12,000 people. Restrictions on access to compensation for real estate property located in Temporarily Occupied Territories increase the risk of homelessness and extreme poverty.

According to IRC Ukraine, this risk is exacerbated by the fact that many IDPs have lost or are at risk of losing their monthly financial support for IDPs. This is due to recent changes in Ukrainian legislation, which stipulate that support for internally displaced persons will only be available to those who are particularly vulnerable.



21

Photo: Tamara Kiptenko for the IRC

## THREAT'S EFFECT ON THE POPULATION

### The risk of eviction and/or homelessness

- Potential health risks from overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions, as well as consequences for the mental health and psycho-social well-being of refugees (especially in collective housing).
- Increased vulnerability to exploitation and abuse due to precarious living situations and the inability to maintain stable employment due to frequent changes in residence (or lack of housing).
- Disruption of children's education caused by changes in accommodation.
- Difficulty accessing legal and social services due to temporary residency status and frequent relocations.
- Discrimination in the housing market, particularly against vulnerable groups such as single mothers, people with disabilities, elderly individuals, and Roma refugees, limits their ability to secure stable housing.
- Erosion of social networks and community ties, exacerbating feelings of loneliness and marginalization.
- Newcomers without travel documents might face problems with registering in collective accommodations.
- Premature returns and additional pressure on housing market resulting in increased prices.

### Who is affected?

**Older refugees, people with disabilities and medical needs, single mothers, people without proper documentation, refugees from NGCA, people living in collective accommodations, children, and unaccompanied children, and Third Country Nationals, Roma community**



# CAPACITY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## The risk of eviction and/or homelessness

### Capacity<sup>6</sup>

<b>Capacity Contributions to Risk Severity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of affordable housing</li><li>• Financial aid reductions</li><li>• Rising rental costs</li></ul>
<b>Changes Influencing Response Strategy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 40+ program closure with possible effect over 50,000 persons (as of March 2024)</li><li>• Ongoing closures of collective accommodation centers and anticipated closure of small private collective accommodation centers with capacity below 10 persons as of July 2024<sup>7</sup></li><li>• Proposal to collect fees for stays in collective accommodation centers from social benefits such as 800+</li></ul>

There is a shortage of about 1.5 million affordable housing units in Poland. As Habitat for Humanity points out, some 14% of Poles live in substandard conditions, including 13.5 million people, living in overcrowded conditions. The lack of capacity of the housing market in Poland translates into challenges among the population of refugees (Habitat for Humanity, 2024).

In addition to the 40+ program (whose closure in June is mandated by the proposed amendment to the Special Law Act), support in finding housing and financing rentals is provided mainly by international and local organizations.

These NGOs and INGOs have launched various programs to mitigate these risks, including medium-term rental assistance, partial monthly rental subsidies, coverage of rental costs for the most vulnerable households, and support in structuring contracts and securing rental agreements. Habitat for Humanity has also created a pilot program of social rental agencies in Dąbrowa Górnicza.<sup>8</sup>

In response to disparities in per-person funding in collective accommodation centers and the lack of uniform standards for their operation, the Shelter, Housing, and Accommodation Sector, in collaboration with the Protection Sector, prepared technical guidelines in May 2023.<sup>9</sup>

The data underscores the importance of continued and enhanced support with accommodation expenses to improve the economic conditions of the most vulnerable Ukrainian refugees in Poland. It is necessary to ensure the continuity of collective accommodation, especially for the most vulnerable groups.

It is also essential to regulate issues related to the costs of accessing collective accommodation, particularly in the context of proposed changes and the collection of fees from benefits (such as 800+) for refugees with children.

Additionally, the specific situation of children with disabilities needs to be addressed with precise measures.

**Reductions in financial aid, closure of collective accommodation centers, and rising rental costs necessitate a strategic shift towards sustainable housing solutions, enhanced coordination among support mechanisms, and targeted interventions for the most vulnerable groups.**

<sup>6</sup> Capacity are the resources and capabilities that are available to individuals, households, and communities to cope with a threat, or to resist or mitigate the impact of a threat. Resources can be material or can be found in the way a community is organized. Capabilities can include specific skill sets or the ability to access certain services or the ability to move freely to a safer place.

<sup>7</sup> As per UNHCR data there were 357 collective accommodation centers with capacity below 10 persons in December 2023. Their closure may affect around 2,000 persons.

<sup>8</sup> See more about the programs here: [Habitat for Humanity, Ukraine 2 Year Report 0.pdf](#); [See more about Shelter and Accommodation Sector in Poland: Document - Poland: Shelter, Housing & Accommodation Sector - Factsheet as of January 2024 \(ENG\) \(unhcr.org\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> Regional Refugee Response (2023). Standardy dotyczące ośrodków zbiorowego zakwaterowania – wytyczne techniczne dla Polski.

# CAPACITY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## The risk of eviction and/or homelessness

### Recommendations

IRC maintains all recommendations presented in the previous Q4 (2023) report. Additionally:

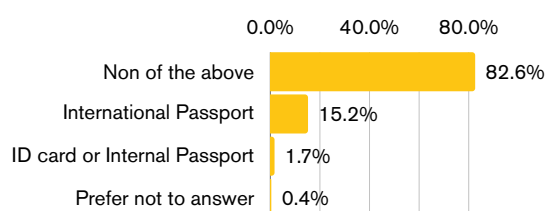
<b>Government</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ensure continuity in the collective accommodation system: Integrate existing structures into the programs covered by the new version of the so-called "Special Act." Transition from the 40+ projects to ensure dignified and stable housing conditions for refugees currently in the program.</li><li>• Implement and enforce anti-discrimination practices in the housing market to prevent biases against refugees.</li><li>• Conduct thorough monitoring of the number of people in the 40+ program and those in local and international organization programs providing accommodation.</li><li>• Create a centralized, comprehensive database of the number and types of collective accommodation places in Poland.</li><li>• To regulate and oversee the minimum conditions in collective accommodation.</li></ul>
<b>Humanitarian sector</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Advocate for the rights of refugees in housing and address issues of homelessness through collaborative efforts with local authorities and housing providers.</li><li>• Continue monitoring the situation of refugees in collective accommodation and strengthen the referral system within existing programs supporting refugee housing.</li><li>• Introducing cash for rent programs for the most vulnerable groups.</li><li>• Provide information and legal assistance for refugees on rental market.</li><li>• Providing specific training of all staff of collective accommodation, including security personnel, on prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, and gender-based violence core concepts, ensuring they are able to mitigate risks of violence and respond to disclosure when violence occur.</li><li>• Conducting systematic safety audits, and designing specific, time-bound, and budgeted risk mitigation action plan.</li></ul>
<b>Donors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Invest in projects that aim to increase the availability of affordable housing.</li><li>• Fund monitoring of the situation of refugees in collective accommodation and those who are at risk of homelessness.</li></ul>



# KEY FINDINGS

## Protection risk 2: Denied or Restricted Access to Legal Identity

Most respondents (83%) did not report any issues with missing documents. However, over 15% of monitoring participants do not have an international passport. Among those who indicated an inability to obtain these documents in Poland, nearly 86% declared that they would not be able to secure this form of documentation. Additionally, in 14% of cases, limited possibilities were related to obtaining identity cards and internal passports.



According to UNHCR data supplementing IRC Protection Monitoring (PM) information, nearly one-quarter of refugees still lack key documents such as biometric passports (UNHCR, 2024).

In a previous IRC report on monitoring access to legal aid, one of the most common unresolved legal issues was access to international passports.<sup>10</sup> Financial barriers are one of the obstacles to obtaining documentation. UNHCR data confirms particularly complex cases of refugees from eastern Ukraine who face difficulties in accessing status, documentation, and the risk of statelessness.

Data from IRC's legal service partners indicate an increasing number of inquiries about residency legalization or questions related to applying for international protection in Poland.

Moreover, considering the predominance of women with children in the monitoring data, limitations in access to civil documents also threaten children, creating risks of statelessness and exclusion from support systems, basic services, and social, political, and economic life.

Missing documentation is particularly significant for men, given the changes in Ukrainian legislation regarding mobilization laws. The forced migration of war refugees from Ukraine was burdened with identity document shortages, as these were often left behind or destroyed during their journey. This has overwhelmed foreign diplomatic missions and Ukrainian services. To address this, on June 10, 2022, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine launched an experimental project to issue passports for Ukrainians abroad through foreign branches of the State Enterprise "Document."

- **Movement Restrictions for Ukrainian Men:** Since February 2022, Ukrainian men aged 18-60 have faced movement restrictions, with few exceptions (e.g., those with disability certificates). During the reporting period the Ukrainian government initiated additional restrictions. Specifically, the new regulations aim to manage mobilization and cross-border movement, particularly by limiting access to consular services and driving licenses if military records are not updated. Notwithstanding the Ukrainian Parliament passed a law concerning military service, mobilization, and military registration on April 11, 2024, the intended legislative changes had already their effects on the documentation of the Ukrainian male population abroad.

<sup>10</sup> In 7 cases, the individuals were from Kharkiv, 6 from Kherson, and 4 each from Donetsk and Kyiv.

# KEY FINDINGS

## Protection risk 2: Denied or Restricted Access to Legal Identity

- **Increased Demand for Documentation Services:** Since December 2023, there has been a rise in the demand for documentation services. Additionally, on April 23, document issuance at SE "Document" was suspended for technical reasons, including the acceptance of applications for the renewal and extension of driving licenses in Warsaw. Subsequently, on April 24, the Cabinet of Ministers suspended passport issuance for Ukrainian men aged 18-60 abroad. As of April 25, 2024, Ukrainian state services abroad did not provide any form of identity documentation for this group, except for return certificates to Ukraine, known as "white passports." Lately the issuance of documents was renewed however from now on, to receive any consular services, men aged 18-60 must submit their military registration document in paper or electronic form with some minor exceptions. The issuance of military registration documents was not available abroad during the preparation of this report and required travel to Ukraine.

Changes in mobilization laws may also negatively impact the situation of female refugees and children in Poland. Denying legal identity to men in the host country can affect their access to basic rights and employment opportunities.

This can shift the economic burden and responsibility solely onto women, making them more vulnerable to previously identified risks, such as access to dignified housing and exploitation-free work.

This situation could lead to an increase in international protection requests from Ukrainian men in Poland. It is crucial to ensure that the system for processing these requests is adequately prepared to handle the increased volume, guaranteeing the full rights of Ukrainian refugees.

University representatives interviewed expressed concerns about the recruitment of Ukrainian students in Poland. "These are our students; we fear their recruitment. We feel like this is the calm before the storm. Everyone is on edge, expecting something to happen suddenly. We worry that our future potential students will have limited access to documents, which means limited access to the education system. We need to find alternative solutions" (KII, representative of a higher education institution, Katowice).

Additionally, there are increasing problems with the legality of residence in Poland. Several KII respondents noted growing issues in obtaining residence cards.

**"People come and say they didn't get their residence card again. So, we reach out to the authorities, the dedicated officials, as a widely respected institution – and nothing. Then we hear that companies suddenly hire 30 welders from Ukraine, and they all get residence cards immediately. Are we dealing with a black market, privileged pathways for issuing these cards? Connections between employment agencies and officials? Why isn't there equal access for everyone? Or are these people being hired without residence cards? All of this raises our doubts"** (KII, representative of a higher education institution, Katowice)

# KEY FINDINGS

## Protection risk 2: Denied or Restricted Access to Legal Identity

"Legalizing residence is becoming an increasing problem. We don't have a dramatic number of reports, as our programs aren't dedicated to this type of support, but we certainly see ongoing discussions, doubts, and problems related to this" (KII, representative of a local NGO, Gdynia).

"We hear discussions about changes in the law, in access to legal status. The biggest risk and challenge is to ensure that we don't end up in a situation where we invited 2 million people, and due to some foolish regulation, we make them 'illegal.'

They will fall out of the system, and problems will start for people outside the system, with no support. Working 'illegally,' no access to basic support" (KII, social care representative, Warsaw).

States, under international obligations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are required to grant equal rights to individuals of all genders. They should not arbitrarily or discriminatorily deny any person or group the possibility of legal identity for political or any other reasons. In recognizing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, states should refrain from interfering with legal identity and must prevent statelessness and lack of identity.

During the monitoring period, IRC's legal partners noted an increase in inquiries regarding the amendment of the so-called Special Act.

Specifically, refugees expressed concerns about verifying identity in the PESEL register using valid travel documents, especially if the PESEL number was issued based on other documents, such as a birth certificate

Elderly and financially disadvantaged groups of Ukrainian population in Poland as well as refugees arriving from temporarily occupied territories may face significant obstacles in accessing costly SE Dokument services or consulates while applying for valid travel documents needed to ensure their continuous protection.

The risk may be aggravated by irregular border crossing from Ukraine by the male population escaping mobilization. Protection Monitoring conducted by IRC Ukraine highlights risks associated with restrictions on free movement and forced delegation to military recruitment offices. It points to inequalities in access to free movement.

According to the report, this significantly impacts the presence and mobility of men in urban areas and especially in rural regions. The monitoring indicated that in areas such as the Mykolaiv region and government-controlled areas in the Zaporizhzhia and Donetsk regions, conscription-age men are no longer observed.

One of the consequences has been the halting of certain service sectors due to a lack of specialists. In many cases, women had to take over these jobs. In relation to Poland, regular reports from Ukrainian and Polish border-guard services indicate attempts by conscription-age Ukrainian men to cross the border irregularly.

11 Article 1, 2, 6, 7 and 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 16, 24 (2) and 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, CRC Art. 3, 7 & 8, 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons, Articles 25 and 27; 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, Articles 1-4; ICRMW Art. 29; General Comment Number. 6 Treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin; CEDAW General recommendation No. 32 on the gender-related dimensions of refugee status, asylum, nationality, and statelessness of women.

# THREAT'S EFFECT ON THE POPULATION

## Denied or Restricted Access to Legal Identity

- Limited access to international passports and other key identification documents poses a significant risk of statelessness,
- Lack of legal identity restricts access to basic services, including healthcare, education, and social support systems, leading to marginalization and social exclusion.
- Without proper documentation, refugees face significant challenges in securing legal employment, which can result in economic dependency and exploitation (labour exploitation, forced labour and trafficking)
- The cost of obtaining legal documents can be prohibitive, exacerbating economic vulnerability and preventing refugees from accessing necessary identification.
- The uncertainty and stress associated with lacking legal identity and the constant threat of statelessness can lead to severe mental health issues.
- The ongoing legal and administrative hurdles create long-term uncertainty for refugees, impacting their ability to integrate into the host community and secure a stable future.

## Who is affected?

**Men, especially in conscription age, women, older refugees, people with disabilities and medical needs, people without proper documentation, women living in unstable or collective accommodations, children, and Third Country Nationals**



Photo: Tamara Kiptenko for the IRC

# CAPACITY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## The risk of eviction and/or homelessness

### Capacity

<b>Capacity Contributions to Risk Severity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Financial barriers</li><li>• Bureaucratic inefficiencies</li><li>• Rising rental costs</li><li>• Support from local and international NGOs in free legal aid</li><li>• Community support in sharing information and rising awareness</li></ul>
<b>Changes Influencing Response Strategy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Suspension of documentation services for male population and limited capacity of consulates</li><li>• Amendments extending temporary protection and introducing new requirements for PESEL UKR</li><li>• Ongoing discussions with new government and proposed amendments of the Special Act</li></ul>

Financial barriers, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and recent legislative changes have exacerbated the severity of risks, necessitating a strategic response that includes increased funding for legal aid, streamlined documentation processes, and enhanced coordination among all stakeholders.

Any changes in capacity, such as the suspension or resumption of document issuance services, significantly influence the response strategy. Ensuring continuous and equitable access to documentation services is critical to reducing the risk of statelessness and ensuring refugees' integration into the host community.

Ongoing discussions and legislative adjustments, such as the amendment of the Special Law, show potential for systemic improvements but require effective implementation and monitoring to ensure equitable access.



Photo: Tamara Kiptenko for the IRC

# CAPACITY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## The risk of eviction and/or homelessness

### Recommendations

IRC maintains all recommendations presented in the previous Q4 (2023) report. Additionally:

<b>Government</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ensure flexibility in the enforcement of the requirement to present a valid travel document in order to access or confirm temporary protection status and to qualify for a temporary residence permit.</li><li>• Simplify and expedite the process for refugees with heightened vulnerability (e.g. arrivals from occupied territories) who may face additional barriers in renewing or replacing documentation to obtain essential legal documents and access temporary protection services, even without valid Ukrainian travel documents.</li><li>• Provide clear guidelines and increase the availability of information about legal documentation requirements and procedures among refugees in the language they understand.</li></ul>
<b>Humanitarian sector</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Offer legal aid services to assist refugees in navigating the complexities of obtaining legal documentation.</li><li>• Continue monitoring of legal needs and legal aid assessments.</li><li>• Establish, support, and strengthen mobile legal services to reach refugees in remote or underserved areas.</li></ul>
<b>Donors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support initiatives that offer free or subsidized legal services to refugees.</li><li>• Support programs to cover the costs of issuing travel documents to refugees.</li></ul>



# EFFECTS ON THE POPULATION

## Who is affected?

**Women, older refugees, people with disabilities and medical needs, people without proper documentation, women living in unstable or collective accommodations, beneficiaries of 40+ program and newcomers, women with HH members with disability, children, and unaccompanied children, Third Country Nationals, refugees from NGCA, Roma community, men of conscription age**

In this cycle IRC PM conducted an additional analysis of older refugees at risk.

### Older Refugees

"Senior citizens are forced to start a new life after 60. They don't like change. They feel comfortable in their own homes, with their radio, TV, cake, and coffee. They have thousands of problems but keep them hidden within four walls. We don't see them. Going out to meet people creates problems; integration among seniors is very difficult. They don't know the language, and after relocation, the language often becomes their only home" (KII, NGO representative, Katowice).

Approximately 24% of the Ukrainian population is aged 60 or older, making them the most affected by humanitarian crises. Studies from conflict-affected areas since 2014 indicate that 70% of older people have at least one chronic disease, 33-42% suffer from serious psychological distress, and 60% have been displaced. Non-communicable diseases account for 91% of total deaths (Amorcida, 2022).

The forced migration from Ukraine is considered one of the "oldest in history" due to the high number of elderly individuals compelled to leave Ukraine. Currently, it is estimated that over 70,000 elderly refugees (aged 60 and above) are residing in Poland (UNHCR, 2024).

In this cycle of Protection Monitoring, 80 respondents were individuals aged 60 and above. Half (51.3%) of these individuals reside in collective accommodation centers in Poland. Nearly 40% have disabilities, and 75% of those over 60 reported having chronic illnesses.

Most of these individuals sustain themselves on pensions. In the 60-69 age group, 18% of the refugees indicated employment and supporting themselves with their salary.<sup>12</sup>

Among the main needs, older refugees primarily indicated the need for access to healthcare and medication (23.6%). Additionally, they mentioned material support (18.1%) and other needs.

Under "other needs," Ukrainian refugees over 60 expressed the need for financial and material assistance. This included financial help for basic needs, food, clothing, and specific items like glasses or blood pressure monitors. They noted that their pensions are insufficient to cover the cost of medications. They also highlighted significant difficulties with housing conditions, seeking separate rooms with private bathrooms and better living conditions, including social housing and improved conditions in collective accommodation centers.

Furthermore, they emphasized the need for legal assistance and support with documentation, including help with legal issues and document translation. Older individuals also expressed concerns about changes in their legal status after losing UKR status.

Overall, these collective needs highlight the diverse challenges faced by older individuals, requiring comprehensive support in financial, material, educational, housing, and legal aspects.

12 For more information on the situation of elderly people who remained in Ukraine, refer to the OHCHR report (2023) available here: 2023-HRMMU-Briefing-Note-Older-Persons-ENG.pdf (ohchr.org)

# EFFECTS ON THE POPULATION

## Older Refugees

This is reflected in the challenges related to accessing healthcare. Among individuals over 60, 40% utilized some form of medical support in Ukraine (such as specialist visits or, in most cases, access to medication).

Reasons for returning to Ukraine for healthcare included the lack of availability of specialized medical services in Poland or excessively long waiting periods. Refugees also cited cheaper medication prices in Ukraine. In several expert interviews (n=3), barriers to accessing oncology treatment were noted.

This aligns with data from HelpAge (2023) in their report on the situation of older Ukrainians in Poland. As indicated, older refugees face financial insecurity and uncertainty about their future. Low pensions from Ukraine exacerbate economic insecurity among older Ukrainians.<sup>13</sup> They also encounter numerous obstacles in accessing healthcare, services, and information.

The UNHCR report also highlights these challenges, not only in Poland but across the entire region hosting refugees. Ensuring long-term and stable housing remains a significant challenge, as confirmed by IRC data.

The provided data, supplemented by expert interviews, suggest a range of vulnerabilities within this group of refugees. In 11 KII, this group was recognized as one of the most vulnerable and challenged in Poland.

"Among the elderly, there is an additional barrier — informational exclusion. Not everyone, in fact rarely anyone, uses Telegram or WhatsApp. They miss all these support messages. Information escapes them. This must be considered when designing aid programs." (KII, social care representative, Warsaw).

"We are well aware of the difficult situation faced by older individuals in Poland. What more can we say about the situation of elderly refugees, especially those who are here alone? We have some funds for helping refugees, but mainly for those of working age. We all know how much we like to mix international protection with work utility. And Ukrainian seniors live in small spaces, mostly in collective accommodations; their conditions are heart-wrenching. But if we provide nothing for Polish seniors, how can we provide for Ukrainian ones?" (KII, social care representative, Katowice).

**"Everyone talks about the moment and need for integration, often understood as integration into the labor market. If refugees are employed, they are often considered integrated — they speak the language, earn money, and pay taxes. But what about the integration of older individuals who will never be employed in Poland? What do their adaptation processes look like? Are we considering their language barriers, their extremely low pensions, and the fact that many are here alone, in collective accommodation centers?" (KII, social care representative, Warsaw).**

Respondents also pointed to insufficient and dwindling funding for programs specializing in support for the elderly. Studies conducted by HelpAge and PCPM confirm IRC's findings regarding the lack of initiatives aimed at integrating older Ukrainians with their Polish peers. Corresponding results are presented in scientific studies focusing on displaced elderly individuals. "Although older people are recognized as a particularly vulnerable group during humanitarian crises and displacement, they are traditionally not treated as a priority in aid provision" (Armocida, 2022).

<sup>13</sup> In 2014, Ukraine and Poland signed a social security agreement granting Ukrainians working in Poland the same pension rights as Polish citizens, allowing for the mutual accumulation of social insurance periods to qualify for a pension. The primary source of income for older refugees is Ukrainian pensions, usually accessible via ATM cards linked to Ukrainian bank accounts. Issues arise for refugees who received pensions by mail or left their ATM cards in Ukraine. Reissuing cards or changing the method of fund transfer may require travel to Ukraine, which poses additional risks. Major uncertainties affect those who have not accumulated the required number of contributory years and delays in processing pension documents for those who reached retirement age while in Poland (ActionAge, 2023).



## EFFECTS ON THE POPULATION

### Older Refugees

Older individuals also face obstacles within the social care system. Bureaucratic issues hinder them from receiving benefits for the elderly. "The average current pension for these individuals is 300-400 PLN per month" (KII, social care representative, Gdynia).

#### Intersectionality of age and the disability

The high percentage of individuals with disabilities and chronic illnesses among older refugees exacerbates their difficult situation.

"There is a lack of bilateral exchanges between Ukraine and Poland. Although the system is becoming stronger in certifying disabilities, older individuals are still particularly vulnerable to difficulties in this area. They need documents, certifications, and knowledge on how to obtain them" (KII, social care representative, Gdynia).

Data from IRC partners indicate a significant need for legal support among individuals over 60, particularly women. One of the areas requiring support is the so-called support benefits.<sup>14</sup>

The needs of refugees in this area concern issues related to obtaining disability certifications and the resulting financial benefits. Older individuals with disabilities particularly require support in formulating formal appeals against negative decisions. In some cases, families still need assistance in applying for caregiving or nursing allowances.

The vulnerable economic situation of older individuals, lack of language proficiency, lack of stable housing and support networks, along with bureaucratic obstacles in accessing social care and the difficulty in accessing healthcare (especially for those with disabilities and chronic illnesses), significantly worsens the situation of older refugees in Poland.

**"The most vulnerable are older individuals and those with disabilities, and even more so when these traits combine. They cannot work; they came to save their lives. We can try to help them, but they are overlooked 'because they do not contribute to the state budget.' An even greater challenge is when older individuals with disabilities are in collective accommodation, though it is worst when they are left on their own" (KII, social care representative, Warsaw).**

14 Changes implemented from January 1st of this year have affected adults with disabilities, who now require a decision determining their level of support to apply for benefits. Caregivers of these individuals have been deprived of the right to caregiving allowances, and dependent individuals cannot obtain support benefits due to the lack of eligibility for those under temporary protection in Poland. However, experts noted a positive change: the caregiver of a minor with a disability can now work and receive the caregiving allowance simultaneously.



Photo: Tamara Kiptenko for the IRC

## THREAT'S EFFECT ON THE POPULATION of older refugees

- Insufficient pensions and inability to work lead to persistent poverty and dependence on aid.
- Vulnerability to financial exploitation due to economic dependency and lack of legal protection.
- Overcrowded and poor living conditions in collective accommodations exacerbate health and safety risks.
- Inadequate and temporary housing solutions increase the risk of homelessness and unstable living conditions.
- Language barriers and social isolation hinder integration, leading to increased mental health issues and reduced quality of life.
- Elderly refugees often face neglect in policy and support programs, leading to insufficient aid and protection.
- Bureaucratic hurdles and lack of tailored support for elderly refugees result in difficulties in obtaining necessary documentation and social services.

### Recommendations

#### Government

- Recognize that the average Ukrainian pension is insufficient for financial self-sufficiency in Poland. Solutions may include targeting those in greatest need through the social protection system, or regulations in Ukrainian pensions in relation to Polish minimum pension.
- Separate aid conditions from integration into the labor market or school, considering that these conditions do not apply to older individuals. Allow older Ukrainian refugees to legalize their stay without the work/study requirements under the Special Act. Communicate the adopted solution in Ukrainian and in accessible formats. Provide assistance to apply for residency permit, if only online application will be available.
- Open existing policies and programs for older people in Poland to include older Ukrainian refugees. Support Polish senior organizations to engage older Ukrainians in their activities.
- Regularly collect, analyze, and report data on the situation of refugees, including older people, disaggregated by age, gender, and disability.

#### Humanitarian sector

- Continue and strengthen support in collective shelters, including psychosocial support, information sessions, and leisure activities for older Ukrainian refugees.
- Provide a support through dedicated assistants to help vulnerable older refugees access public institutions and services, including medical appointments and other institutional contacts.

#### Donors

- Provide financial support to ensure inclusive and sustainable solutions for elderly in Poland, including the integration of older Ukrainian refugees, their long-term accommodation and access to the healthcare.

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