



2024 April
June

PROTECTION MONITORING REPORT



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Cover description

Author of the photo: Oleksandr Rupeta for the IRC

Novyi Burluk village, Kharkiv Oblast, Ukraine. Tamara, IRC content and digital officer, Ukraine's crisis, walks towards the village House of Culture. The building was heavily bombed. In Novyi Burluk village, the work of the CP team is in high demand. IRC is the first humanitarian organization that works with kids in the village. The village's House of Culture and school were destroyed. All fields and forests are mined. Therefore, kids don't have a place where to gather and socialize with each other. CP session provided a rare occasion for kids to do so.
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As of the end of June 2024, there are approximately 6 021 400 refugees from Ukraine in Europe. Around 80% of refugees consist of women and children. There are currently about 957 000 refugees registered in Poland.

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.

In this quarter, the IRC's Protection Monitoring (PM) Report identifies critical protection risks related to accommodation, social exclusion and poverty, and the specific vulnerabilities of mothers with children with disabilities, as well as children and teenagers particularly at risk. Additionally, risks related to labour exploitation and mental health are highlighted.

- Protection Risk 1: Risk of eviction and homelessness
- Protection Risk 2: Risk of restrained access to basic services and assistance
- People at risk: mothers with children with disabilities
- People at risk: children and teenagers

Legal Environment

This quarter has seen several significant legislative changes impacting both refugees and the host community. These include:

- New standards for the protection of children, referred to as the "Kamilek Act"
- Prolonging Temporary Protection and Simplifying Temporary Residency Procedures
- Changes to the Special Act concerning Ukrainians under temporary protection in Poland and
 - Particularly the provisions about the compulsory schooling starting in Polish educational system in September 2024
 - and the discontinuation of the "40+" program
- New legal provisions for people with disabilities

Kamilek Act and protection of children

The Act of **July 28, 2023**, amending the Family and Guardianship Code and certain other laws, introduced measures aimed at enhancing the **protection of children** from harm within the Polish legal framework. The law also applies to all other institutions and locations where children are present, including temporary refugee accommodations and collective housing centers.³

By August 15, all entities working or in contact with children, including educational institutions such as schools and kindergartens, must implement newly established standards for the protection of children. Developed by the Ministry of Justice, these standards are intended to guide all child-facing institutions in creating binding documents that address the identification and response to child abuse.

The guidelines provide procedures for managing suspected cases of abuse, establish principles for safe interactions between school staff and students, and outline a process for implementing response protocols including mandatory reporting to relevant authorities. Additionally, they include a list of resources for guardians and children who need support. Failure to comply with these requirements by relevant institutions by the deadline will result in penalties.



Photo: Tamara Kiptenko for the IRC

Prolonging Temporary Protection and Simplifying Temporary Residency Procedures

The Amendment will extend temporary protection from June 30, 2024, to September 2025 (the EU directive extends it to March 4, 2025). Moreover, all Ukrainian citizens in Poland who had a PESEL UKR, will be able to apply for a 3-year temporary residence in Poland through a simplified procedure. This will grant them access to the labor market and allow for business ventures in Poland. However, it will not provide access to healthcare and other services guaranteed under temporary protection.⁴

Changes in the Special Act

As of July 1, new regulations under the amended Act on assistance to Ukrainian citizens have come into effect, introducing several key changes:

- **Extension of Protection:** Temporary protection for Ukrainian citizens and their families is extended until September 30, 2025, along with the legality of stay for those who arrived before the war.⁵
- **Benefit Changes:** The one-time arrival benefit of 300 PLN and the "40+" accommodation benefit are discontinued.
- **Healthcare Professions:** Special regulations allowing Ukrainian doctors, dentists, nurses, and psychologists to practice in Poland are extended.
- **PESEL UKR Requirements:** Immediate application for PESEL UKR upon arrival in Poland is now mandatory, with identity confirmation required through a valid travel document (previously it was 30 days).
- **Accommodation Fees:** New rules are introduced regarding fee exemptions for certain individuals in collective accommodation. Additionally, all collective accommodations must be registered in voivodeships, which will issue decisions on whether they can continue operating or need to be closed. Individuals who are forced to leave their current accommodation "might" receive support.

- **Family Reunification:** Those with PESEL UKR can now apply for temporary residence for family reunification, with a simplified application process available.
- **Status Restoration:** There is now a possibility to restore UKR status based on justifiable circumstances beyond leaving Poland for over 30 days.
- **Parental Benefit:** The payment of the 800+ parental benefit will be tied to fulfilling compulsory schooling within Polish educational system requirement starting June 1, 2025.
- **Compulsory schooling:** for Ukrainian children in Poland. From September 1, 2024, children of Ukrainian refugees will be subject to the obligation of one-year preschool preparation, compulsory education, and compulsory learning in the Polish education system, just like Polish students.

New legal provisions for people with disabilities

The amendment to the Act on Vocational and Social Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons entered into force on August 3, 2024. The status of disabled persons will be maintained during the waiting period for a new certificate, but only until March 31, 2025. This extension is contingent upon the timely submission of an application for the new certificate.⁶

4. More information on the recent changes in Special Act: Centrum Pomocy Prawnej im. Haliny Nieć » Najnowsze zmiany do Ustawy o pomocy obywatelom Ukrainy (pomocprawna.org)

5. Read more: IRC in Poland: Impact of New Changes to Refugee Hosting Laws Need to Be Monitored | International Rescue Committee (IRC)

6. Although these changes go beyond the monitoring period, it was deemed worthwhile to include them in the report due to the rapidly changing context and the significance of the changes in relation to the identified risks. See more: Council of Ministers in favour of extending the validity of disability certificates and certificates on the degree of disability - Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy - Gov.pl website (www.gov.pl).

In this cycle, the IRC Protection Monitoring Team conducted **437 surveys** with refugees over the age of 18. Additionally, as part of the qualitative research component, **14 expert interviews (KIIs)** were conducted. The monitoring was carried out in three cities: Warsaw, Katowice, and Gdynia. However, more than 60% 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.

1 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.

2 Sampling

Convenience, non-probabilistic sampling was used.

3 Methods

Mixed approach (qualitative methods together with quantitative ones).

- Individual Household Survey
- Semi-structured interviews (KIIs)
- Participant observation
- Desk Review
- Thematic and statistical analysis including qualitative coding

4 Limitations

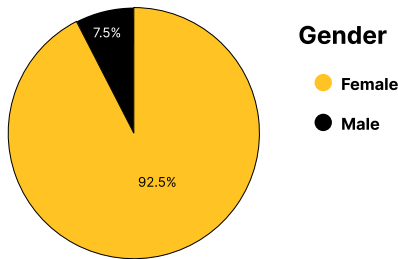
Participants are identified in the selected locations and asked for their consent to be interviewed using a harmonized questionnaire. The results presented in this report should be interpreted according to the limitations of the methodology and the context.

- 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.
- A methodological limitation is the underrepresentation of male refugees in our sample. This imbalance may restrict the accuracy of our findings in assessing the impact of recent legislative changes on Ukrainian males, such as restrictions related to consular services and SE Dokument services.

Demographics

Gender and age

In the Q2 Protection Monitoring cycle, 92.5% of participants were female, whilst 7.5% were male. The largest age group represented in this report falls within the 35-49 years old category (as in previous cycles), comprising almost 42.8% of the sample.



Region of Ukraine

Further, many of the participants originate from Kyiv city, constituting the largest segment with 17.6% (77 individuals). However, various other regions are represented like Kharkiv with 12.5% of respondents, Dnipro with 10.5%, and Donetsk with 8.6%.

Household (HH) composition

The average household size is a family of 2, and the largest HH included 8 people. A significant portion of the participants, 64%, are accompanied by adult family members, while 68.4% have children with them. The average child age is 6. The biggest group of children is that of the 7-10 years old (28.3%). In terms of family dynamics, the majority of children in the household are either daughters or sons of the respondents, accounting for 85.7%, and 43.2% have a spouse or partner with them. Notably, the data highlights that most caregivers (80.6%) reside in the same household in Poland.

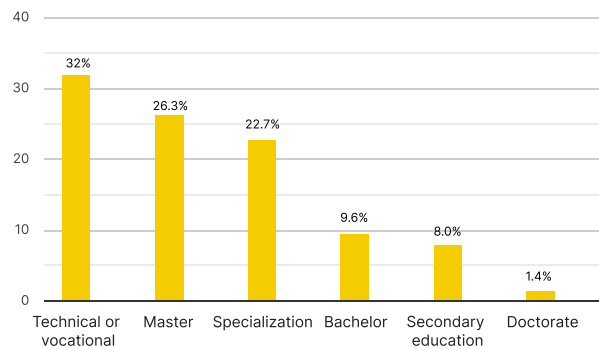
Data of arrival

Most respondents primarily arrived at the beginning of the escalation of the conflict. In this cycle 35.2% of people arrived in March 2022. In total, 60.6% of respondents arrived in 2022, 23.1% arrived in 2023 (mostly in last 3 months of 2023), and 16% in 2024.

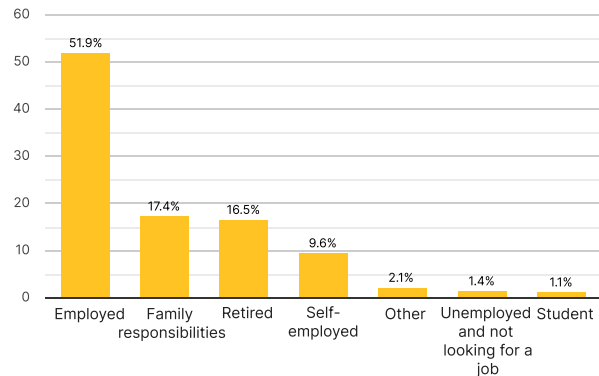
Education and main activity before leaving Ukraine

With regards to the participants' educational background and activities pursued in Ukraine, the 32.1% have a technical or vocational education. Nevertheless, 59.9% of the participants have higher education. Before leaving Ukraine most (60.9%) were employed.

Level of education



Main activity before leaving Ukraine



Disability

Washington Group Questions (WGQ): The data reveals a range of abilities among participants concerning daily activities. While 62.7% reported no difficulties with walking, seeing, hearing, remembering, communicating, or self-care activities, 26.1% experienced some difficulty, and 9.8% reported significant challenges. A small percentage, 0.5%, are unable to perform these activities at all.

Among the surveyed households, 31.1% have at least one member with a disability, and 53.8% report having members with chronic illnesses. The data reveals that a considerable portion of the population holds some form of disability certification (96% in total). Specifically, 44.8% have a formal disability certificate from Ukraine, while 35.3% possess disability certificates from both Ukraine and Poland. Additionally, 16.2% have obtained their certificate exclusively in Poland.

A substantial portion of individuals - 44.9% - possess a disability certificate issued solely by Ukraine which may not be recognized by Polish social and healthcare systems. This lack of recognition can result in various challenges, including limited access to local services and benefits designed for people with disabilities. Consequently, these individuals may encounter administrative barriers, leaving them in a more vulnerable position and without full access to the protections and support systems available to those fully integrated into the Polish system. The issue of confirmation of disability in Poland remains one of the most demanded legal assistance services as reported by IRC partners.

Access to territory

Most Ukrainian refugees arrived directly through the Polish-Ukrainian border, while 6.4% of the respondents chose alternative routes, bypassing direct crossing of the Polish-Ukrainian border.

These alternatives involved transit through third countries, including Russia (24 people), Latvia (16 people), Lithuania (14 refugees), Belarus (7 respondents) and Estonia (4 people). There were 13 incidents identified on those borders.

In respect to crossing the Ukrainian border, 81.2% of participants reported no issues, **while 12.4% faced certain challenges** (10 pp. more than in Q1 2024 with 2.2%) The most common incident was difficulties due to martial law, identified by 38 participants. Only 2% of participants encountered some difficulties in the Polish border.

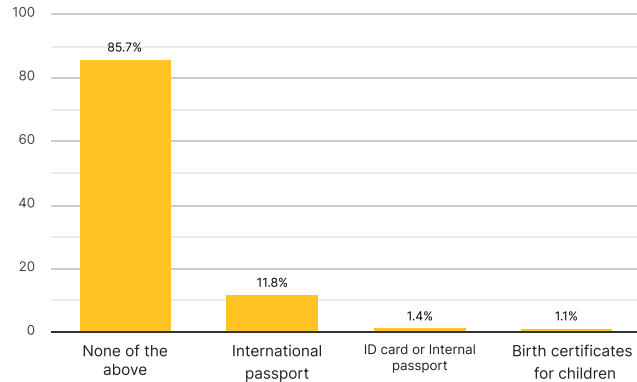
In this cycle, the PM included a question regarding challenges faced by males in crossing the border to or from Ukraine due to martial law and mobilization. Only a small percentage, 3.2%, reported encountering difficulties during border crossings. The reasons for these challenges varied, ranging from a lack of proper documentation to complications when attempting to leave non-government-controlled areas via Russia.

Situation in a host country

Access to documentation, consulates, and benefits

A significant majority (85.7%) of respondents reported no missing civil (Ukrainian) documentation, with **only 11.8% lacking an international passport**. Of those missing documents, 8% were male respondents (4⁷ individuals). Most participants acknowledged the possibility of obtaining or renewing their documents in Poland, with 61.7% confirming they could renew or obtain all necessary documents. **However, 25% stated they were unable to do so.**

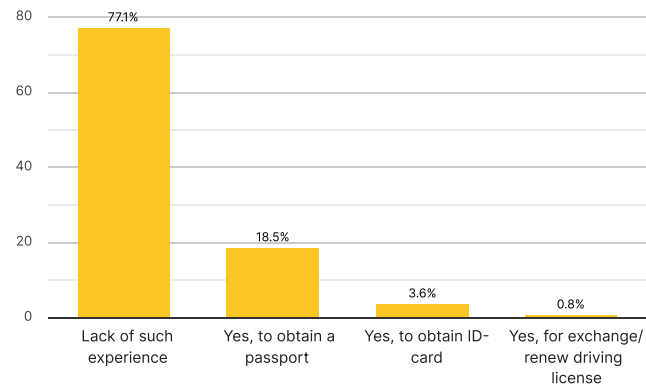
Are you or any of the HH members missing any of the civil documentation?



In previous cycles, one of the primary concerns was the potential termination of PESEL UKR and the resulting loss of access to social benefits. All respondents in this cycle reported having a PESEL UKR number. Approximately 12% needed to reapply for PESEL UKR, and among those, 68.8% experienced long queues and extended waiting times.

More than 14.9% of respondents had to return to Ukraine to produce, extend, or restore specific documents, with four individuals lacking an international passport. Additionally, 5.5% needed to travel back to Ukraine for document-related purposes but were unable to do so. Among this group, 4 individuals were missing international passports, and 2 were without ID or internal passports.

Have you or members of your household applied to SE Dokument services?



Most respondents had not utilized consular or SE Dokument services. Only 18.9% reported using consular services, with 8.9% applying for essential documents such as foreign passports or return documentation. Additionally, 7% sought other forms of assistance, including power of attorney, passport services for children or grandchildren, correcting documentation errors, or addressing housing issues. Smaller percentages applied for document certification, child registration, or consular registration.

Due to a limited number of male respondents, there is no possibility of proper assessment of how legislative changes affected provision of consular services for males. Though, such restrictions and denials were reported by the respondents.

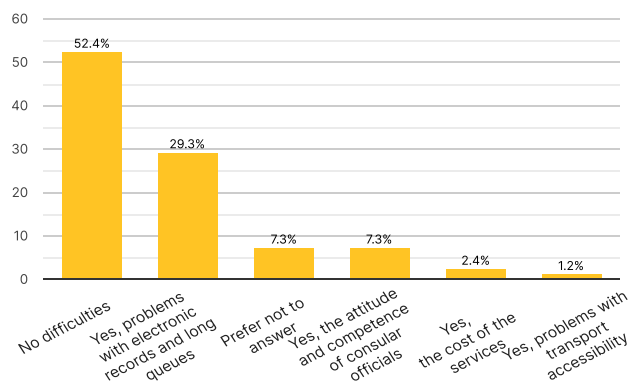


I applied to get married, but we were denied, we were told to return to Ukraine, to go to the military registration and enlistment office, and there he would be taken away and face the same fate as my ex-husband who was killed in the war.

(Female, 49)

Situation in a host country

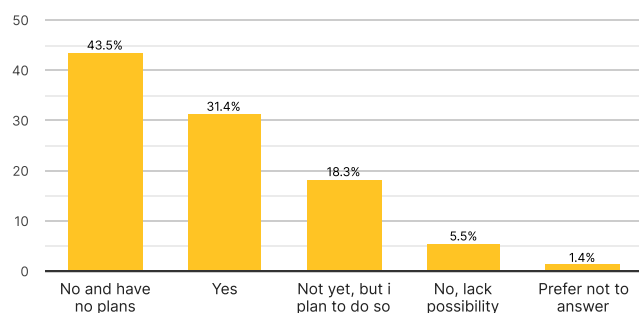
Did you or members of your household have any difficulties with applying to Ukrainian consulates?



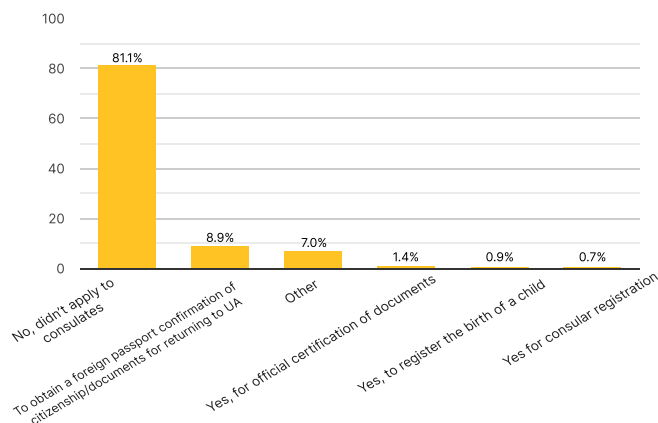
Analysis of these findings shows that over half of the participants did not face significant challenges when applying to Ukrainian consulates. The most common issues reported were related to electronic record management and long waiting times (29.3%). While most users had a trouble-free experience with Polish digital administrative services, issues with app installation were common (10.7%).

A significant portion of respondents (43.5%) are not considering temporary residence, and they have neither applied nor plan to do so. Moreover, 32.5% have already applied, and more than 18% intend to apply in the future.⁸

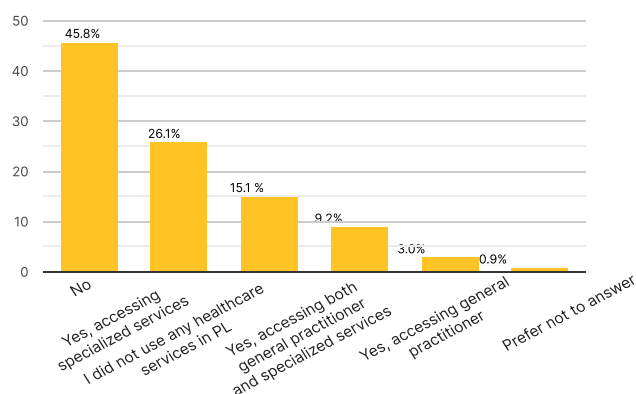
Have you applied for temporary residence?



Have you or members of your household applied to Ukrainian consulates?



Did you or any of the household members had difficulties accessing medical services?



Over 45% of respondents reported no difficulties accessing medical services in Poland. However, nearly 50% still encountered challenges, particularly with specialized services, general practitioners, or both, with long waiting times being the most frequently cited barrier. An increasing number of respondents in Q2 reported traveling back to Ukraine for medical services — 47%, up from 41% in Q1 and 23% in Q4 2023 — largely due to perceived difficulties with access or quality of care in Poland, especially related to long wait times. These findings are corroborated by statistics from the [Polish Central Statistical Office \(GUS\)](#) and the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#).

Situation in a host country

The ongoing importance of healthcare for refugees is further emphasized by UNHCR's 2024 regional analysis, which identifies healthcare as a top priority for 34% of respondents across most countries. Within the 30 days preceding the survey, 28% of households required healthcare services. Of these, 89% were able to access care without issues, while 11% had unmet needs.

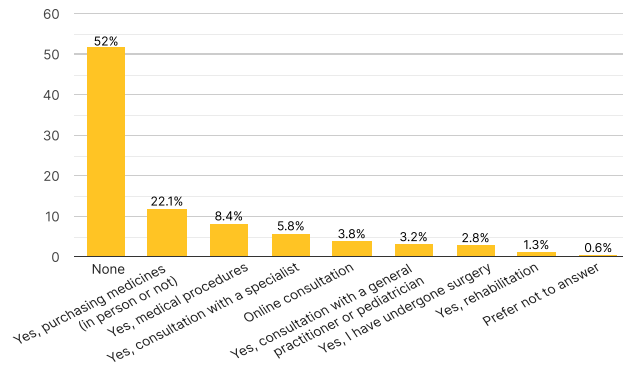
In Poland, specific challenges were highlighted: 38% of those with unmet health needs struggled with scheduling appointments, 27% faced language barriers, and 19% lacked knowledge on how to access services. On average, households allocated 9% of their total expenditures to healthcare.

This expenditure rose to 12% for households with a member suffering from a chronic illness, compared to just 4% for those without such conditions. Additionally, households with a person with a disability spent significantly more on healthcare — 15% on average, compared to 8% for households without disabilities (16% and 7% in Poland, respectively).

It is worth noting that the same issues with access to healthcare affect the host population. The healthcare system is marked by long waiting periods and limited availability of specialist services under the National Health Fund (NFZ).

In 2024, the Polish Central Statistical Office, in collaboration with WHO, released an interactive analysis focused on the health of Ukrainian refugees. Early 2024 data indicated that most Ukrainian refugees in Poland did not need healthcare in the 30 days prior to their interviews. However, 48.6% did require healthcare for various issues. Among the most commonly reported health needs in the first quarter of 2024 were acute illnesses (around 39%) and dental health concerns (10.6%).

Have you or your HH members used any medical services in Ukraine since you arrived in Poland



Risk of Distress and Mental Health Disorders for Further Monitoring

UNHCR's 2024 regional analysis highlights that 19% of individuals faced mental health and psychosocial (MHPSS) issues affecting their daily lives, with 30% of households reporting at least one member impacted. The prevalence of these issues varied by age and gender, with women across all age groups over 12 reporting higher levels than men, particularly in those aged 35 and older. In contrast, boys under 11 experienced more mental health issues than girls. Additionally, MHPSS challenges were significantly more common among individuals with disabilities (42%) compared to those without (17%).

These findings are consistent with qualitative data from the latest IRC PM cycle, which reveals an increasing risk of stress and mental health conditions among affected populations. Key Informant Interviews (KII) indicate that individuals are struggling with limited access to personalized psychological support, particularly long-term services necessary to address deep-seated MHPSS issues.

Key Barriers to Accessing Mental Health Support:

- **Language Barriers:** Refugees face challenges in communicating with mental health professionals due to insufficient language proficiency.
- **Lack of Specialized Professionals:** There is a shortage of mental health professionals within the National Health Fund (NFZ) who can communicate in the refugees' languages.
- **Waiting Times:** Long waiting periods for appointments with psychologists or psychiatrists are a significant hurdle.
- **Stigma:** Psychological support and mental health care are often stigmatized within both Ukrainian and host communities.

- **Low Awareness:** Parents and caregivers frequently lack awareness of the psychological support needs of children.
- **System Differences:** There are unclear differences between the mental health support systems in Poland and Ukraine, which complicates access.

A local NGO representative from Katowice noted,



There are two groups — those who recognize their need for support, often dealing with severe disorders or heavy circumstances. Their problems may be triggered by war or socio-economic situations, such as a decline in material status or poor living conditions. For these individuals, long-term, continuous psychotherapy is essential.

(KII, local NGO, Katowice)

In Poland, mental health professionals (especially psychotherapists) often have diverse educational backgrounds, including medical and philosophical studies, while in Ukraine, the profession is more closely tied to pedagogical studies, thus with a stronger focus on children. This difference further complicates the understanding and acceptance of mental health services.



In Poland, it's also the case that not every psychotherapist is a psychologist and vice versa. There are people with medical and philosophical degrees working as psychotherapists. In Ukraine, this profession is more often associated with pedagogical studies, which naturally ties it more to children. It seems that adults are left only with psychiatrists, a profession that is associated with negative connotations.

(KII, psychologist, local NGO, Gdynia)

Situation in a host country



There are individuals with serious psychological problems who have often experienced mental health issues in their home countries. These individuals now remain outside the healthcare system. For those struggling with addiction, if you're fortunate enough, you might find help from someone older, often needing to manage through informal means. While addiction therapy is somewhat manageable, many people are dealing with 'less severe' issues such as mood disturbances or dissatisfaction. Accumulated stress can exacerbate these issues. Additionally, there is a significant stigma around psychological services in this community — people are simply reluctant to use them.

(KII, psychologist, local NGO, Gdynia)



We need to raise awareness about the importance of children's mental health among parents. Parents are told they should visit a psychological counseling center, which is a unique concept not known in Ukraine. The approach differs across countries. In some places, these issues are addressed through schools. Here, parents receive information that their child should go to such an 'institution' but do not understand why or what it involves. This is also frequently true for Polish parents.

(KII, psychologist, local NGO, Katowice)

Mental health issues and the need for psychological support are also increasing among children and adolescents.



We need to focus on providing long-term psychological support for children. They attend Polish schools and have some leniency initially, but two years have passed. If a teacher now sees that a child is facing difficulties, they will no longer attribute it to a lack of language skills but will recognize it as a problem and a deficit.

(KII, local NGO representative, Gdynia)

The [IOM \(2024\) report](#) on MHPSS needs among individuals in collective accommodations highlights particular concerns regarding mental well-being and general satisfaction with support. Over 33% of respondents rated their mental health as poor or not so good, with 14% noting a decline since arriving in Poland. Poor mental health was also associated with poor general health.

Additionally, around 45% of participants reported feeling anxious, 36% felt depressed, 24% felt angry, and 21% lacked curiosity in the week prior to the study.

Among factors causing negative mood, IOM identified uncertainty, insecurity about the future, and unsatisfied with the shelter (mentioning concerns like poor living conditions, or even feeling like a prisoner).

There is a need to move away from viewing prolonged displacement as a single, albeit extended, event. The reality of a protracted crisis is far more complex, particularly regarding the challenges and needs of displaced populations. Health is intricately linked to a range of social and economic factors that affect health outcomes and overall well-being (social determinants of health). Additionally, health needs are closely tied to social conditions - key integration factors such as access to livelihoods and safe housing.⁹



The growing need for psychological support is often overlooked as the focus shifts from emergency aid to integration efforts. While language courses are important, the real issue is that this transition neglects the worsening mental health crisis among refugees, made worse by prolonged displacement.

(KII, expert and local NGO representative, Gdynia)

Situation in a host country

Education and childcare

More than 35% of refugees reported that their children are not enrolled in the Polish education system, compared to 25% in the first quarter. The main reasons for not enrolling children in Polish schools include parents' preference to keep their children in the Ukrainian curriculum (whether online or onsite), which accounts for 44% of the responses. Other challenges mentioned include difficulties adapting to Polish schools, particularly for those who attempted to enroll their children in either offline Ukrainian schools or local Polish schools.

Some respondents expressed plans to enroll their children in September, especially among newcomers. Challenges were also noted for children with disabilities and the process of obtaining certification for recognizing the child's disability.

Among the identified **educational challenges, 23.5% reported discrimination from peers or teachers, while 20% cited the burden of navigating two different educational systems.** Additionally, some respondents highlighted a lack of any educational challenges, a response option that may have been overlooked in the survey. Other issues included language barriers and difficulties with adaptation.

Bullying

In this cycle, for the first time, refugees were asked whether their children had experienced bullying at school. An overwhelming 99.1% reported no instances of bullying. This result might be surprising given previous IRC Child Protection Monitoring reports, where children themselves highlighted incidents of bullying and identified risks related to bullying. Findings from the Safety Audit conducted by IRC also confirm the issue of bullying (in every FGDs).

**IDENTIFIED
EDUCATIONAL
CHALLENGES:
23.5% REPORTED
DISCRIMINATION FROM
PEERS AND TEACHERS.**

Understanding how parents perceive and define bullying, as well as how they identify bullying behaviors, is crucial for research and intervention. Parents' awareness and understanding of bullying directly affect their ability to recognize and address such incidents effectively.¹⁰

Media reports have also highlighted cases of discrimination and risks associated with school violence. **Concerns about discrimination and peer violence are emerging, particularly with the new compulsory schooling requirements for Ukrainian children starting in September 2024.**

The amendment to the Act on Assistance to Ukrainian Citizens introduces several changes to the education of Ukrainian children in Polish education system. As of September 1, 2024, Ukrainian refugee children of appropriate school age will need to be enrolled in the Polish education system, to qualify for the 800+ family benefit in Poland.

Other new provisions include extending free Polish language instruction from 24 to 36 months for students who have been receiving such instruction since the 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 school years. Eighth-grade students will have the option to skip the Polish language exam in the 2024/2025 school year. Additionally, the role of intercultural assistant will be introduced.¹¹

According to a CEO report from early 2024, 53% of school-aged refugee children are still outside the Polish education system. At present, there are at least 112,800 children in primary school and 43,600 teenagers in secondary school within the Polish system. Ukrainian refugee students represent nearly 3% of all students in Poland.

Significantly, 3% of refugee students are enrolled in preparatory classes, while the remaining 97% attend traditional classes. At the beginning of 2024, Poland had 288 preparatory classes with 3,700 students, although this number is steadily decreasing. Currently, 85% of counties have no preparatory classes at all. One in four classrooms in Poland includes a student with refugee experience.¹²

10. See more about the parents' and caregivers' perception of bullying: [Frontiers | Understanding Responses to Bullying From the Parent Perspective \(frontiersin.org\)](#). Additionally, UNESCO's Report shows the up-to-date global and regional prevalence and trends related to school-related violence. Read more here: [Addressing cases of bullying in education facilities: systematic approach | UNICEF](#)

11. See more: [Uczniowie z Ukrainy w polskich szkołach – nowe rozwiązania prawne - Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej - Portal Gov.pl \(www.gov.pl\)](#)

12. CEO (2024): [Uczniowie uchodźczy z Ukrainy w polskim systemie edukacji \(ceo.org.pl\)](#). The CEO has also developed a model for educational integration in schools receiving migrant students. Available here: [Opracowaliśmy model pracy szkoły, w której są uczniowie-migranci - Blog CEO](#)

Situation in a host country



Children are more burdened by acculturative stress than adults. They lose their world when they arrive at school, where no one understands them. The educational reality in a different language can be terrifying. While there is a possibility to open preparatory classes, not everyone utilizes them. Sometimes there is a lack of space, and sometimes there is a shortage of staff. There is also a lack of experience among the staff and adequate training.

(KII, school representative, Warsaw)



A group facing particular challenges are children aged 13-14. There are no appropriate educational materials to help them reach the required level. They are not learning Polish, and preparatory classes are of very poor quality.

(KII, local NGO, Katowice)

In all Key Informant Interviews, certain obstacles and shortcomings were noted in the way compulsory schooling is being implemented.

- **Insufficient Communication:** There is a lack of adequate communication from local governments, authorities, and the state towards schools, teachers, and refugee families.
- **Deepening Disparities:** The focus on educational system changes primarily concerning Ukrainian refugees, while neglecting other foreign nationals and a multicultural approach, exacerbates existing disparities.
- **Inadequate Preparation:** Preparatory classes lack practical preparation, sufficient staff, and necessary resources. There is also a deficit in competencies for working with non-Polish children.
- **Unaddressed Bullying:** Peer violence and bullying remain unaddressed in schools, and there are insufficient anti-violence measures, particularly concerning discrimination against foreigners.

- **Insufficient Communication on New Standards:** There is inadequate communication regarding the implementation of new protection standards and the so-called Kamilek Act in schools.
- **Lack of Anonymous Reporting Mechanisms:** It is essential to establish mechanisms for students to report cases of school violence anonymously, as required by the Kamilek Act, which comes into effect on August 15. These mechanisms should consider the situation of foreign children.¹³

The "Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę" Foundation (FDSD), in its annual report on violence among children in Poland, also included the situation of children from Ukraine. In its general recommendations, the foundation highlights the need to scale up preventive and educational activities among children and adolescents, noting that only one-third of students reported participating in anti-violence programs. In addition to implementing child protection and safeguarding standards, it is crucial to conduct preventive actions addressing peer violence, both physical and psychological, as these are the most commonly experienced forms of violence among young people, with their prevalence having significantly increased over the last decade.



Photo: Oleksandr Rupeta for the IRC

Situation in a host country

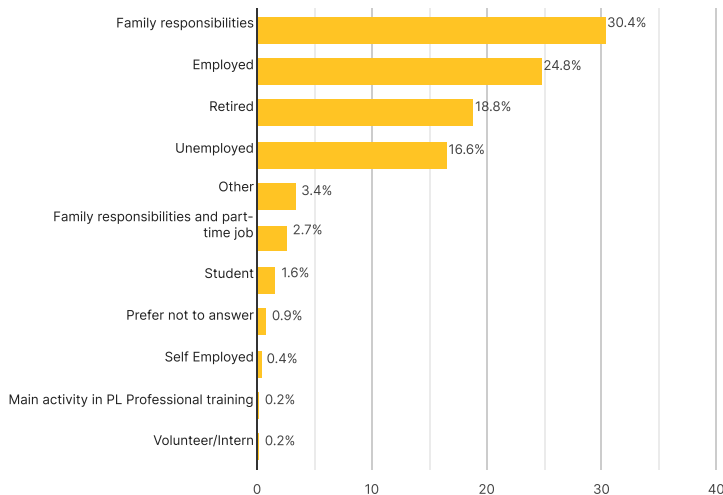
Main activity and source of living

A significant portion of respondents (51.9%) were employed, with an additional 9.6% self-employed and 16.5% retired before leaving Ukraine.

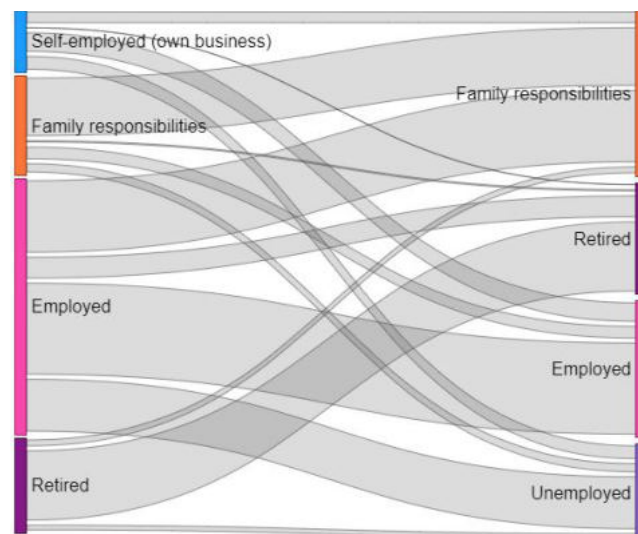
Only 1.4% were unemployed. After displacement, the largest group is now occupied primarily with family responsibilities (30.4%), followed by those who are employed (24.8%) and retired respondents (18.8%).

Notably, the unemployment rate has increased by more than 15 percentage points.

What is your main activity in Poland?

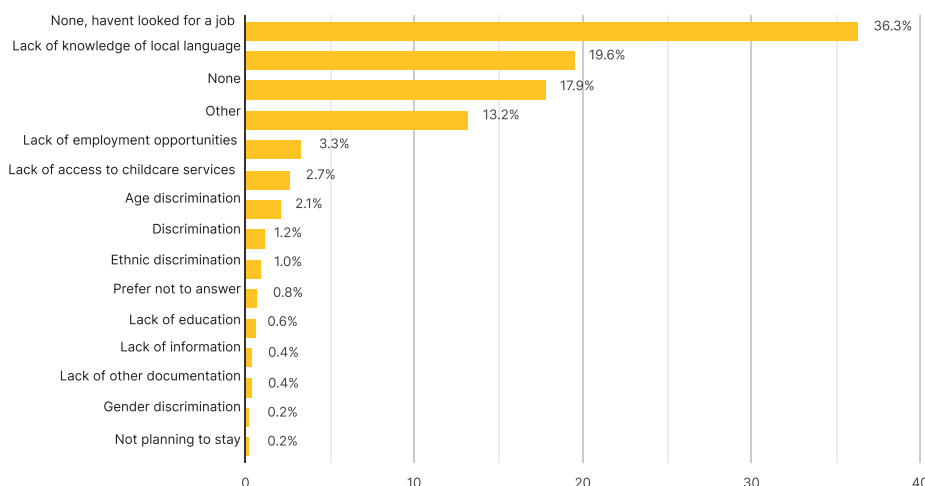


According to the PM data, individuals who were employed in Ukraine, have experienced various changes in Poland: **46 are now unemployed, 80 of them remain employed in Poland, and more than 60 people moved from employment to family responsibilities.** Moreover, 12 people who owned their own business in Ukraine, now are unemployed in Poland.



Among the barriers to finding employment in Poland, the most frequently cited was the lack of language proficiency.

What issues have you faced when looking for job?



ONLY 1.4% OF RESPONDENTS WERE UNEMPLOYED IN UKRAINE, AND 16.6% REMAIN UNEMPLOYED IN POLAND.

Situation in a host country

Risk of labour exploitation for further monitoring



Most of the people were already aware that they would be exploited. But what good is this awareness if the only jobs available to them are exploitative? They believe that what's left for them are the 'scraps of the labour market.

(KII, local NGO, Katowice)

The largest proportion of respondents, 41.5%, reported that they have not experienced any work-related issues. Following this, 34.9% indicated that they either had no work experience in Poland or were not seeking employment. Other issues, while less frequently reported, accounted for 12.8%. More specific work-related problems such as receiving a lower salary than other workers and lack of contracts were reported by 2.6% and 2% of respondents, respectively. Although the problem isn't immediately apparent in quantitative data, it emerges from refugee comments regarding their work experiences and safety. Information about labor market issues and potential exploitation also surfaced in several Key Informant Interviews.



We've noticed a certain trend concerning young women, particularly those without children. They are often overlooked. We see that when they find work without any specific qualifications — especially language skills — they end up in warehouses. All of this happens without any oversight. They work 10-15 hours a day. If they live in collective centers, it's even worse because they are far from potential job locations. They constantly risk falling into the trap of exploitation.

The warehouses they work in are places 'where people aren't visible.' This is where exploitation happens, in warehouses and factories, hidden from sight.

(KII, local NGO representative, Katowice)



Statistically, there is a slightly lower percentage of foreigners with employment contracts. Fewer people are properly employed; instead, we see more temporary contracts and self-employment. We don't entirely understand why this is the case, but when compared to Poles, Ukrainians are much more often hired under worse contracts.

(KII, migration expert and local NGO representative, Gdynia)

This cycle also included information about the sectors in which refugees work in Poland, aiming to understand where reports of abuses are most frequent.

"They didn't pay the full salary, only half of it, so I had to leave" **(Female, cleaning sector)**

Or as one of the female respondents stated:

"The employer refuses to officially hire, not even allowing for a contract." **(Female, 45, cleaning sector)**

Refugee comments about irregularities covered a range of professions, including factory work, cleaning, domestic work, and the education sector.

"Poles work for 7 hours, while I and the other girls work 12 hours for a lower rate."

(Female, 36, sector not specified)

Moreover, there is a noticeable need to monitor specific professional groups and understand the diverse challenges in various sectors. Reducing this to a "general problem" can be counterproductive when addressing and combating irregularities. Greater involvement of local authorities and state structures is also necessary.



Someone won't see this as exploitation for a long time, especially if they combine it with social welfare benefits; they might even see it as a gain, not exploitation. If you compare it to poverty and war, how else can you see it?"

(KII, social services, Katowice)

Urgent needs

The most pressing needs in Q2 are still employment (14%), accommodation (12%) and material assistance (11.4%).

In most cases, other needs were indicated (18.3%), which often consisted basic needs, like food and clothes. Nevertheless, the comments from refugees gathered in the PM survey reveal a broad array of unmet needs.



I need a passport for my mother, rehabilitation for my child, and most importantly, I need to find a steady job to provide for my family. I hope to rent my own house in the future, apply for a residence card, and live like all the normal people here who have lost their homes. (Female, 48, Warsaw)



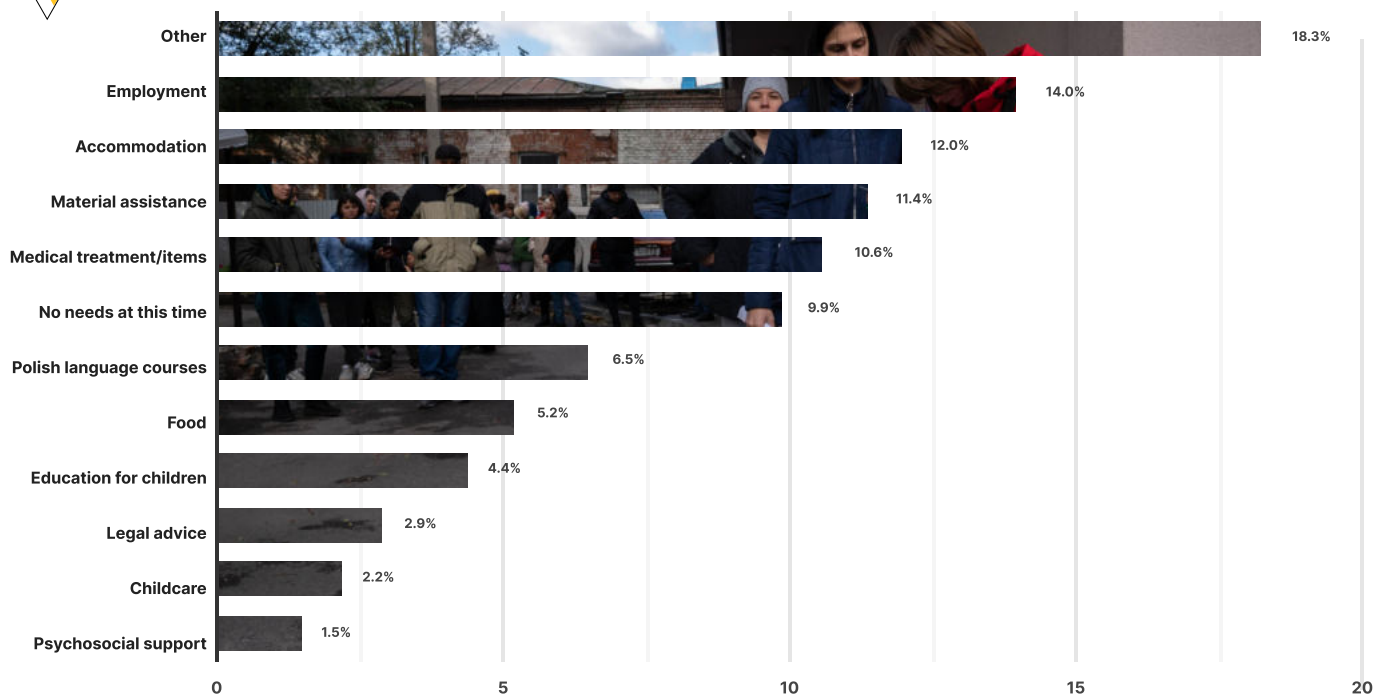
There is a lack of normal housing, lack of normal conditions, very little space, especially for my son with his syndrome. (Female, 50, Katowice)

Other needs mentioned

- **Food and Clothing:** Essential items like food and clothing are frequently mentioned as critical needs.
- **Language Courses:** constantly indicated, both in surveys and expert interviews, the need to increase language skills, and specialized Polish. This is confirmed by IRC activities in Katowice, Gdynia and Warsaw.
- **Housing:** Affordable and adequate housing is a major concern, especially with the end of financial aid programs. It is expressed in 12% of response, and additionally mentioned in other needs, as sometimes it addresses specific concerns (for example in collective accommodations).
- **Financial Assistance:** Refugees consistently highlight the need for financial support to cover basic expenses.
- **Family Reunification:** Reuniting with family members is a significant emotional and psychological need.
- **Social Integration:** There is a desire for more social activities and integration into local communities.



What are your most urgent needs?



- **Educational and Vocational Training:** There is a strong demand for educational opportunities, vocational training, and career guidance to improve employment prospects.
- **Desire for Stability and Self-Sufficiency:** Refugees express a strong desire for stable employment and the ability to be self-sufficient, reducing their dependence on aid.
- **Mental Health:** Psychological support, especially for children.
- **Access to Healthcare:** medication, and particularly rehabilitation services are vital.

Information needs

The number of people indicating that they do not need any information has increased (39.1%, previously 27.3%). However, information needs for job opportunities are still important indications (14.8%). At the same time, knowledge of financial assistance is needed (12.9%).

What information needs you identify?

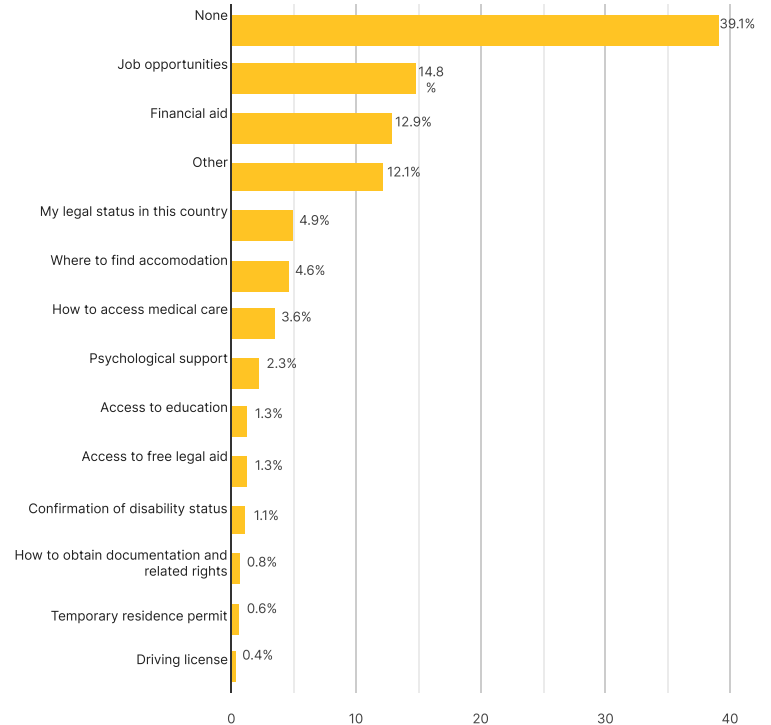


Photo: Tamara Kiptenko for the IRC

Intentions

Approximately 60% of respondents remained in Poland without embarking on a visit to Ukraine since their initial arrival. Around 20% have gone back once, 16.2% have visited 2-4 times. The principal motivation behind these visits, reported in Q2, was a need to visit relatives/friends, or to obtain documentation.

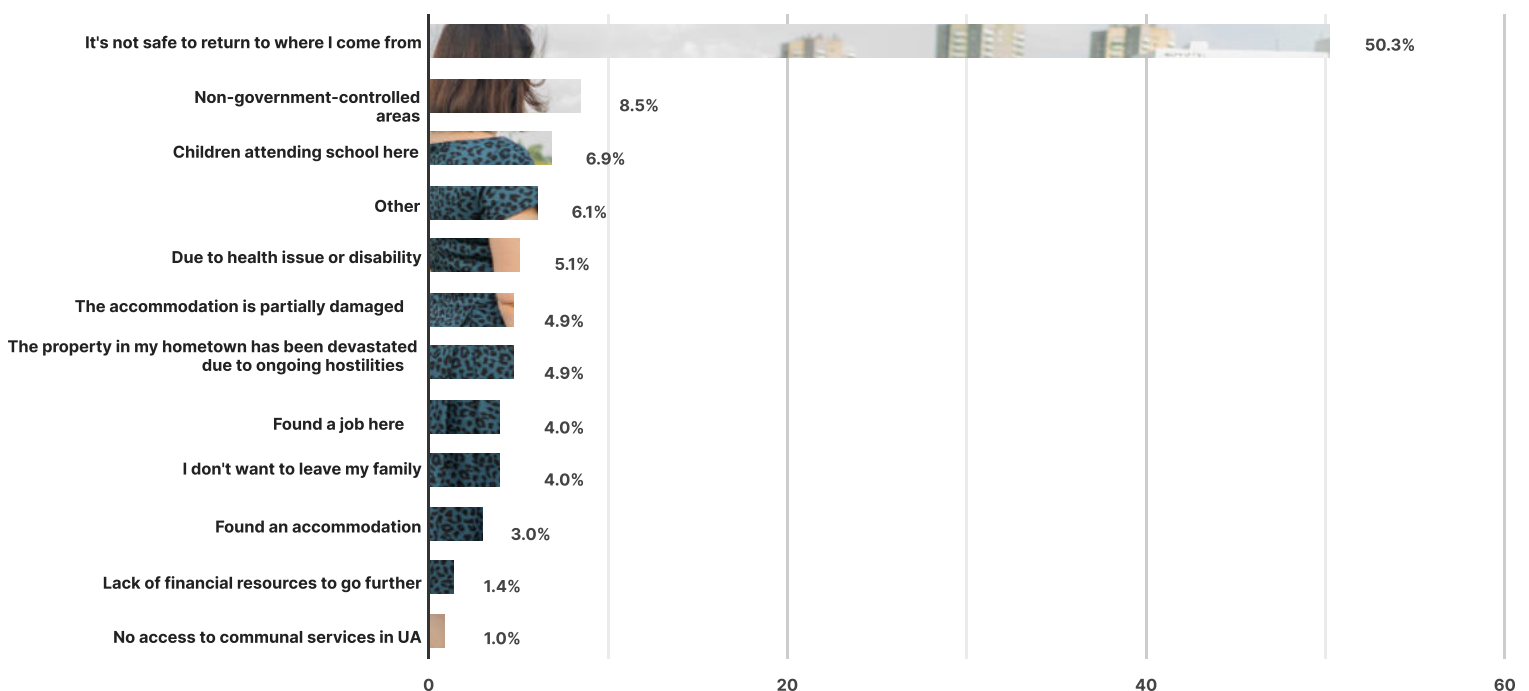
Problems when returning to Poland after short visits to Ukraine were still indicated (29.3%). **The most common were problems with Diia.pl¹⁴ and loss of temporary protection status (40%) among these indications.** It is noted, however, that these are not necessarily problems in the last 3 months of the survey.

Currently, 72.8% of respondents don't plan to go back to Ukraine in the next three months, while around 15.6% aim for a short visit home.

Among those not returning, 94% will stay in Poland.

Those who indicated that they plan to return to Ukraine permanently (1.6%), argued this on the grounds of lack of financial opportunities to stay in Poland, or the decision of the family to return, or the desire to reunify with the family. **Among the reasons for staying in Poland, those related mainly to safety and security issues in Ukraine**, covering more than 60% of responses, or loss of property in Ukraine due to the ongoing conflict (around 10%) were indicated. However, a diversity of reasons is evident. In addition to these, children's participation in the Polish education system (7%), or health problems (5%) were also indicated.

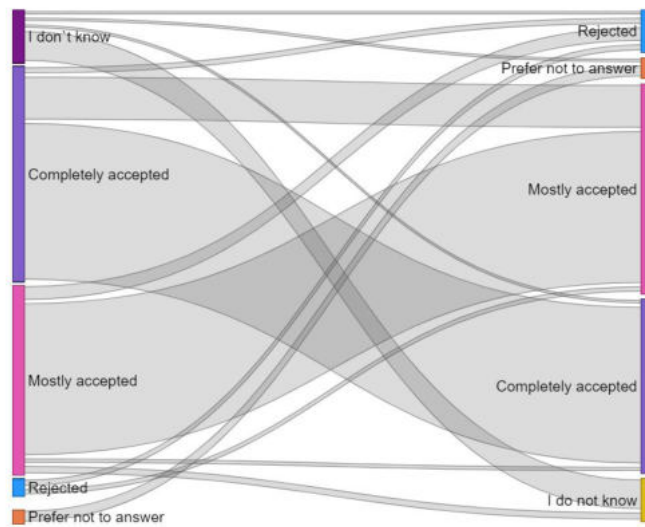
Why do you want to stay in Poland?



Social cohesion and safety

Social cohesion

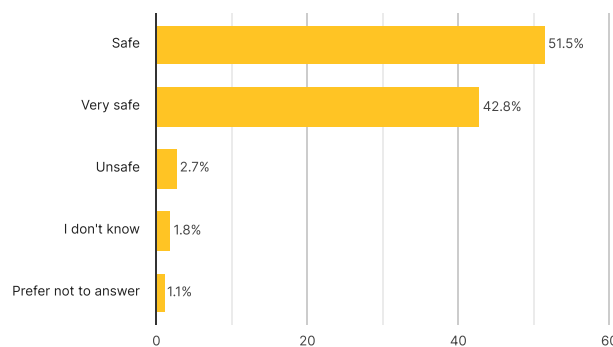
Close to 85.1% of respondents feel completely or mostly accepted by the local community. In some cases, the level of complete acceptance shortly after arrival changed to usually felt acceptance (more than 9.8% of respondents). In a dozen cases, the change went from complete or partial acceptance to rejection (16 people).



Safety

How safe do you feel in Poland?

MORE THAN 94% OF RESPONDENTS INDICATED THAT THEY FEEL SAFE OR VERY SAFE IN POLAND



More than 94% of respondents indicated that they feel safe or very safe in Poland, while only 2.7% reported a lack of safety (6% in Q1). Among these people, 4 of them indicated incidents of discrimination (due to origin), 2 of them gender based violence.

Protection Risk 1: Risk of eviction and homelessness



Refugees are struggling to find housing because it is simply too expensive. Someone who came with a family and has money can rent a place for themselves. And those who are alone, such as single mothers or the elderly, either face homelessness or rent an apartment with the last of their money.

(KII, NGO, Gdynia)

Homelessness is a human rights violation.¹⁵ The risk of homelessness and housing insecurity has been flagged over the past three IRC quarterly reports. Risk shaping factors are also evident in this PM cycle. Moreover, the need for housing still remains in the top 3 most urgent needs among respondents. This is also backed up by the KIIs, which rank housing as one of the top 3 most urgent needs in most cases. (11/14).¹⁶

Homelessness¹⁷ goes beyond the issue of lacking a place to live, becoming an increasingly complex social phenomenon and a public health concern. Definitions of homelessness also consider housing stability. Migration and refuge are recognized as "new" structural factors of homelessness, as noted by the [European Observatory on Homelessness](#). It is crucial to understand whether adequate accommodation systems exist in the host country at various stages of the asylum process and the refugee experience. If such systems are lacking, there is a risk that refugees may face a [homelessness crisis](#) and be forced to rely on services intended for homeless individuals. Depending on the preparedness of these services, the issue may become a burden on the system and the state, but most importantly, a safety risk for these individuals.

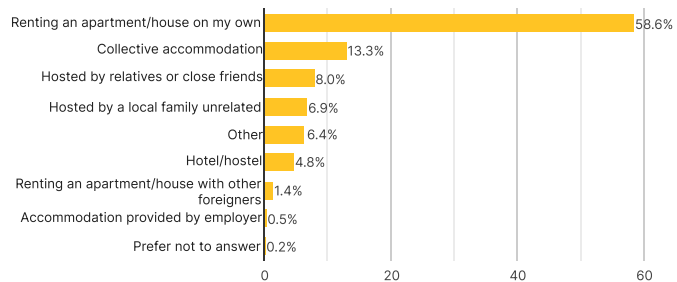


Access to independent housing for refugees is a significant challenge. No one can afford the cost of housing, not even in Katowice.

(KII, Ukrainian local NGO, Katowice).

Over 47% of respondents have changed their place of residence at least once since arriving. The majority, 58.6%, currently live in rented accommodation. More than 13% are staying in collective accommodation centers, and nearly 5% reside in hostels. Others are being hosted by friends, family, or unrelated individuals. A broad range of "other" housing options also exists, including 11 respondents from the 40+ program and others with varied arrangements such as sharing costs with an NGO, living with family, or working as caregivers in the same place they reside.

Where do you live?



These findings align with data from the 2024 Housing and Accommodation Sector, which shows that across the country, approximately 68% of refugees rent housing on the private market, 12% share accommodations, 13% live in hostels, and 7% reside in collective accommodation centers (pl. ośrodki zbiorowego zakwaterowania, OZZ).

KEY DATA



43%

RESPONDENTS HAVE NO SET TIME LIMIT FOR THEIR CURRENT ACCOMMODATION



30%

DO NOT HAVE GUARANTEED HOUSING FOR MORE THAN A YEAR

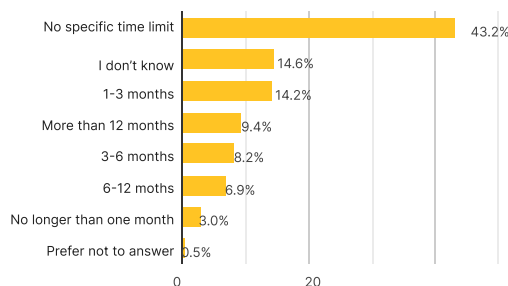


40+

MAIN OTHER REASONS FOR LEAVING CURRENT HOUSING WAS THE EXPIRATION OF THE 40+ PROGRAM

In this monitoring cycle, over 43% of respondents indicated they have no set time limit for how long they can stay in their current accommodation. Similar to previous cycles, around 15% expressed uncertainty regarding their housing stability. The number of individuals who will need to leave their current residence within 1-3 months has increased. Overall, nearly 30% of people do not have guaranteed housing for more than a year. Among those who had to leave a residence, the common reason cited was the expiration of the 40+ program.

How long can you stay in the current accommodation?



The study also assessed the sense of safety in housing accommodations. Over 90% of respondents considered their accommodation **safe or very safe**, while only 5% expressed concerns about safety. These concerns were not limited to collective accommodation centers. For example, one respondent shared.



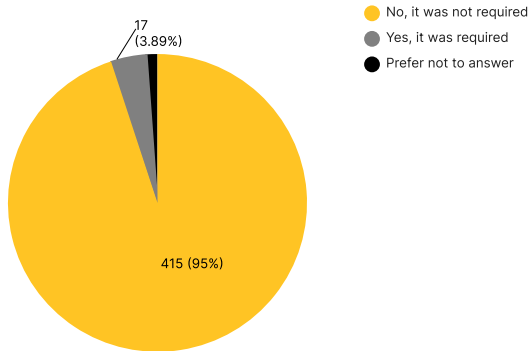
The woman I rent from goes through our stuff every time; we have a room without a lock. She gets the 40+ payment from us and pays it to the landlord herself. She says it's her business. (Female, 56, Warsaw)

Additionally, 17 individuals reported being required to provide unpaid services or services in exchange for maintaining their living conditions while residing in their accommodations.

17. Homelessness is defined in various ways by international organizations, national legislation and social organizations. It includes living in temporary shelters or staying with relatives and friends due to lack of housing. UN DESA distinguishes two categories of homelessness: primary homelessness (living on the streets without shelter) and secondary homelessness (people moving frequently between different types of housing or living in long-term shelters). The former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing distinguishes three dimensions of homelessness: lack of a home both physically and socially, homelessness as a form of systemic discrimination and social exclusion, and the resilience and potential of homeless people as agents of change. See more at: <https://europe.ohchr.org/news-events/news/european-platform-combating-homelessness-10-elements>.

Risk of eviction and homelessness

Where you required to perform unpaid services or services in exchange for maintaining basic living conditions while living in the accommodation?



Take the story of a man who lived in a garage. The owner collected the 40+ benefit, but the living conditions were disastrous. Snow and water leaked through the metal garage doors. He stayed silent and didn't tell anyone because he thought that was how it was supposed to be.

(KII, Social Services, Gdynia, KII)

As part of the monitoring, observations were also conducted at several collective accommodation centers in Warsaw and Katowice. In some large centers in the capital, issues were noted regarding the lack of basic safety measures and the implementation of safeguarding principles. Violations included lack of privacy, inadequate or nonexistent food provisions, and conditions that were degrading to human dignity. In one instance, forced labor and exploitation were reported in exchange for a place in a collective accommodation center. In another case, individuals who were exempt from payment were still being charged.

Social cohesion



We are running out of the 40+ payments that helped us pay the rent. My dad is disabled and cannot be left alone for long, so we really need social housing.

(Female, 57 Warsaw)

Previously, there were two main tools for providing housing assistance to Ukrainian refugees under Polish law: Article 12 and Article 13 of the Act on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine.

- **Article 12** stipulated that the Voivode or other public administration bodies, including local government units, could aid Ukrainian citizens through collective accommodation (where at least 10 people stay), by operating reception centers, or by providing transportation related to accommodation or medical care.¹⁸

As of July 1, 2024, parents or legal guardians are required to pay 15 PLN per day for the accommodation of children, with this amount being deducted from the 800+ child allowance. Exemptions from these fees are provided in specific circumstances. Importantly, under the amended special law, the 800+ benefit will only be paid for children who are attending school or fulfilling the legal obligation of education according to Polish education law.

- **Article 13** allowed for the provision of financial support to those who offered housing and meals to Ukrainian citizens. This support was commonly referred to as the "40 Plus Program," reflecting the amount of 40 PLN per person per day. Both individuals in private housing and those in collective accommodations benefited from this program.

The termination of the Article 13 program as of July 1, 2024, significantly impacts the housing situation of refugees.¹⁹ In April 2022, 600,000 people were already benefiting from this support. The end of the 40+ program eliminates the possibility of compensating the costs of shelter and food for war refugees. Consequently, after July 1, the new provisions of the special law introduce financing of stays in collective accommodation only based on agreements signed with the Voivode.

18. The amendment defines group accommodation as a facility with at least 10 people or belonging to the public finance sector. The governor may provide accommodation to Ukrainian citizens regardless of the number of persons, if the contract is with a non-profit organization that has been in existence for at least 24 months, which provides accommodation to: persons with a disability certificate or their guardians, and women over 60 and men over 65.

19. Moreover, UNHCR data shows the significant impact of rent subsidy support on the poverty rate among Ukrainian refugees. Without rental support, the poverty rate among refugees is 46%. However, when housing support is included as an indirect source of income, the rate drops to 29%. See more: Document - Helping Hands - The Role of Housing Support and Employment Facilitation in Economic Vulnerability of Refugees from Ukraine (unhcr.org)

Risk of eviction and homelessness



Changes in the 40+ program are a huge problem. People are returning to Ukraine or relocating to smaller towns, which in our circumstances means social exclusion. There, they won't find jobs and won't be able to support themselves. It's a vicious cycle.

(KII, NGO representative, Gdynia)

According to information from the Ministry of the Interior and Administration (MSWiA), in the first quarter of 2024, approximately 50,000 people received financial support under Article 13, with around 30,000 receiving extended assistance. This suggests that many belong to vulnerable groups as defined by the law. However, these figures may be underestimated due to limitations in the monitoring system for tracking beneficiaries. Additionally, as of April 2024, around 40,000 refugees were residing in collective accommodation centers contracted by regional governors.

Expert interviews and refugee comments revealed concerns about certain abuses within the 40+ program and the lack of adequate oversight tools.



For example, there were cases where elderly individuals were charged for utilities even though they were living under the 40+ program. Or people were housed under the 40+ program, four to a room, without enough space for a bed.

(KII, local NGO representative, Gdynia)



There were also other types of fraud: when the 40+ payment was delayed, landlords would evict people from their homes. It happened more than once.

(Katowice, KII, NGO)

In July, IOM, in collaboration with Mapuj Pomoc (eng. Mapping Help) and Foundation To Proste, completed a study mapping collective accommodation centers in Poland. The study aimed to understand their distribution, activities, and key characteristics, such as accessibility for people with disabilities. Another goal was to organize this knowledge and create an interactive information database. By June 30, 2024 (before changes to the Special Act were implemented), 1,071 active collective accommodation centers with confirmed addresses were identified. The least data was available for the Małopolskie Voivodeship, while the most people resided in centers in the Mazowieckie Voivodeship (3,236), and the fewest in Opolskie (161). Regarding occupancy rates, the highest was in the Wielkopolskie Voivodeship (76%), while the lowest was in Podkarpackie (32%). In terms of funding, 95% of the mapped centers were financed under Article 12 of the Special Act, and only 3% under Article 13.²⁰

As for support for individuals with specific needs, only 22% of the centers reported being adapted to meet the needs of people with disabilities, though this information is self-reported and not externally verified. The data also highlighted the availability of accommodation in smaller towns or rural areas when larger cities and collective centers are full. However, experts and refugees agree that this should not be the sole alternative solution.



There are instances where the goal of local authorities is to remove these groups from city centers, relocating them to smaller towns. Some will indeed stay in Gdańsk, where they are less visible and have more housing options. In Sopot, there are no available spaces, and here in Gdynia, there aren't any either.

(KII, NGO representative 2, Gdynia).

Risk of eviction and homelessness



People choose to move to smaller towns or villages where costs are lower while maintaining jobs or schools in larger cities, which increases travel time, costs, and safety risks. This is only feasible if the parent does not need to care for their children full-time.

(KII, Ukrainian Community representative, Katowice)

In July 2024, the National Federation for Resolving Homelessness issued a statement on the changes to the law on assistance to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the armed conflict in their country. Based on data from IRC, the Federation's position, and information from UNHCR and IOM, several potential challenges have been identified:

- The limitation of continued support for Ukrainian refugees by NGOs and other entities that had been funding accommodation under Article 13 (40+).
- The program often served particularly vulnerable individuals, including those with disabilities or chronic illnesses. Many currently requiring relocation are elderly or large families.



If the 40+ program is canceled for families like those of single mothers with children with disabilities or the elderly, it will be a disaster because these people cannot simply work to provide for themselves.

(KII, NGO representative, Gdynia)

Concerns exist about relocating people to smaller towns or rural areas, particularly those that are isolated in terms of communication and information. Refugees who lived in such areas and are forced to relocate after the 40+ program ends may face significant challenges.

The 2024 National Survey of Homelessness found that 6% of people experiencing homelessness in Poland (1,749 individuals) hold Ukrainian citizenship. However, these results do not fully capture the scale of homelessness among refugees, primarily due to methodological limitations. Importantly, the situation of those living in collective accommodation centers (around 40,000 refugees) meets the definition of homelessness according to the European Typology of Homelessness (ETHOS) by FEANTSA and Article 6, point 8 of the Polish Social Assistance Act. Refugees in these centers do not reside in permanent housing and are not registered for permanent residence.²¹



Gdynia claims there is no homelessness problem. Social services responsible for addressing this issue visited seven locations known for homelessness and found no foreigners. But we all know those foreigners are there. The official stance, both now and in the past, remains the same — there are no homeless people and no refugees in need. A perfect city.

(KII, NGO representative, Gdynia)

Media reports have described cases of individuals experiencing homelessness, such as a woman from the Donetsk region, a mother of five, who spent 18 days on the streets of Warsaw. People previously housed in private accommodations under the 40+ program sometimes had limited access to information about assistance procedures, local organizations' support, and their rights. This issue also affected those living in collective accommodation centers outside urban areas, where NGOs and international organizations with information and support programs were less accessible.

Housing is closely linked to integration and its various dimensions, such as individual safety and security. It can also be considered a prerequisite for accessing employment, education, and healthcare. Additionally, unstable housing situations increase the risk of violence and gender-based violence.

Risk of eviction and homelessness



It often happens that a man and a woman dislike each other but have to live together, for example, because housing is expensive or for the sake of a child. Or there are situations where too many people share the same space, like three generations in one home. There are also cases where elderly individuals, unable to afford rent, choose to live in religious communities — they volunteer and live there for free.

(KII, NGO representative, Warsaw)



Photo: Oleksandr Rupeta for the IRC

Effects of the threat:

- **Premature Returns to Ukraine:** Vulnerable individuals, including those from temporarily occupied areas, are sometimes forced to return to Ukraine due to housing instability, as confirmed by humanitarian sector reports, local NGOs, and media.
- **Increased Risk During Autumn and Winter:** The approaching colder months exacerbate the dangers associated with homelessness, heightening the risk of health issues and even loss of life. Refugees without stable housing may struggle to maintain employment or participate in vocational training, deepening their economic vulnerability.
- **Overcrowded and Inadequate Housing Conditions:** Overfilled collective accommodation centers (OZZ) and poor living conditions contribute to further social exclusion and increase the risk of poverty.
- **Limited Access to Essential Services:** Homelessness significantly restricts refugees' ability to access critical services like healthcare, education, and social support.
- **Economic Vulnerability:** Lack of stable housing can lead to difficulties in sustaining employment or engaging in vocational training, worsening economic insecurity.
- **Increased Risk of Exploitation:** Refugees experiencing homelessness are at a heightened risk of exploitation, including forced labor, survival sex, and other abuses, as they may be pressured into unsafe or exploitative living arrangements.
- **Gender-Based Violence (GBV):** The absence of stable housing amplifies the risk of GBV, particularly for women and children, who may be compelled to live in overcrowded or unsafe conditions.

Who is affected?

Groups particularly at risk of homelessness and eviction include:

- Older people
- Persons with disabilities
- Large families
- Single mothers, especially those with children with disabilities
- Members of the Roma minority and refugees from third countries.



I believe the most vulnerable are older people who receive low pensions and cannot work due to health conditions. Especially if the 40+ program ends, they won't be able to afford housing. Among them are also women with children with disabilities who cannot go to work, and the state benefits they receive are primarily spent on rehabilitation, physiotherapy, and psychological support, particularly when the child has directly experienced the war.

(KII, local Ukrainian organization, Katowice).



Just like adults, children are in a difficult housing situation. They earn, but they have, for example, deaf parents, so we are also talking about excluded groups. Social housing for refugees yes, they happen, but in terrible conditions, a hole in the bathtub, terrible! It was horrible! Unfortunately, this young boy had to arrange everything on his own.

(KII, local NGO, Gdynia)

Capacity

Factors Shaping the Risk

- **End of the 40+ Program and Uncertainty:** The termination of the 40+ program and doubts regarding the continuation of housing previously funded through this mechanism increase the risk of homelessness.
- **Lack of Adequate Information Campaigns:** There has been insufficient communication about the closure of centers and the end of the 40+ program. Many respondents were unaware of the discontinuation of these benefits.
- **Inadequate Information Flow:** There is a lack of comprehensive information from regional governors and the Ministry of the Interior and Administration regarding collective centers. Information is fragmented concerning the number of centers, those financed through 40+, and the overall number of residents in OZZ (pl. *Ośrodki Zakwaterowania Zbiorowego*, so called OZZ, eng. *Centers of Collective Accommodation*).
- **Limited Coordination Among Stakeholders:** The coordination between actors involved in housing and the safety of refugees is insufficient, exacerbating risks.
- **Reduced Support and Uncoordinated Closures:** The reduction in support and uncoordinated closure or relocation of facilities managed by NGOs, particularly those without funds for continued operations, may increase the risk of homelessness.
- **Introduction of Fees in OZZ:** New fees for minors in OZZ, to be deducted from the 800+ benefit, have been introduced, adding financial strain on vulnerable families.
- **Crisis Intervention System's Capacity:** The effectiveness and coordination of Crisis Intervention Centers and Crisis Management Centers, responsible for assigning and relocating refugees to appropriate OZZ, are crucial but currently inadequate.

- **Housing Availability and High Rental Costs:** The limited availability of housing and the high cost of rent exacerbate the vulnerability of refugees.
- **Inadequate Relocation and Dispersion:** There is inadequate relocation planning, leading to improper distribution of refugees between large urban centers and rural areas.

Some key informants emphasize that the risks facing refugees are also linked to broader housing and social policies. The lack of effective preventive measures against refugee homelessness could lead to more severe problems, which would be costly for public finances and may exceed the capacity of Polish NGOs and local governments.

Capacity

The Lisbon Declaration on the European Platform on Combating Homelessness emphasizes, among other things, that no one should live in temporary or transitional accommodation longer than necessary to return to normal life or to obtain permanent housing; and that no one should be discharged from any institution without being offered appropriate housing.

- *Services for People in Homelessness Crisis*²²

According to the latest national survey, there are 595 facilities in Poland providing overnight accommodation for homeless individuals, including shelters, hostels, and warming centers, with a total capacity of 22,723 places. When including an additional 3,318 temporary spaces available during extreme cold weather, the total number of accommodation spots rises to 26,041. As of January 2024, 21,688 of these spaces were occupied. Additionally, there are other facilities offering services for homeless individuals beyond shelter, such as soup kitchens (276), bathhouses (71), laundries (35), food distribution points (300), clothing distribution points (270), and day centers (27). It is important to highlight that the responsibility to provide shelter, meals, and clothing to homeless individuals lies with local municipalities. Shelter is provided by allocating a place in a night shelter or hostel.

The Provincial Crisis Management Centers coordinate assistance for homeless individuals, offering hotlines that provide information on available accommodations, food kitchens, and material, financial, legal, and medical assistance. The Departments of Security and Crisis Management maintain up-to-date data on available spots in shelters and hostels. Monitoring reports indicate that following the termination of the 40+ program, the crisis management hotlines experienced significant strain, with not all of them offering support in Ukrainian.

● *Government Strategy on Combating Homelessness*

The government's Social Services Development Strategy 2030 and the National Program for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion also address support for individuals in a homelessness crisis.²³ In 2024, the Program for Assisting Homeless Individuals: Overcoming Homelessness was introduced. However, this program does not adequately address the situation of foreign nationals and refugees in crisis. Experts and social organizations have pointed out that since 2006, the funding allocated to NGOs under this program has remained almost unchanged.

In Warsaw, the Warsaw Center for Integration "Integracyjna Warszawa" (eng. *Integration in Warsaw*) serves as an additional actor in the field. Some Polish cities also have Councils or Social Dialogue Commissions on Homelessness. Understanding how these actors and institutions are prepared to address a potential crisis among foreign nationals, including Ukrainian refugees, is crucial for an effective response.

The provisions of the Law on Social Assistance outline the categories of foreigners eligible for social assistance benefits. Refugees from Ukraine who are under international protection, hold UKR status, or have temporary protection, as well as those with a residence card, are granted access to these benefits.

● *Charter of Rights for People in Homelessness Crisis*

Defining homelessness through a rights-based approach empowers individuals in crisis by granting them agency and the right to act.

In Poland, only two cities - Warsaw and Gdańsk - have adopted a Charter of Rights for People in Homelessness Crisis. This charter compiles fundamental human rights based on European and international law, specifically tailored to the needs of those experiencing homelessness.

It includes the right to housing, access to dignified temporary shelter conditions, the right to use public spaces and freedom of movement, the right to equal treatment, the right to a mailing address, and access to basic sanitary facilities.

In addition, individuals in crisis must have access to life-saving services, the right to participate in elections, and the right to privacy, even in collective accommodation facilities. They are also entitled to perform survival actions within the bounds of the law, such as begging and searching for discarded food, which should not be criminalized.

● *Support Programs by NGOs and INGOs*

International and local non-governmental organizations and UN agencies offer or have offered accommodation support programs. For instance, in 2024, IOM opened another collective accommodation center in Warsaw. Habitat for Humanity, in collaboration with UNHCR and IOM, introduced the "Step to Home" program, which supports Ukrainian refugees. The program provides services aimed at increasing access to and ease of rental housing. These programs are mainly targeted at individuals belonging to groups particularly vulnerable to housing and social exclusion. Habitat also runs a Social Rental Program and, together with UNHCR, provides temporary accommodation in Warsaw. Another example could be the "Wspólnie do niezależności" program (eng. *Together Towards Independence*). It is led by the Ministry of the Interior, the Polish Center for International Aid, and the Polish Red Cross. It aims to assist Ukrainian refugees living in collective accommodation centers. The project provides six months of support to help refugees move out of collective centers, along with career counseling, vocational and language courses, and guidance on navigating the Polish education and healthcare systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

IRC maintains all recommendations presented in the previous Q1 report. Additionally:

Humanitarian Sector

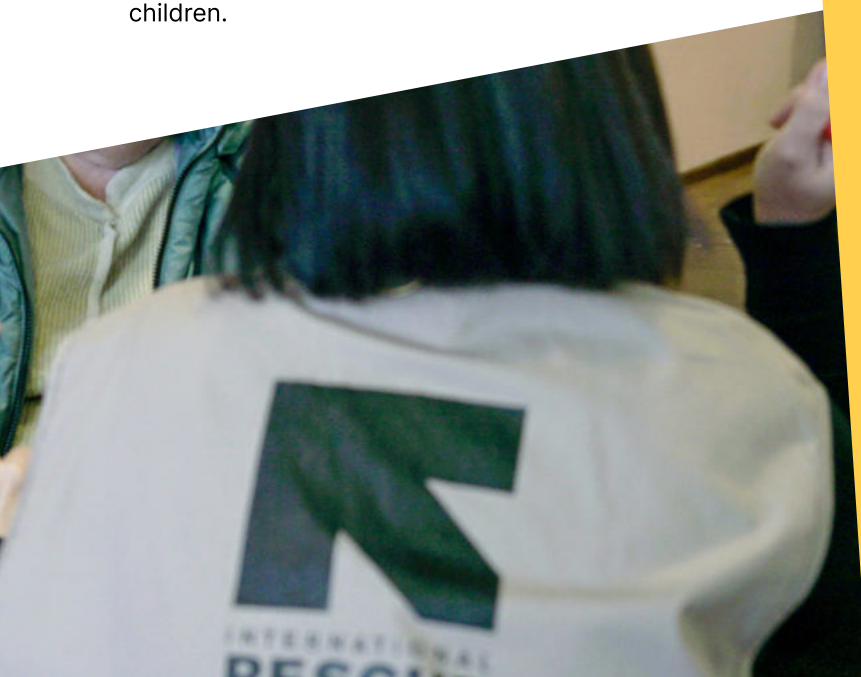
- Encourage local NGOs and government to advocate for the adoption of the **Homelessness Rights Charter** in more urban centers across Poland.
- Regularly **assess living conditions in collective accommodation** centers, especially those located outside major urban areas with limited access to NGO and humanitarian support.
- **Reinforce legal frameworks** to protect refugees from unlawful evictions, exploitation, and discrimination in housing. Consider the gender dimension (addressing the fact that single-mothers face additional difficulties). Advocacy should also ensure that refugees have access to legal support and information about their rights.
- **Facilitate inclusive discussions** involving the community, refugees, the humanitarian sector, authorities, and local NGOs to explore sustainable strategies for relocating refugees between larger and smaller urban centers.
- Develop **targeted programs to facilitate access to private housing**, with a specific focus on supporting vulnerable groups such as individuals with disabilities, chronic illnesses, and those requiring special accommodations, as well as single-mothers with children.

Polish Government

- **Enhance awareness among city officials**, social and health stakeholders, and the general public about the homelessness crisis and the rights of those affected, with special attention to individuals with refugee experience. Adopt an approach that frames homelessness as a violation of human rights.
- Current **data on the homelessness crisis remains insufficient**. It is essential to include vulnerable categories, such as migrants and refugees, in data collection efforts. Ongoing monitoring is required, particularly after the termination of the 40+ program for Ukrainian refugees.
- **Develop a Centralized Database for Collective Accommodation**: Implement a centralized database to track the availability and conditions of collective accommodation centers. This system should be accessible to NGOs and relevant stakeholders to improve monitoring, coordination, and responsiveness to the needs of residents.
- **Monitor living conditions** in collective accommodation centers and introduce guidelines and minimum standards for the operation of such centers.
- Continuously **monitor the implementation of the "Kamilek Law"** and child protection standards within collective accommodation centers.
- Ensure that **refugees receive clear, accurate, and timely information about housing options**, their rights, and available support services. This could include the creation of multilingual informational materials and the establishment of helplines.
- **Prepare a winterization plan** to accommodate potential arrivals from Ukraine due to worsened humanitarian situation caused by attacks on energy-generating facilities.

Ukrainian Government

- Have a preparedness plan for possible premature returns to Ukraine of populations at heightened risk.



Risk 2: Risk of restrained access to basic services and assistance

In this cycle, the IRC Protection Monitoring has identified the risk of restrained access to basic services and assistance among refugees.

Refugee households in Poland, interviewed during the monitoring process, frequently experience one of three risks related to restrained access to basic services, assistance, and poverty, as well as social exclusion.²⁴ These risks include severe material and social deprivation, living in a household with very low work intensity, and the threat of homelessness.

Low Work Intensity and Associated Challenges

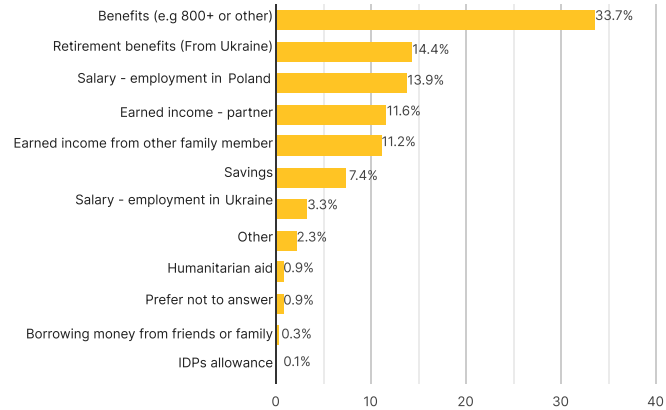
The rate of individuals living in households with very low work intensity is defined as the proportion of people in a household where working-age members have worked 20% or less of their total work potential in the previous year. While the monitoring did not aim to measure this indicator, certain symptoms of low work intensity and associated risks were observed.

Data on the proportion of time dedicated to work was not collected from the PM respondents. However, most refugees indicated that their main activity in Poland was family responsibilities (30.4%), followed by employment at 24.8% (with some combining work and domestic duties as their two primary activities). Additionally, nearly 19% of respondents were retired, and 16.6% were unemployed.

Social benefits, such as the 800+ program, were cited as the most common source of income by almost 34% of respondents. Pension benefits from Ukraine were the second most common source, while only 14% indicated that their primary income came from work in Poland.

SOCIAL BENEFITS, SUCH AS THE 800+ PROGRAM, WERE CITED AS THE MOST COMMON SOURCE OF INCOME BY ALMOST 34% OF RESPONDENTS

What are your main sources of living?



And if people don't work, they still need to eat. That is why they often visit organizations that distribute food and care products. However, resources are limited, and not everyone who comes receives assistance. People are exhausted from asking, and people are exhausted from helping

(KII, NGO representative, Katowice)

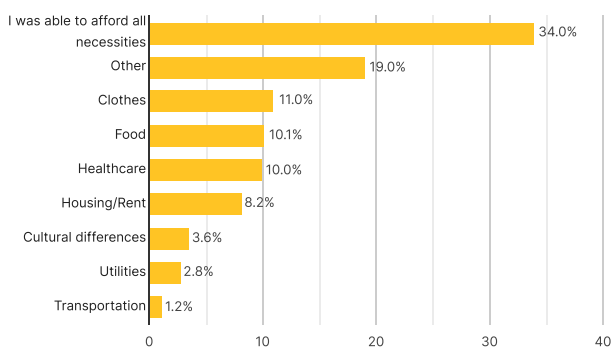
Importantly, these data represent only a subset of the refugee group interviewed during the PM process. Statistics in Poland indicate that between 225,000 and 350,000 of refugees are employed. The positive contribution of refugees to the economy has been highlighted in the report of [UNHCR and Deloitte \(2024\)](#).

In this cycle, for the first time, refugees were asked about their financial ability to cover basic needs and urgent expenses. Over the previous three months, more than 34% reported being able to cover all essential expenses. This means that nearly 70% of individuals faced challenges in this regard. Many could not afford clothing, food, healthcare, rent, cultural activities, and other necessities. **Among those struggling to meet basic needs were individuals who are employed (28.5%), those engaged in family responsibilities (36%), or retirees.**

Risk of restrained access to basic services and assistance

Notably, those who are employed but still face difficulties in covering essential needs work across various sectors, including education, finance, cleaning services, as well as IT services and construction. This underscores that being employed does not guarantee protection from poverty. According to experts, we often encounter the phenomenon of "in-work poverty," particularly among marginalized groups such as refugees, who may struggle to find employment that aligns with their qualifications.

Have you been unable to afford any of the following necessities in last 3 months?



It's hard not to afford the food you bought in Ukraine, you don't always eat what you want, it's hard with food and it's hard with clothes (Female, 61, Gdynia).

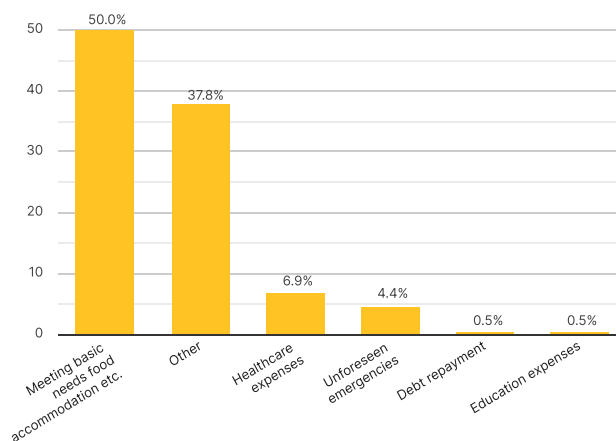


The dentist is very very expensive, when I was billed, I thought I would have to sell my kidney.

In the context of the next three months, refugees identified significant concerns about meeting their basic needs, such as food and housing. Over 50% expressed fears that they would not be able to secure these essentials. Among nearly 38% who indicated other challenges, the majority mentioned that they cannot afford anything. When asked about specific worries, food was the most frequently mentioned, particularly vegetables and fruits.

OVER 50% EXPRESSED FEARS THAT THEY WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO SECURE BASIC NEEDS.

As one 76-year-old woman said, "I look for everything to be cheaper, and it kills me morally because I've worked all my life". In some cases, refugees were forced to return to collective accommodation centers due to financial difficulties. A 51-year-old woman shared, "I was forced to go back to the shelter because I couldn't pay my rent." These concerns are consistent across different age groups, with more than 50% of older individuals also reporting difficulties in meeting their most basic needs.



We save on everything, everything goes to pay for rent, we don't have enough money for food, and we can't even pay for a canteen for our children at school (Female, 42, Katowice).

Refugees overwhelmingly reported being forced to save money, even on essentials like food or maintaining "adequate living conditions." Many mentioned they couldn't afford "anything non-essential." One 43-year-old woman expressed, "Thank God nothing happened that required spending money, because we wouldn't have managed it." Another way they coped with financial strain was through receiving humanitarian aid, such as food or hygiene supplies.²⁵

*"I don't have enough for everything; I only receive 400 PLN of pension from Ukraine" (Female, 51, Warsaw).
"We are saving on food" (Male, 68, Katowice).*

Risk of restrained access to basic services and assistance

Among those who expressed concerns about meeting basic household needs, health expenses, or unexpected costs in the coming three months, over 68% had children in their households. This suggests a significant risk of child material deprivation. Given the prevalence of single-mother-led households, there is a risk that children are also burdened by the "context of material deprivation".

- Moving to smaller towns or villages with lower living costs while maintaining employment or schooling in larger cities. This can increase commuting time, costs, and safety risks.
- Sharing housing with other families or living in substandard conditions, including returning to collective accommodation centers.



Economic challenges at home are a problem. Financial issues are getting harder because parents are also struggling more. Children have to start working at 15. These are low-paid jobs, but it helps support the household. It's both nice and sad. Yes, maybe they are becoming more resourceful, but at the same time, they are losing their youth, not spending money on themselves or their passions, but giving it to help their parents. Where do they work? Food delivering, dish-washing, food services - some have internships, but they generally don't earn much and are often exploited.

(KII, Local NGO representative, Gdynia).

These findings align with the UNHCR's 2024 regional analysis,²⁶ which indicates that refugees face a high degree of economic vulnerability, with half of them living below the poverty line based on reported income.

Based on refugee comments from monitoring and interviews with key informants, the following strategies for coping with economic difficulties have been identified:

- Cutting back on expenses related to food, clothing, and medical services.
- Borrowing money from friends, relatives, or acquaintances, accumulating debt, or selling personal belongings.
- Seeking extra jobs, often under unsafe or unhealthy conditions, or agreeing to long working hours.



Photo: Karolina Jonderko for the IRC

Risk of restrained access to basic services and assistance

Effects of the Threat:

- **Risk of Social Exclusion, Poverty and Material Deprivation:** Material poverty in long term can result from low income, unemployment, limited access to education and health care.⁴⁵ It is also caused by social inequalities such as discrimination, lack of available housing or limited employment opportunities.
- **Increased Vulnerability:** Lack of access to essential resources such as food, clothing, and healthcare exacerbates vulnerability, particularly among marginalized groups, including single mothers, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities.
- **Nutritional Deficiencies:** Limited financial resources may compel refugees to reduce spending on essential nutrition, leading to malnutrition and associated health issues.
- **Mental Health Impact:** Ongoing financial stress and uncertainty about meeting basic needs — such as food, shelter, and healthcare — can contribute to heightened anxiety, depression, and other mental health disorders, including PTSD.
- **Child Poverty Risks:** A significant proportion of refugee households with children facing economic difficulties indicates a heightened risk of child poverty. This can result in long-term developmental issues, reduced educational opportunities, and increased psychological stress for children.
- **Homelessness Risk:** Many refugees struggle to afford basic necessities like rent, heightening the risk of homelessness. This situation is further exacerbated for those who previously relied on collective shelters or temporary housing support, such as the now-defunct "40+" program.
- **Precarious Employment:** Refugees often work in low-wages, insecure jobs that do not match their qualifications, leading to in-work poverty. This undermines their economic stability and perpetuates a cycle of poverty and exploitation. The pressure to meet basic needs may drive refugees into precarious work conditions, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse.

Who is affected?

- Older refugees
- Single mothers with children
- Single mothers with children with disabilities
- People with disabilities
- Refugees from third countries and the Roma community
- Women and children
- People living outside major urban centers
- Former beneficiaries of the 40+ program and refugees residing in collective shelters

Capacity

Approximately 1.8 million Poles were living in extreme poverty in 2022. In 2023, one in fifteen people in Polish households was living below the extreme poverty threshold. This represents an increase of over 2 percentage points (GUS, 2023). Among this group are nearly 400,000 children and 290,000 elderly individuals. Data on foreigners are not included. Regional analysis by UNHCR (2024) indicates that refugees face a high degree of economic vulnerability, with half of them living below the poverty line based on reported income.²⁷

Foreigners residing in Poland with a permanent residence permit, long-term EU resident status, those who have maintained refugee status in Poland, subsidiary protection, and refugees from Ukraine with UKR status are eligible for social assistance. This includes integration, psychological support, financial and food assistance, and in the future, access to Foreigners Integration Centers.



Risk of restrained access to basic services and assistance

In 2022, 612,000 Ukrainian families (1,111,000 people) benefited from social assistance benefits (300+ payments, food assistance, and other benefits). Data for 2023 is not yet available.

For individuals from Ukraine, the most significant forms of support include the **family benefits program 800+ and, for families with children, the "Good Start" benefit**, which since July 1st is contingent on fulfilling school attendance requirements. Changes in the Special Act also resulted in the elimination of a one-time 300 PLN payment per person for Ukrainian citizens.²⁸

Among family benefits paid to Ukrainian citizens in Poland, family allowances with supplements were the most prevalent, accounting for 64.4% of the total value of family benefits paid. Parental benefits constituted 17.4% of the benefits paid, while care benefits, targeted at individuals with disabilities, made up 16.7%. More than half of these were care allowances, with 23% being care supplements.



People at Risk: Mothers or Caregivers with Children with Disabilities

Raising a child with disabilities demands significantly more parental involvement. Mothers are often compelled to take on additional roles, not only as the family's breadwinner but also as a teacher or therapist.²⁹ The additional costs associated with caring for a child with disabilities further increase the risk of economic difficulties for families. The demands of care giving, including coordinating and seeking out support, can be time-consuming and stressful, negatively impacting parents' employment opportunities and health, particularly for mothers. This is corroborated by data from expert interviews conducted in Q2 PM.



Mothers of children with disabilities are increasingly inquiring about housing options suitable for people with disabilities. They are asking about alternatives to the 40+ program, which is about to end.

(KII, local NGO representative, Gdynia)

In nearly half of the expert interviews (6/14), specific challenges faced not only by people with disabilities but also by mothers of children with disabilities were highlighted. Indeed, most reports and monitoring efforts focus on the situation of people with disabilities, but much less attention is given to the experiences of refugee families with disabled children.



People with disabilities and parents of children with disabilities face enormous emotional burdens and daily struggles (compounded by the challenges of being a refugee). In the morning, when a psychologist begins her day with clients, by the end of it, she is emotionally drained. And she only listens — imagine what it's like for those who actually live through it

(KII, NGO representative, Gdynia)



When we talk about vulnerable groups, we're also referring to exhausted mothers of children with disabilities, who can't afford rent (let alone accessible housing for people with disabilities). They can't take on jobs because they have disabled children to care for.

(KII, local Ukrainian NGO, Katowice)

Challenges also extend to the benefits available for people with disabilities (and, therefore, for children with disabilities) in Poland. The primary struggle, however, is finding employment and, in most cases, the inability to balance care giving with work. Assistance, care, and child-rearing benefits do not guarantee that basic needs are met. Families in this situation who remain in collective accommodation centers, which are rarely equipped for people with disabilities, face particular difficulties.³⁰



Family structure — a woman with three children (sometimes disabled) — can't rely on any relief just because she has children. I find it hard to imagine how this person could find full-time employment because what happens with the children then? Does someone magically take care of them?

(KII, social services, Katowice)



Moreover, if the 40+ program is canceled for such families, it will be a disaster because people cannot work under any circumstances.

(KII, NGO representative, Gdynia)

Among the challenges, it is important to highlight the services provided for people with disabilities. Social services in this field rarely have experience working with refugees. Additional barriers include language barriers, the unavailability of language courses for people with disabilities (PwD) and their caregivers, and the inability of caregivers, who cannot work due to care giving responsibilities, to attend language courses due to a lack of necessary social and family networks. Furthermore, the lack of translation services and a general lack of knowledge about the rights and available services for PwD (both among refugees and service providers) remain significant issues.

There is still a lack of data regarding the situation of PwD in Poland. According to the Ministry of Family, Labour, and Social Policy, by October 2023, Ukrainian refugees with disabilities had submitted 16,004 applications for disability certification.

People at Risk: Children



We had to intervene several times to save the lives of these kids. For instance, during suicide attempts. There were instances when security called us because someone was on the roof, and we intervened, fortunately managing to save them. We also help with homelessness crises among youth, including foreign youth. In these cases, we receive calls more and more frequently. This issue often affects young boys, including those from Ukraine.

(KII, local NGO, Gdynia)

From qualitative data, including expert interviews (5 out of 16), a significant problem emerged concerning children. Among the challenges identified were:

- **Bullying and Discrimination:** The issue of bullying and persistent discrimination among children was highlighted in 9 expert interviews.
- **Difficult Family Situations:** Problems related to substance abuse and violence within families were also noted.



We are dealing more with adult violence towards minors. We don't issue 'blue cards' for mere slaps. This violence is different and harder to detect...

(KII, social services, Katowice)

- **Fear of Military Mobilization:** Among young Ukrainian refugees, particularly boys, there is an increasing fear of being mobilized into the military, leading to significant psychological stress.
- **Risk of Sexual Exploitation:** The risk of sexual exploitation was noted in two expert interviews.



The risk of sexual exploitation of minor refugees is emerging. I wouldn't call it a problem yet, but we know it exists. We observe such symptoms. Due to a lack of activities, a lack of constructive ways to spend time, situations arise where a child doesn't attend school and is not accepted. Children have issues with the Polish language, and the accumulation of these problems makes them more vulnerable to becoming victims of sexual violence.

(KII, social services, Katowice)

- **Lack of Parental Time:** Parents often work multiple jobs, which may lead to potential neglect.



Additionally, the issue of parents' time — if they are working, the children see them for only 1-2 hours a day and don't have the opportunity to discuss everything with them.

(KII, school representative, Warsaw)

- **Economic and Financial Challenges:** Economic pressures within households are becoming more apparent. There is a growing risk of exploitation and abuse in the workplace, particularly among teenagers who, often as young as 15, are forced to work to support their family's budget.

- **Housing Instability:** Like adults, children face significant challenges due to unstable housing. The uncertainty and the frequent need to change schools add considerable stress to their lives.
- **Suicidality:** There is an increasing number of youths reporting suicidal intentions and the need for urgent psychological intervention. This is particularly noticeable from the perspective of NGOs (4/14 interviews)
- **Lack of Parental Awareness:** A significant issue is the little awareness among parents regarding the necessity of psychological support for their children.
- **Challenges in Accessing Healthcare:** Access to healthcare, particularly dental care, psychological support, and psychiatric services, remains a challenge.
- **Language Barriers:** Language barriers persist, hindering full access to the Polish education system.



Foreign youth often report suicidal thoughts. When they speak about it, there is an opportunity for intervention and the need for psychological work. There is a need to refer them to specialists, to draft a life contract. Fortunately, we have been able to manage these cases so far, as those who reported it have remained in contact. They keep their promises and attend therapy.

(KII, local NGO, Gdynia)

RECOMMENDATIONS

IRC maintains all recommendations presented in the previous Q1 report. Additionally:

Polish Government

- Create programs that **facilitate access to dignified employment opportunities** for refugees, matching their skills and qualifications (including gender-dimension, including childcare and other care dependency assistance)
- **Increase the availability of affordable housing** options for refugees, particularly in areas with high living costs.
- **Expand food assistance programs** and community kitchens to ensure that refugees have regular access to nutritious food, **especially children at schools.**
- Develop specific **programs to support refugees living in rural areas,** where access to services and employment opportunities may be limited. This could include mobile health and social services, transportation assistance.

Humanitarian Sector

- Support programs **that facilitate access to dignified employment opportunities** for refugees, matching their skills and qualifications. Provide language training, job placement services, and certification recognition to help refugees enter the workforce in their fields of expertise.
- **Implement targeted support programs (example: cash programs for emergencies)** for the most vulnerable groups among refugees, such as single mothers, the elderly, people with disabilities, and those living in rural areas.
- **Promote the social inclusion of refugees** through community integration programs, such as mentorship.
- Develop **specific programs to support refugees living in rural areas,** where access to services and employment opportunities may be limited. This could include mobile health and social services, transportation assistance.
- Conduct **targeted monitoring/research with the older refugee population** to develop long-term solutions, considering their limited employment potential.







2024 SAFETY AUDIT

A safety audit aims to understand potential and existing GBV risks faced by women and girls in a given setting through observation of surroundings and engagement with the community, here specifically refugee women and girls from Ukraine, and key informants.

Methodology

A safety audit aims to understand potential and existing GBV risks faced by women and girls in a given setting through visual observation of surroundings and engagement with the community, here specifically refugee women and girls, and informants. The present safety audit is based on field data collection conducted in Gdynia and Katowice in April and May 2024, that included participatory qualitative methodologies such as: direct observation (6 Safety Walks in locations visited by refugee women and girls, 3 in Gdynia and 3 in Katowice), FGDs (3 in Gdynia with age groups 14-18, 28-45, 60+ and 3 in Katowice with age groups 25-30, 60-70), and KIIs (3 in Gdynia and 4 in Katowice) were conducted with governmental and non-governmental practitioners from humanitarian and social services, education and humanitarian sector representatives.

Limitations: The findings of the audit cannot be generalized to the whole population of refugees in Poland or the population in Gdynia/Katowice. Also, most FGD participants were already acquainted with one another. While this could foster a sense of comfort while discussing sensitive topics, it might also lead to some individuals feeling reluctant to share personal perceptions of GBV.

Findings

Contextual indicators surrounding GBV risks

GBV remains substantially underreported, and this is due in part, according to participants, to the lack of trust in the police.



You are the one responsible for your own safety. In some cases, the police may not even come. Or do nothing to help.

(Female adult, Katowice, FGD participant).

Underreporting is also related to underutilization of services by survivors, including because of perceptions relating to the strict legislation around SRH in Poland and fears of confidentiality breach or overall lack of trust in the services, in addition to language barriers.

Participants discussed challenges for survivors to speak up, because of enduring, patriarchal social norms in both Ukraine and Poland and victim blaming attitudes that tend to silence survivors. Additionally, the barrier to speaking up is also conflict-related, with the issue of “heroism treatment” that further silences survivors, described by participants as some form of discrimination within Ukrainian communities against those who decided to flee Ukraine and seek shelter in other countries.



The split of Ukrainian society. Those who left Ukraine and those who stayed. Those who left Ukraine are considered as betrayers.

(Female adult, Katowice, FGD participant).

Structural obstacles such as precarious conditions of living for women/survivors, most often single heads of household, and lack of decision-making power also continue to further discourage women to seek help.

Protection Risks. Safety concerns/ GBV risks

● Fleeing Ukraine: risks of human trafficking



In both cities, respondents mentioned how situations of potential human trafficking have increased since the war escalation in 2022. According to reports, some women and children had gone missing shortly after entering Poland and were last seen being approached by unknown men by the borders

(Katowice, KII representative).



A friend of mine experienced a suspicious situation. A man approached a group of women and said he would help those who wanted to get to safe housing. At that point, she knew Polish and heard a suspicious conversation between the driver and this guy, so she decided not to use their services and wait for the bus.

(Female adult, Katowice, FGD participant)

- **Safety concerns in housing crisis/collective accommodation**

In addition to the lack of services in centers, concerns were shared about safety in collective accommodation, without specifying locations.



After arriving in Poland, my daughter and I were placed in one collective center.... This man behaved abusively towards me and my daughter, from time to time he did not allow to enter the kitchen, to go to the bathroom. Once, when my daughter was taking a shower, he somehow opened the door and said that now everyone can come in (...). Also, after he hit me several times, I reported it to the police. They did literally nothing to fix the problem. No one from the hostel helped us. I decided that the only one who could help me was myself. I found new accommodation, and we left this hostel

(Female adult, Katowice, FGD participant)

It is important to note that the data collection took place before the termination of the 40+ program and closing of some collective shelters, that are contributing to a further accommodation crisis. It may be anticipated that this crisis will push women and girls without sufficient financial resources or access to safe and stable housing options into further situations of GBV risks.

- **Safety concerns at home: the taboo of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)**

Women, girls, and GBV response practitioners have indicated a need for services supporting survivors of IPV. Some patterns were raised by participants, including remote psychological abuse that can heighten risks for women and girls of further exposure to violence, as well relationships dynamics and living situations in the host country.



It is often the case that the man is the breadwinner and the main and only decision-making person in the family. Therefore, the woman is completely dependent on such a husband, which is why she cannot leave him and prefers to tolerate such behavior and/or even violence.

(Female adult, Katowice, FGD participant)

In both Katowice and Gdynia, it was mentioned that more and more violence can be encountered in new families formed with Polish men and Ukrainian women (KIs).

- **Safety concerns and discrimination against refugee women in public space and online**

Respondents in Gdynia and Katowice generally reported feeling relatively safe living in those cities compared to living in Ukraine. However, the findings also reveal how women and girls are significantly self-aware and adopt strategies of avoidance in places/times deemed unsafe or in the face of male aggressiveness.

Teenage girls mentioned forms of harassment from men and boys, when seen as intoxicated or under the influence of drugs, for instance at shopping malls on the outskirts of the city, or on the road to public transportation stations. Adult women mentioned frequent verbal and physical abuse in taxis and public transport, predominantly from aggressive intoxicated men. A dimension of male aggressiveness towards refugee women and girls in the public space that was largely reported by participants relates to discrimination against Ukrainians and xenophobia, with a wide variety of instances of verbal abuse, aggressive attitudes and bullying.



I am trying not to speak Ukrainian on the streets.

(Female adult, Katowice, FGD participant)

Participants also highlighted how the problem deeply affects their children. Notably, participants shared that many Ukrainian parents are advising their children to refrain from speaking in Ukrainian in public or even at school in order to avoid being subjected to bullying or harassment. Participants highlighted that those experiences seem frequent in the school environment, with an absence of reaction from the educational staff or school administration, contributing to normalizing tolerance and replication of discrimination towards refugees.

The line between aggressive behaviors toward refugees and similar behavior on basis of gender is blurry, and participants' stories shared a gendered undertone of harmful masculine behaviors targeted at women and girls in particular.



He put the flowers on my knees. I was afraid to say or do something. He sat down next to me and started saying, 'Are you from Ukraine?', 'Give me money', 'You are in Poland, getting money from our taxes'. I did not know what to do. Thank God, a tram came, and I left that stop.

(Female adult, Katowice, FGD participant)

Participants were expressing a constant fear of being subjected to those behaviors and seeking ways to self-protection such as carrying defensive items with them and attending self-defense workshops.

Safety concerns were also raised in women and girls' use of the online space, reporting how xenophobia, bullying and harassment is common throughout social media platforms and channels and through closed members groups, with harmful and hateful content shared either publicly or privately, with a significant amount of escalation of violent attitudes. Many FGD participants also mentioned the prevalence of scams through phone calls from unknown phone numbers targeting older women. The spread of rumors was also reported by participants as an overall concern for their safety.

Capacity

Access to information and support services

Information about available services and support is scattered. There are difficulties in obtaining reliable information and a general lack of knowledge about how the support system for families or GBV survivors works (including in terms of mandatory reporting). Therefore, refugees mostly seek information on their own as to how to navigate affairs in institutions or where to seek help in a crisis or GBV situation, on the Internet, on social media or from friends. As revealed throughout the audit, survivors have to rely on their self-determination and own coping and safety strategies.

Participants also mentioned issues relating to the lack of psychological and psychiatric support in Ukrainian language and due quality, access to safe legal abortion, as well as practical issues such as lack of time on their side, for lack of childcare or due to long distances to services, predominantly located in the main urban areas and with restricted working hours. Informants also raised issues of lack of sensitization to GBV protection work, or even simply lack of updated, coordinated information between providers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

IRC maintains all recommendations presented in the previous Q1 report.

Additionally:

To GBV service providers and providers of services to refugee and migrant populations:

- **To mainstream the survivor-centered approach** as essential minimum standards for every institution, service and organization, whether local or international, that supports refugee populations, through staff capacity building and internal policies, including on how to handle GBV disclosures for all employees working in services that provide non-GBV specialized support to refugees and migrants.
- **To include Ukrainian-speaking staff** on all GBV-related infolines and promoting this resource within the community and through GBV pathway resources.
- **To consult women and girls** to identify the practical barriers they face in accessing services and look for feasible solutions, such as adjusting services' timetables to ensure they are accessible outside of standard working hours, accessible points within reasonable transport distance, childcare support/children's safe spaces.
- **To improve sectoral coordination among service providers at local level**, to ensure up-to-date mapping of services, functional referral pathways, and adequate dissemination of accurate information to be available in local neighborhoods/community centers and organizations, especially in areas with high refugee populations.

To Governmental and non-governmental actors working with host and refugee communities, social institutions and the media:

- To improve safety in the municipalities through practical solutions such as lighting in key areas, around public transport places, etc.

- To launch **gender and child-sensitive public campaigns** against harassment in public places and online, backed up by information about available services to encourage reporting. To work on social norms initiatives and campaigns to address victim-blaming and sexist attitudes including around harmful masculinities. For instance, to consider implementing gender mainstreaming in education policies to ensure that gender perspectives are integrated into all aspects of the educational system. Incorporating gender mainstreaming in refugee policies, ensuring that the unique needs and challenges faced by individuals are considered and addressed.
- To **promote social cohesion** and trust building between host and refugee communities through campaigns and initiatives in schools and other social institutions (e.g. information sessions, lectures and discussions).
- To **join efforts to enhance safety at school and initiatives against bullying**, mainstreaming gender and nationality/status lens and conflict-sensitivity (e.g. information sessions, lectures and discussions). Local humanitarian organizations collaborate in this effort along with educational units in Pomeranian and Silesian voivodships.

To Governmental and non-governmental actors working on housing needs and solutions for refugees

- To **develop and execute collective accommodation improvement plans** based on safety audit findings, involving cross-sector and inter-agency collaboration with local services within the existing shelters, and consult with women and girls to anticipate safety concerns and needs in view of the rising collective accommodation crisis.

To all actors:

- To continue conducting **joint assessments or coordination efforts between GBV program stakeholders and other sectors** as a good practice to identify emerging risks and track progress in risk mitigation efforts holistically with active participation in GBV cluster meetings.

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