Risks to Community Cohesion between Ukrainian Refugees and Host Communities in Central Europe

Regional Report

WHITE PAPER | JUNE 2023
Risks to Community Cohesion Between Ukrainian Refugees and Host Communities in Central Europe

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Risks to Community Cohesion between Ukrainian Refugees and Host Communities in Central Europe

In Central Europe, governments, non-governmental organisations, businesses, multilateral organisations, and ordinary citizens have provided substantial support to Ukrainians fleeing Russia’s 2022 invasion. However, as the war continues, this support may begin to deteriorate due to the challenges host countries face, such as high inflation and stretched social services, as well as disinformation campaigns relating to refugees, including from Russia-aligned stakeholders. This report aims to help understand the factors that might undermine cohesion between Ukrainian refugees and host communities in the region in the medium term. It provides programmatic recommendations to local, national, and international stakeholders on what they could do to mitigate those factors. In addition, the report details the characteristics that have increased (or can increase) different Ukrainian refugees’ vulnerabilities to exploitation, discrimination, and ability to access necessary services, as well as incendiary and misleading discourses about Ukrainian refugees that have appeared and have the potential to be spread further.

This report was funded by the UK Government through the Community Cohesion in Central Europe project, under the Conflict, Security and Stability Fund. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK Government’s official policies, or the views of IFES or Palladium.

Suggested Citation:
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Executive Summary

Background

The world was shaken by Russia's brutal escalation of hostilities and full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022—and by the ensuing human suffering. By March 2023, European countries recorded more than 8 million people displaced by the violence in Ukraine, with more than 5 million registered for temporary protection (TP) or similar national protection schemes on the continent.¹

Ukrainian refugees have been warmly welcomed by host populations in Central Europe. Governments, non-governmental organisations, businesses, multilateral organisations, and ordinary citizens provided whatever support they could to Ukrainians fleeing the invasion. While a quick end to the war is hoped for, the conflict may become prolonged, and therefore, displaced Ukrainians will likely continue to reside in neighbouring and other European countries.

Social services and systems were already stretched before the war, and pressure on housing, health, and education systems is increasing. Other challenges are likely to arise as the conflict protracts and people’s needs and concerns evolve, particularly in the context of inflation continuing to rise (for example, consumer price inflation was 13.2 percent² in 2022 in Poland and with highs of 30.2 percent³ in December 2022 in Moldova). In addition, incendiary and misleading narratives, including by Russia-aligned stakeholders and disinformation campaigns,⁴ can potentially exacerbate concerns and negatively impact community cohesion. In other crises, over time, tensions have led to increased polarisation of society and discrimination or hate crimes against minorities. Some early signs point to support for Ukrainian refugees beginning to erode in some countries. For instance, polling from December 2022 indicated that only 42 percent of Slovakia’s population viewed Ukrainian refugees positively.⁵ In the Czech Republic, in September 2022, energy protestors demanded the government ‘enter into direct gas supply contracts with Russia’ and return Ukrainian refugees to their homes.⁶ Looking ahead, with the invasion ongoing, the priorities of organisations that currently support Ukrainian refugees might change, resulting in a drop in funding available to support refugees and communities hosting them.

Despite these challenges, disruption to the status quo leads to clear opportunities to improve the situation and general living standards for refugees and local communities.

⁵ GLOBSEC (2022). New report shows that the V4 population supports Ukrainian refugees with some reservations, accessed 22 March 2023. Although there has been debate about methodological approaches to polling conducted by GLOBSEC and the Slovak Academy of Science, such as noting the different scales given to participants to respond to questions (1–5 or 1–10) and how responses were collected (online— in-person); even when the question posed is the same. See GLOBSEC (2002). New poll: Slovaks want Ukraine to win the war, Not Russia, accessed 22 March 2023.
⁶ Chastand, J-B. (2022). In the Czech Republic, the social crisis has awakened pro-Russian forces, Le Monde, accessed 23 March 2023.
Objectives

Several months into the war’s second year, this report aims to help understand the factors that might undermine cohesion between Ukrainian refugees and host communities in the region in the medium term and provide recommendations to relevant organisations for what they could do to mitigate those factors. We provide recommendations for specific programmes as well as programmatic and service delivery approaches that local, national, and international stakeholders could take to increase community cohesion and reduce the likelihood of these potential tensions occurring.

Approach and methodology

The research was conducted between November 2022 and March 2023. The team carried out desk-based research, followed by research workshops in the five countries of focus (the Czech Republic, Moldova, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia) with 229 experts from government, multilateral organisations, local and international non-governmental organisations, and academia. These research activities focused on (1) characteristics that can make refugees more vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation, and difficulty accessing services; (2) incendiary and misleading discourse about Ukrainian refugees in the country; and (3) tensions that might arise between refugees and host communities in the medium term (by September 2023). The research team followed up with a survey that asked key experts to rate the effectiveness of various programmatic responses for mitigating the five tensions that are most likely to affect community cohesion by September 2023 and to share programmatic lessons learnt that could be useful for others working in this space. The team then supplemented the findings from the workshops and surveys with additional desk-based research.

Structure of the report

The report considers the characteristics that have increased (or can increase) different Ukrainian refugees’ vulnerabilities to exploitation, discrimination, and ability to access necessary services (Chapter 2); the incendiary and misleading discourses about Ukrainian refugees that have been noted and have the potential to be spread further (Chapter 3); tensions that might occur between Ukrainian refugees and host communities in the medium term (Chapter 4); and various programmatic responses that could be applicable in the region to mitigate the risks at each stage of the refugees’ journey (Chapter 5).

Each chapter covers six stages of Ukrainian refugees’ journeys in the country: (1) entry, legal status, and registration for services; (2) healthcare; (3) housing; (4) education; (5) employment and income; and (6) community, social, and political life. This enables the report to more clearly bring out the links between misleading and incendiary discourses, the underlying challenges that such discourses exploit, the increased vulnerabilities of certain groups of Ukrainian refugees, and where tensions between Ukrainian refugees and host communities might emerge or become more significant, as well as to offer more targeted recommendations.

Key findings

This report draws out a range of vulnerabilities, discourses, and potential tensions that might materialise in the region; the country-specific reports provide greater detail on these. Three overarching observations can be made
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regarding the nature of the risks to community cohesion that might materialise in the Czech Republic, Moldova, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia in the medium term.

1. Economic concerns are a key driver of potential tensions.

Polling in Europe consistently shows that, since mid-2022, the population is primarily worried about economic factors such as the rising cost of living. For example, an October 2022 European Union (EU) poll showed that 93 percent of survey respondents in the EU (rising to 95 percent for Slovak respondents) were worried about rising living costs, including increasing food and energy prices.\(^7\) Moldova’s inflation rate was the highest at 30.2 percent in December 2022\(^8\) after a year of stability between 2.5 percent and 3 percent.\(^9\) With the increase in fuel and energy prices in all the research countries, discourses such as ‘What about our citizens?’ or ‘Ukrainian refugees are draining our social system as domestic citizens are being crushed by inflation’ appear.\(^10\) The narrative that rich Ukrainians siphon aid they don’t need from the ‘needy’ has existed since the beginning of the Russian invasion.\(^11\) One news report quoted a resident volunteering at the border in March 2022, saying, ‘You feel uneasy about it, seeing someone in a Lexus get a free lunch’.\(^12\)

Some grievances may be based on partial truth. For example, in Romania, there was a misconception that Ukrainians had been granted unlimited free travel within the country,\(^13\) but, in fact, the free-fare period ran only from March until May 2022.\(^14\) In the Czech Republic, Ukrainian refugees received some higher social benefits than locals. However, this was a temporary measure, and Czechs had access to a broader range of benefits that could add up to more than what Ukrainians received.\(^15\) Workshop participants also noted that some respondents believed that local taxpayers paid for much of the support to refugees that was actually funded by the EU or voluntary charitable donations. The general public might also underestimate the benefits that Ukrainians contribute to their country’s economy.\(^16\)

This report makes the recommendations below to mitigate potential tensions around economic concerns. These and other recommendations are detailed in Chapter 5 of this report.

- Ensure and communicate equity in the distribution of resources among the Ukrainian and local populations in need, and publicise the additional resources (international funding and voluntary domestic donations) the country received to support the refugees.

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\(^{13}\) For the first 150 days, Ukrainian refugees are generally provided with humanitarian aid of CZK 5,000, and Czech citizens do not have access to benefits in this amount. The social benefit, which corresponds to the humanitarian aid, is the amount of the ‘living minimum,’ e.g., CZK 4,860 for an individual in a single-person household (there are different categories). (For more details on social benefits, see the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs website and the *Životní a existenční minimum section.*) However, Czechs can apply for other types of social benefits, such as unemployment benefits, housing allowance, and maternity allowance. Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (2023). *Pomoc pro občany Ukrajiny a jejich zaměstnavatele*, accessed 12 February 2023; Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (2023); *Pomoc občanům Ukrajiny*, accessed 13 January, 2023; Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (2023), accessed 20 March 2023; Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (2023). *Průvodce*, accessed 20 March 2023.

\(^{14}\) EURACTIV (2023). *Slovaks believe Ukrainian refugees are making the country worse*, accessed 29 March 2023.
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- Implement phasing programmes—that is, change approaches to target support to those most vulnerable as a conflict continues.
- Share positive stories on social media, for example, about Ukrainian and host community relationships, support and solidarity, and Ukrainian refugees’ contributions to the country.
- Extend programs supporting refugees to more vulnerable local communities.
- Engage with businesses and organisations to help them make the most of a more diverse workforce.

2. Political discourses, fuelled by disinformation and historic grievances, have the potential to stir tensions.

Russian-aligned stakeholders have been active in spreading disinformation in all five countries. This includes anti-Ukraine narratives such as ‘blaming Ukraine and NATO [the North Atlantic Treaty Organization] for the war and pinning high energy prices on their own government rather than Russia cutting gas supplies’ and disinformation targeted directly at Ukrainian refugees. Slovakia and Moldova are particularly vulnerable due to larger pro-Russian populations and greater sympathy for Russia than comparable EU countries.17 Alongside this, particularly in Slovakia, a prominent ‘peace narrative’ suggests that Ukraine should seek to end the war and ‘unnecessary suffering’, which might include compromises on the part of Ukraine. One study called this narrative ‘a euphemism for stopping the military support for Ukraine’; the narrative has also been extended beyond the war to refer to support for Ukrainian refugees.18 Moldova’s sizeable Russian-speaking population typically consumes news produced in Russian, often from within the Russian Federation, and many have adopted more pro-Russian perspectives as a result.19

Historic tensions are being stirred up as well. Responses to the Volhynia massacre, during which it is estimated that up to 60,000 Polish people were killed between 1943 and 1945,20 characterised Ukrainians as anti-Polish nationalists. Similarly, workshop participants in Moldova noted that discourses were emerging about Ukrainian nationals’ role in supporting Transnistria in its conflict against the Moldovan state in the 1990s. Questions are asked about why Moldovans should support Ukrainians when the Ukrainian state was perceived to have historically fought against Moldovans’ interests.21

Such narratives can particularly gain traction on anniversary dates, such as the 80th anniversary of the Volhynia massacre in the summer of 2023, as well as elections. Negative narratives about Ukrainian refugees were observed in the 2022 Czech election, suggesting that the Czech Republic was providing too much support to Ukrainian refugees.22

19 In 2016, 69 percent of Moldovans claimed to use Russian language news; and 40 percent of Moldovans claimed to find Russian language news as trustworthy or more trustworthy than domestic Moldovan news. Broadcasting Board of Governors (2016); Role of Russian Media in the Baltics and Moldova, accessed 28 March 2023. Some regions are particularly affected. for example, in Gagauzia, a recent poll showed support for the pro-Western Moldovan government was as low as 2 percent, with 85 percent to 90 percent of people reporting having trust in the Russian Federation. agauzyeri.com (2023) Подробно об итогах соцописа в Гагаузии, accessed 28 March 2023.
21 Chisinau research workshop 2 March 2023.
To mitigate potential tensions that can arise due to political discourses, this report recommends:

- Conducting more activities to increase interactions that members of both communities enjoy (such as movie screenings or sports activities), providing opportunities for the groups to meet and get to know one another.
- Implementing strategic communications to reach target audiences and penetrate information bubbles.
- Creating additional free or affordable after-school activities for both communities’ children, which also provide an avenue for parents to become acquainted.
- Improving the training of search engines and generative artificial intelligence to help reduce bias and potential abuse.
- Organising community dialogues around topics such as fear of insecurity and war, Ukrainian history and culture, and the realities of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.
- Producing radio and TV programming to address tensions, including ‘edutainment’ that uses fiction to help build inter-community understanding.
- Working with journalists to support quality journalism that does not contribute to the spread of incendiary discourses.
- Reviewing school curricula, including the teaching of history and digital literacy.

3. Many of the challenges are rooted in long-standing operational issues.

Our research has demonstrated that many of the concerns that host communities expressed, and the incendiary and misleading narratives shared by actors with malicious intent and some parts of the population, are rooted in longstanding issues such as a strained healthcare or housing system. Healthcare provision in each of the five focus countries had challenges before the arrival of refugees from Ukraine. These included staff shortages in the Czech Republic,\(^{23}\) Poland,\(^{24}\) Romania,\(^{25}\) and Slovakia,\(^{26}\) long waiting lists in Poland\(^{27}\) and Slovakia,\(^{28}\) and unequal regional provision of healthcare in Romania\(^{29}\) and Slovakia.\(^{30}\) The arrival of Ukrainian refugees has highlighted some of these longstanding challenges; it also can speed up their resolution, as these issues have become even more visible. In some cases, different sources of funding might become accessible to address the issues, which could improve the situation for both Ukrainians and host communities.

To mitigate potential tensions around longstanding operational challenges, this report recommends:

- Linking community-cohesion-focused work with broader efforts to improve operational concerns in each country.
- Conducting conflict and context analysis to inform programming and communication campaigns and implementing specific programs to improve access to services for the local and refugee populations where needed (e.g., by providing translation services for healthcare and mobile clinics or supporting

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\(^{24}\) British Medical Journal (2022). Poland’s buckling healthcare system nevertheless welcomes Ukraine refugees with open arms, \(BMJ\) 2022; 377.

\(^{25}\) The Economist (2019). Romania’s health-care system, the EU’s worst, struggles to reform.

\(^{26}\) European Commission (2019). Internships for doctors from third countries to address shortage of health professionals in Slovakia.

\(^{27}\) British Medical Journal (2022). Poland’s buckling healthcare system nevertheless welcomes Ukraine refugees with open arms, \(BMJ\) 2022; 377.

\(^{28}\) UNHCR, Protection Risks and Needs of Refugees from Ukraine, accessed 13 April 2023.

\(^{29}\) The Economist (2019). Romania’s health-care system, the EU’s worst, struggles to reform.

\(^{30}\) European Commission (2019). Internships for doctors from third countries to address shortage of health professionals in Slovakia.
social intermediaries in the rental process, guaranteeing rent payments and minimum tenancy standards.\textsuperscript{31}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{31} See, for example, Habitat for Humanity (n.d.) \textit{Introducing Social Rental Agencies in Poland}, accessed 27 March 2023.}
Chapter 1: Introduction

The world was shaken by Russia’s brutal escalation of hostilities and full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022—and by the ensuing human suffering. By March 2023, European countries recorded more than 8 million people displaced by the violence in Ukraine, with more than 5 million having registered for TP or similar national protection schemes on the continent. Pol has welcomed the highest number of Ukrainian refugees, while the Czech Republic welcomed the highest number per capita, as demonstrated in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
<th>Czech Republic</th>
<th>Romania</th>
<th>Moldova</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refugees from Ukraine recorded in country as of March 2023 (UNHCR)</td>
<td>1,583,563</td>
<td>113,024</td>
<td>504,352</td>
<td>104,823</td>
<td>106,485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainian refugees hosted as a % of total population</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total population (million)</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>19.02</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ukrainian refugees have been warmly welcomed by host populations in Central Europe. Governments, non-governmental organisations, businesses, multilateral organisations, and ordinary citizens provided whatever support they could to Ukrainians fleeing the invasion. For example, in Poland, in addition to the government’s swift political and financial response, civil society organisations and individuals united to organise and support the response. A study by the Polish Economic Institute estimated that up to 77 percent of Polish citizens took individual action to support fleeing Ukrainians in the early months of the war. A study by GLOBSEC estimated that up to 46 percent of Slovak citizens took individual action to support Ukrainians during this time. In the five countries, immediate civil society support—such as hosting Ukrainian refugees—enabled the national and local governments to develop more systemic legal and operational responses. Such thorough action was taken despite the countries and the region more broadly having limited recent experience of, and infrastructure for, large numbers of refugees before the war. Each country experienced a 100- to 500-fold increase in refugees between 2020 and 2023. While a quick end to the war is hoped for, the conflict may become prolonged, and it is therefore likely that displaced Ukrainians will continue to reside in neighbouring and other European countries.

Some social services and systems were stretched before the war, and pressure is increasing on the housing, health, and education systems in the host countries. Other challenges will likely arise as the conflict protracts and people’s needs and concerns evolve, particularly with inflation continuing to rise (consumer price inflation reached

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34 Authors’ calculation, taking total population and refugee population figures provided in the table.
36 Polish Economic Institute, *How Polish society has been helping refugees from Ukraine*, accessed 24 March 2023.
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30.2 percent\(^3\) in December 2022 in Moldova). In addition, incendiary and misleading narratives, including by Russia-aligned stakeholders, and disinformation campaigns\(^4\) can potentially exacerbate existing concerns and negatively impact community cohesion. In other crises, over time, tensions have led to increased polarisation of society and discrimination or hate crimes against minorities. This can decrease a society’s resilience to disinformation and shocks more broadly and, in the worst cases, increase criminality and violence or conflict between communities and lead to human rights violations, including exploitation of vulnerable individuals and lack of access to basic services.

Some early signs point to support for Ukrainian refugees beginning to erode in some countries. In Slovakia, for instance, ‘How are you Slovakia?’ research project polling conducted by the Institute for Sociology and the Institute for Research in Social Communication, MNFORCE, and Seesame between March and December 2022 found that, during this period, the proportion of respondents who strongly disagreed that people from Ukraine should receive the same rights as others in Slovakia increased from 15 percent to 25 percent.\(^4\) Those who disagreed that refugees should have the right to apply for asylum in Slovakia without annual limits increased by almost half, from 35 percent in March 2022.\(^4\) In the Czech Republic in September 2022, energy protestors demanded the government “enter into direct gas supply contracts with Russia” and return Ukrainian refugees to their homes”.\(^4\)

Looking ahead, with the invasion ongoing, the priorities of organisations that currently support Ukrainian refugees might change, which may result in a drop in funding available to support refugees and the communities hosting them. Despite these challenges, the disruption to the status quo leads to clear opportunities to improve the situation for both refugees and local communities. With the right information at hand and building on strong support throughout the third sector by governments and the public, there is an opening to strengthen community cohesion and progress on addressing longstanding issues throughout the region.

**Objectives**

As the war enters its second year, this report aims to help understand the factors that might undermine cohesion between Ukrainian refugees and host communities in the Central European countries in the medium term.

We provide recommendations for specific programmes as well as programmatic and service delivery approaches that local, national, and international stakeholders could take to increase community cohesion and reduce the likelihood of these potential tensions occurring.

We understand community cohesion\(^4\) as occurring in a society in which:


\(^4\) Slight variations of this definition are used by various schools and councils in the UK and are put forward by the Department for Children, Schools and Families, now called the Department for Education.
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- All communities have a sense of belonging;
- The diversity of people’s backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and valued;
- Similar life opportunities are available to all; and
- Strong and positive relationships exist and continue to be developed in the workplace, schools, and the wider community.

This report considers community cohesion at the local, regional, and national levels.

**Approach, methodology, and structure of the report**

The project team conducted research in five focus countries: the Czech Republic, Moldova, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. In total, the team produced six research reports: this regional report and five country reports. This regional report summarises the findings of the country reports and draws out the key commonalities and differences in the potential tensions that might arise between the Ukrainian refugee and host communities. It also draws out regional trends and conclusions. For specific details on the topics discussed and country-specific information, please refer to the country-level reports.

To conduct the research, the project engaged a diverse team: a core team responsible for the overall research framework, methodology, and delivery across the five countries; country researchers in each focus country; and an advisory group of subject matter experts to provide specialist inputs. The team used the same approach and methodology for each country.

The research was undertaken in two phases. The inception phase took place in November and December 2022. The research team developed the approach and methodology and conducted initial desk-based research. This research examined the key relevant stakeholders in each country; existing programs in this space; and characteristics that can make different refugee groups vulnerable to exploitation, discrimination, and challenges in accessing services. Finally, the team completed an initial mapping of the tensions that might arise between the host communities and refugees in the medium term.

The research phase took place between January and March 2023. The team organised interactive two-day workshops with key experts from local and national governments, multilateral organisations, local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), academia, religious leaders, and the private sector. The morning sessions on the first workshop day were conducted with only Ukrainian refugees, discussing the characteristics that can make refugees more vulnerable. Representatives from academia and local NGOs joined for the afternoon sessions, which focused on refugee ‘journeys’—the various aspects of setting up a life in the host countries. The second day included a broad range of participants and focused on incendiary and misleading discourses about Ukrainian refugees and tensions that might arise in the medium term. The workshops were conducted between February and March, on 1 and 2 February in Prague with 65 experts, 8 February in Warsaw with 22 experts, 15 and 16 February in Bucharest with 53 experts, 1 and 2 March in Chisinau with 52 experts, 7 and 8 March in Bratislava with 20 experts, and 14 March in Kosiče with 17 experts from a broad range of organisations. In total, the project engaged 229 workshop participants across the five countries. The workshops used September 2023 as a focal point to orient the discussions toward risks that might become significant in the medium term. The research team then followed up with key experts through a survey, asking respondents to rate the effectiveness of various programmatic responses to mitigate the five tensions that are most likely to affect
community cohesion by September 2023 and to share programmatic lessons learned that could be useful for others working in this space. Finally, the findings from the workshops and the surveys were supplemented by additional desk-based research.

The report is structured according to the different stages of Ukrainian refugees' journeys in each country: (1) entry, legal status, and registration for services; (2) healthcare; (3) housing; (4) education; (5) employment and income; and (6) community, social, and political life. This allows the report to more clearly bring out the links between misleading and incendiary discourses, the underlying challenges that such discourses exploit, the increased vulnerabilities of certain groups of Ukrainian refugees, and where tensions between Ukrainian refugees and host communities might emerge or become more significant, as well as to offer more targeted recommendations.

After this introduction, Chapter 2 details the characteristics that have increased (and can increase) different Ukrainian refugees' vulnerabilities to exploitation and discrimination, including their ability to access necessary services. This chapter draws on the desk-based research and research workshop findings.

Chapter 3 focuses on the incendiary and misleading discourses about Ukrainian refugees. This section is based on the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) Chain of Harm framework, which maps the path by which disinformation, misinformation, and dangerous speech (DMDS) move through an information ecosystem, depicting how directed disinformation commonly amplifies hate speech or other divisive narratives to achieve its aims. The discourses section used three sources of data: (1) findings from the in-country workshops, (2) research from third parties on misleading and incendiary discourses about Ukrainian refugees, and (3) Facebook content found via CrowdTangle. The approach led to recommendations regarding discreet intervention points where the Chain of Harm could be 'disrupted'.

Chapter 4 summarises the tensions that might occur between Ukrainian refugees and host communities in the medium term. The chapter presents a long list of possible tensions to highlight the possibility of malign actors relentlessly promoting related discourses and of underlying challenges worsening sufficiently to increase tensions around a particular subject. This chapter draws on the desk-based research and research workshop findings.

Chapter 5 discusses various programmatic responses that could be applicable in the region to mitigate risks at each stage of the refugees' journey. The programmatic recommendations are intentionally broad, but they include illustrative examples to enable a range of organisations—from governments and multilateral organizations to NGOs of various sizes, as well as small community initiatives—to consider and adapt them in their programming.

Annex 1 is an acronyms and abbreviations list, and Annex 2 presents data on the key political, economic, and demographic characteristics of the five countries, as well as statistics on the numbers of refugees hosted, their demographic characteristics, financial support received, access to services and employment, and host population attitude polling figures.


46 The team used the CrowdTangle research tool to triangulate the findings from the workshops and third-party research and to identify examples to incorporate in the report. See Crowdtangle (2023). Welcome page, accessed 22 March 2023.
Given that the political, economic, and broader context may change very quickly after the publication of this report, Annex 3 is a summary of key links to relevant statistics that can be consulted for an up-to-date picture of the situation. Annex 3 also provides a range of recommended readings for deeper dives into the topics discussed in this report: Ukrainian refugees' needs and challenges, reports on discrimination, pressures on social services, public attitude polling, disinformation discourses, program lessons learned, and other topics.

This report was commissioned by the UK’s Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office and delivered by a consortium of Palladium and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) in collaboration with British embassies in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, and Moldova.
Chapter 2: Vulnerabilities to Exploitation and Discrimination

2.1. Overview

This chapter details the official refugee journey through the six identified stages: (1) registration for legal status, welfare, and benefits; (2) healthcare; (3) housing; (4) education; (5) employment; and (6) community, social, and political life. It then delves into the practical challenges, varied experiences, discrimination, and difficulties experienced by specific groups of refugees. It identifies some intersectional characteristics that can make people particularly vulnerable to exploitation, discrimination, and experiencing challenges in accessing services. These characteristics are summarised in the table below. They were selected as they have impacted refugees’ experiences to date and are likely to affect refugees in the future, particularly if programmatic priorities change, financial support decreases, and/or disinformation efforts gain more traction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journey stage</th>
<th>Characteristics that can make refugees vulnerable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legal status, welfare, and benefits</td>
<td>• Separated or unaccompanied children&lt;br&gt;• Elderly people, especially those travelling alone&lt;br&gt;• People with disabilities, particularly those with disabilities that limit mobility&lt;br&gt;• People unable to attend in-person registration or cover the related costs&lt;br&gt;• People with low digital literacy&lt;br&gt;• People with incomplete or inaccurate documentation from Ukraine or who were not properly recorded upon entry&lt;br&gt;• People with complex cases for temporary protection, including third-country nationals&lt;br&gt;• People who do not speak the local language&lt;br&gt;• Transgender people&lt;br&gt;• Members of the Roma community&lt;br&gt;• Single-parent families (Moldova)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare</td>
<td>• Elderly people&lt;br&gt;• People with mental health conditions and/or experiencing trauma or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)&lt;br&gt;• People with disabilities&lt;br&gt;• People with chronic health needs&lt;br&gt;• Women seeking support for sexual or reproductive health&lt;br&gt;• People who do not speak the local language or English&lt;br&gt;• Refugees living in more remote regions&lt;br&gt;• People on lower incomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>• Elderly people and people with disabilities or mobility issues&lt;br&gt;• People on lower incomes or in more vulnerable and precarious positions in relation to all types of housing&lt;br&gt;• Members of the Roma community&lt;br&gt;• Women suffering abuse, including domestic abuse&lt;br&gt;• Single parents&lt;br&gt;• Residents of collective shelters&lt;br&gt;• People renting privately without a formal lease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>• Pre-school children&lt;br&gt;• Children who do not speak the local language</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.2. Legal status, welfare, and benefits

In March 2022, the Czech Republic,\(^47\) Poland,\(^48\) Romania,\(^49\) and Slovakia\(^50\) passed legislation implementing the European Union Temporary Directive (TPD)\(^51\) and clarifying administrative procedures for people fleeing Ukraine to claim TP and access humanitarian assistance. On 1 March 2023, Moldova transposed the TPD into its legislation and formalized the right of refugees to remain in the country until 1 March 2024.\(^52\) In line with the TPD and the March 2022 national legislation packages, Ukrainian citizens and non-Ukrainian third-country nationals (TCNs) are exempt from the regulations regarding short-stay visas to enter the European Union.\(^53\) To extend their stay beyond 90 days, Ukrainian citizens (and their non-Ukrainian spouses) must apply for TP or other government schemes such as work permits or asylum.\(^54\) TCNs are also eligible to apply for TP if they had permanent residency in Ukraine before the invasion or had refugee status in Ukraine and cannot return to their country or region of origin in safe conditions.\(^55\) While the application process is similar, TCNs effectively face a double burden of proof in that they must demonstrate sufficient ties to Ukraine and a lack of safety in their country of origin.

\(^{48}\) European Commission (2022). Poland: parliament adopts law on assistance to Ukrainian refugees
\(^{49}\) Government of Romania (2022). DECISION no. 367 of March 18, 2022, regarding the establishment of conditions for ensuring temporary protection, as well as for the modification and completion of some normative acts in the field of foreigners, accessed 20 March 2023.
\(^{50}\) European Commission (2022). Slovakia adopts package of legislative changes to facilitate integration of those fleeing Ukraine
\(^{51}\) European Union (2022). Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382, 4 March 2022
\(^{52}\) Prior to this, Moldova offered refugees from Ukraine a form of temporary protection similar to that of TP, but issued through Moldova’s National Commission on Exceptional Situations. Since this fell under state of emergency legislation, the entry rights and refugee protection were valid only for a renewable 60-day period of a state of emergency. While the repeated extensions were welcome, this system brought about more uncertainty than TP status.
\(^{55}\) European Union (2022). Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382, 4 March 2022
Once granted TP, refugees have the right to access healthcare, education, housing, and other services and benefits on par with citizens of the host country. In some cases, there are differences in access or process between Ukrainian citizens and TCNs (such as in Poland, where TCNs from Ukraine must obtain a TP certificate from the Office of Foreigners within 15 days of arrival). In other cases, there are slight restrictions on the benefits available to refugees compared to citizens (such as in Slovakia, where Ukrainians under TP are not automatically entitled to child, parental, maintenance, funeral, or childbirth allowances).

There are also requirements related to the renewal of TP status. Refugees in the Czech Republic had to re-register online no later than 31 March 2023 and then attend an in-person appointment at the Ministry of Interior; those in Poland were required to re-register 18 months after 24 February 2022 but no earlier than nine months from the date of their entry into Poland. In Romania, TP had to be renewed in March 2023 and then every six months. In Slovakia, TP is currently granted until March 2024.

Some focus countries—in particular, the Republic of Moldova and Romania—see themselves also as transit countries, given the number of Ukrainian refugees who travel through them to reach other destinations. Those countries have established humanitarian mechanisms to support safe onward travel for refugees. For example, in collaboration with multilateral partners, the Government of Romania established ‘green corridors’ to support people travelling to other border crossing points in Europe. As of 13 January 2023, the government had provided no-cost travel through Romania to 687,820 refugees from Ukraine.

The desk-based research and research workshops identified the groups discussed below as facing particular challenges at this stage of the refugee journey.

**Separated or unaccompanied children** were identified as particularly vulnerable in all five countries. The invasion of Ukraine resulted in the separation of many families, with minors often left in the care of people other than their immediate relatives. Research from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) shows that, of households surveyed between October 2022 and March 2023, 2 percent had children separated from both parents. The International Centre for Migration Policy Development reports that many Ukrainian children who entered Poland in the first three months following Russia’s escalation of the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 were accompanied by relatives or caregivers who were not their legal guardians, meaning that their care needed to be formalised in Poland. As a result, 19,200 temporary guardianships were appointed for 23,000 Ukrainian refugee children in Poland by June 2022. While the figures for unaccompanied children in the region are less clear, media and government reports cite cases of children leaving Ukraine and entering neighbouring countries alone. The Czech Government Commissioner for Human Rights and National Coordinator for Adaption

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56 European Union Agency for Asylum (2022). Poland
59 Government of Republic of Poland (2022). Amendment to the law on assistance to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the armed conflict on the territory of the country.
60 European Union Agency for Asylum (2022). Information on temporary protection in Romania
63 Government of Romania (2023). Romania’s Response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis
65 The International Centre for Migration Policy Development (2022). Temporary protection in Poland – what solutions for vulnerable groups?
66 Guardian (2022). Slovaks hail boy, aged 11, who travelled 700 miles alone from Ukraine
and Integration of Refugees, Klára Šimáčková Laurenčíková, told media sources that, as of March 2023, there were approximately 30,000 child refugees in the Czech Republic unaccompanied by legal representatives.68 This group is likely to face even greater vulnerabilities, including risks of trafficking, abuse, and violence.69 Unaccompanied children may also lack access to proper identification documentation and legal advice70 and struggle to access TP without a parent or guardian to confirm their registration.71

Participants in the research workshops considered unaccompanied children among the most vulnerable groups within the Ukrainian community in Romania, citing examples of severe loneliness and isolation; higher risks of mental health problems, self-harm, and addictive behaviours; and vulnerability to exploitation due to their inability to support themselves financially.72

The elderly, particularly travelling alone: Participants in the research workshop noted that the elderly, particularly if travelling alone and lacking knowledge of the local language, may experience challenges in accessing the necessary information to register for TP and welfare support.73 This risk may be compounded for elderly refugees with poor digital literacy, who find online information more challenging to access and who will rely upon in-person information provided at border crossings and registration centres.74 According to REACH’s multi-sectoral needs assessment in Poland, elderly people face additional barriers in adapting to the new situation and accessing services.75 They may require additional support or alternative non-digital communication channels to ensure they fully understand and access their legal status, rights, and benefits.

People with disabilities, particularly those with disabilities that limit mobility: People with disabilities face challenges in registration and accessing benefits,76 particularly since many processes require an in-person application. The Bratislava research workshop participants op commented that regional locations also affect these limitations. People outside of Bratislava reported longer and more difficult journeys to state offices, which are additionally challenging for people with mobility issues.77 Deaf Ukrainians in Moldova face challenges, as minimal sign language interpretation is available, and Russian (used in Moldova) and Ukrainian sign languages are unrelated. In Romania, people with disabilities cannot send a family member in their place to register for their temporary protection status, so they are required to travel personally.78 In the Czech Republic, the Ministry of the Interior has allowed individuals to send representatives if they cannot attend an in-person appointment to finalise their TP status (based on power of attorney rights and the presentation of a medical report). Still, this bureaucratically complex process requires significant pre-documentation.79 This may be challenging for some individuals, particularly those who have a mobility-limiting disability and are travelling alone without a trusted individual to act on their behalf.

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68 Ceske Noviny (2023). Commissioner: There are about 30,000 unaccompanied child refugees from Ukraine in the Czech Republic
69 European Commission (2022). SRSG on Migration and Refugees publishes reports of visit to Czech and Slovak Republic
70 European Union (2021), Briefing – Vulnerability of unaccompanied or separated child migrants
72 Bucharest focus groups workshop, 15–16 February 2023.
73 Bratislava research workshop 7–8 March 2023.
74 IOM (2022). Assistance to people fleeing the war in Ukraine: IOM Slovakia
75 UNHCR REACH (2022), Multi-sector needs assessment Poland
77 Bratislava research workshop 7–8 March 2023.
Other people unable to attend in-person registration or cover the related costs: Due to the requirement for in-person visits to finalise TP registration, people who face barriers to travel can experience delays in securing their legal status and benefits. This might include those residing in remote areas for whom travel distance can be prohibitive and adults who care for young, elderly, or unwell relatives. According to the UNHCR, Slovakia (30 percent) and Romania (26 percent) have the highest reported number of Ukrainian refugee households with at least one person with specific needs (defined as a disability, serious health conditions, or old age vulnerabilities) in the region neighbouring Ukraine (Belarus, Bulgaria, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia). 

Costs associated with applying for TP can include transportation to government offices for in-person appointments and computer or internet access for electronic registration or access to legal advice or assistance. People living below the poverty line or on low incomes may not have access to the resources necessary to complete the application process.

People with low digital literacy: Information on legal status, rights, and benefits is primarily available online, and this may be challenging for people who have low digital literacy skills. According to media reports, as of 17 March 2023 in the Czech Republic, only 277,000 of approximately 500,000 refugees had submitted the necessary documentation to renew their TP beyond March 2023, with up to one in 10 Ukrainian refugees experiencing problems with the process and documentation requests. The Refugee Aid Organisation noted that seniors and unaccompanied minors without a legally recognised guardian to complete their application were particularly vulnerable. Those refugees may struggle to navigate the application process or communicate with officials and thus risk losing their TP status.

People with incomplete or inaccurate documentation from Ukraine or those not properly recorded upon entry could experience issues and delays registering for legal status and benefits. Ukrainians from eastern regions were more likely to have fled their homes without documentation as the hostilities escalated. In addition, some people may have lost documents during multiple displacements. According to the UNHCR, 26 percent of Ukrainian refugees in Romania, for example, were displaced internally in Ukraine at an earlier date. Participants in the workshop also shared examples of temporary protection cards issued by Romanian officials with handwritten or incorrect information; those cards were invalidated later and required re-registration.

People with complex cases for temporary protection, including TCNs: Some countries, such as the Czech Republic, operate slightly different forms of registration for displaced persons fleeing Ukraine, depending on whether an individual is a Ukrainian citizen (and whether they were resident in the Czech Republic before or after 24 February 2022) or a TCN. While information is available regarding different cases for TP, such as the Ministry of the Interior website, which publishes guidance in Czech, English, and Ukrainian, the differences in status and registration processes may leave some individuals unclear regarding their legal status and rights. There are additional complexities for Ukrainians who held a valid residence permit in another EU country before February

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80 Bucharest focus groups workshop, 15–16 February 2023.
81 UNHCR (2022). Displacement patterns, protection risks and needs of refugees from Ukraine
85 UNHCR (2022). Romania Protection and Profiling Monitoring Factsheet
86 Bucharest focus groups workshop, 15–16 February 2023.
People who do not speak the local language: While all five countries have made significant efforts to provide all necessary documentation in multiple languages, including Ukrainian, refugees can still struggle with some bureaucratic processes and practicalities when they do not speak the local language. This was particularly discussed in Romania workshops, where the local language differs most significantly from Ukrainian compared to the other research countries. Many workshop participants raised the issue of language barriers, noting that before 2022 Romania had only a small bilingual community. Data from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) supports this, reporting that as of August 2022, only 11 percent of Ukrainians in Romania could speak Romanian.

Transgender Ukrainians experience particular difficulties at this stage in the journey since their legal documentation can be incongruous or may not reflect their lived identity or chosen name. This was noted in the workshops in Romania, for instance. A hotline was established for LGBTQIA+ people entering Moldova, but there is very little public-facing information about the impact of the refugee crisis on transgender people. HIAS and VOICE produced a joint report that suggests transgender people perceive a risk of violence at border
crossings and echoed that outdated documentation may prevent them from crossing international borders.\(^9\)

There are reports of discrimination against transgender refugees on the Ukrainian and Romanian sides of their shared border, for instance. On the Ukrainian side, NGOs reported cases of transgender women being asked to submit to humiliating ‘bio-medical’ checks and of others who have not undergone gender-affirming surgery being immediately conscripted and sent back.\(^9\)

**Members of the Roma community** are noted as being discriminated against at the borders. Examples have been shared of border guards refusing to stamp passports,\(^10\) leading to problems at reception centres—where there were further reports of discrimination.\(^10\) Before the escalation of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, it is estimated that as much as 20 percent of Ukraine’s Roma community was undocumented, which can cause particular problems, as noted above.\(^10\) The lack of targeted resources and support for Roma means that the specific issues those populations face—many of which arise from prejudice or exclusion—are under-addressed. This led to post-arrival challenges in accessing full legal status and entitlements, including housing,\(^10\) education, and employment.\(^10\) Workshop participants in Moldova reported that Roma people were less likely to have all the information required to obtain official documentation in Ukraine, which may compound challenges in accessing legal status in the country.\(^10\) Furthermore, there have been reports that Roma in Moldova are not believed when they say they are fleeing the war or are not given access to the same quality of service as ethnic Ukrainians, although they are fleeing the same hostilities.\(^10\)

**Single-parent families** may face additional challenges in attaining legal status, particularly in Moldova, due to Moldovan laws that require both parents’ consent for decisions affecting a child’s status. Single parents may also face challenges at the border if they have different surnames. According to the IOM, parents travelling alone with a minor child should have been granted power of attorney by the second parent to be eligible for IOM assistance to travel to another country.\(^10\) This reflects Moldova’s national law, which requires two parents to be registered on the birth certificate for a child to receive Moldovan documentation.\(^10\) The absence of partners is compounded by the fact that some parents are unaware of each other’s whereabouts, and the war has made it more challenging for families, partners, and ex-partners with shared custody to remain in contact with each other and their children.

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\(^10\) Mirga-Wójtowicz, E., Talewicz, J., and Kolaczk, M., UNHCR (2022). Human rights, needs and discrimination – the situation of Roma refugees from Ukraine in Poland


\(^10\) Mirga-Wójtowicz, E., Talewicz, J., and Kolaczk, M., UNHCR (2022). Human rights, needs and discrimination – the situation of Roma refugees from Ukraine in Poland

\(^10\) Roma Association in Poland (2022). The situation of the people of Roma origin

\(^10\) Chisinau Research Workshops 1 and 2 March 2023.


since the full-scale invasion. Therefore, she could not register her child for settled status in Moldova.\textsuperscript{109}

\section*{2.3. Healthcare}

Refugees from Ukraine who have been granted TP have the right to access healthcare in their country of residence. As there are differences in the national health systems of each focus country, there are different means of accessing healthcare.

In Poland, Ukrainian citizens under TP are entitled to access publicly funded healthcare on the same terms as Polish citizens.\textsuperscript{110} TCNs who fled Ukraine are also entitled to healthcare in Poland, but it is provided through a different system and via designated medical facilities that have signed an agreement with the Head of the Office for Foreigners.\textsuperscript{111} In Romania, refugees under TP are entitled to free national healthcare services, including primary healthcare, emergency medical assistance, and treatment for acute or chronic diseases. Services not typically free for Romanians, such as dental care, are also not free to Ukrainians.\textsuperscript{112} For refugees who have not yet applied for or received TP status, border crossing documents can be used as evidence of the right to access national health services.\textsuperscript{113}

In the Czech Republic, Ukrainian refugees under TP are automatically registered in the Czech health system, and the government covers health insurance payments during the first 150 days of their residency in the country.\textsuperscript{114} After 150 days, refugees must organise their own payments for health insurance through employer contributions, independent payments, or state support via the Labor Office of the Czech Republic.\textsuperscript{115} Without insurance, Ukrainian refugees can also apply for the Extraordinary Immediate Assistance scheme as a one-off, means-tested emergency allowance when there is a serious risk of injury.\textsuperscript{117} In Slovakia, emergency care is provided free of charge, but other forms of healthcare require insurance coverage.\textsuperscript{118} All citizens and residents, including refugees, must have health insurance, paid either through employers or directly by the individual.\textsuperscript{119} However, since January 2023, the Government of the Slovak Republic has ensured that refugees under 18 who are not covered by public health insurance still have access to the full range of healthcare support available under the scheme.\textsuperscript{120}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Chisinau research workshop 1 March 2023.
\item This includes access to general and emergency healthcare, prescriptions, infectious disease prevention measures, COVID-19 vaccinations for adults, and standard preventative vaccinations for children.
\item Dadnam, D., Lomasney, E., Gartshore, L., and McKernon, S., \textit{British Dental Journal} (2021). \textit{Romanian dilemmas}
\item European Commission (2022). \textit{Romania: New order facilitates access to healthcare for people arriving from Ukraine}
\item Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees (SRSG) (2022). \textit{Report of the fact-finding mission to the Czech Republic by Ms Leyla Kayacik} (4–6 May), accessed 7 January 2023.
\item IOM UN Migration (2023). \textit{Information and assistance in connection with the war in Ukraine}, accessed 23 March 2023.
\item OECD (2017). \textit{State of Health in the EU – Slovak Republic – country health profile 2017}
\item Ministry of Health (2023). \textit{Determination of the scope of healthcare needed}
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Since 1 March 2023, Moldova’s TP status has provided the basis of access to healthcare in the country for Ukrainian refugees; displaced people with TP status can access basic healthcare without additional registration. A number of private healthcare providers have waived costs for Ukrainian residents in Moldova.

In addition, specific challenges and barriers to access remain. The groups discussed below were identified through the desk-based research and the research workshops as facing particular challenges at this stage of the refugee journey.

**Elderly people:** Ukrainian refugees aged 60 and over report the highest need for healthcare. For example, 46 percent of refugees surveyed in Poland over 60, and 45 percent in Romania, reported a healthcare need within the previous 30 days. In Romania, Ukrainian refugees aged 60 and over also reported the lowest access to healthcare (by age) amongst those who needed it, with only 61 percent of respondents saying that they were able to access the medical care they needed compared to 70 percent of adults under age 60 and 93 percent of children. In Poland, access to healthcare is limited by factors such as elderly refugees travelling alone, residing in a collective shelter, and not having Polish language skills. In addition, a higher number of elderly people in Poland have reported mobility issues, further increasing the risk of failing to access healthcare. Participants in the Prague research workshops added that elderly refugees can be under extreme stress, as they must navigate new systems in a new culture and language and may feel that they are a burden to their already struggling adult caregivers.

**People with mental health conditions and/or experiencing trauma or PTSD:** The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that one in five people fleeing war will have a mental health condition within 10 years, with one in 10 developing a severe condition like PTSD or psychosis. Evidence from protection monitoring also suggests that new arrivals—having been exposed to conflict in Ukraine for a longer time—are likely to have more compounded and complex mental health conditions that require specialised medical support. Participants in the research workshops discussed barriers to accessing mental health support, including pre-existing limitations in provision, long waiting times, high costs, and feelings of shame or guilt in seeking mental health support.

Approximately 13 percent of Ukrainian refugees surveyed in Poland in November 2022 reported being internally displaced before coming to Poland, and evidence from other conflicts indicates that those who have experienced multiple displacements are likely to have experienced more trauma. Mental health problems were reported in 14 percent of Ukrainian refugees surveyed by UNHCR in Poland, with those aged 60 or over the most affected.

In September 2022, one survey found that approximately 75,000 adult Ukrainian refugees in the Czech Republic need professional mental healthcare, but only around 5,000 (3 percent) have received it. A
UNHCR area-based assessment in Slovakia that looked at the four main cities found that 54 percent of refugees surveyed were unaware of mental health and psychological support services available nearby.134

**People with disabilities:** The UNHCR reports that persons with disabilities typically constitute at least 15 percent of any displaced population and face a range of vulnerabilities, including inadequate access to basic services and information.135 Disability certificates issued in Ukraine are not always automatically recognised, for example, in Poland and the Czech Republic. Ukrainian refugees are eligible to apply for the Polish disability certificate, yet the process can be slow and is exacerbated by the requirement to produce medical documents in Polish confirming the state of health or disability.136 In the Czech Republic,137 people who do not have documents confirming their disability may not be entitled to the same social benefits and financial allowance as Czech citizens with a disability. Delays in securing the certificate can make people with disabilities more vulnerable. For example, in Poland, disabled persons residing in collective centres are exempt from the amendment that requires a financial contribution for accommodation costs; however, proof of disability is required to secure this exemption.138 Many specialist institutes and NGOs with particular healthcare offerings in Moldova have established outreach services for Ukrainians. Still, workshop participants raised that refugees with disabilities continued to experience challenges accessing information. More widely, families of children with disabilities have been noted to have considerable needs that are not met due to cost, lack of a disability certificate, transportation challenges, and lack of services for adolescents.139

**People with chronic health needs:** Participants in the research workshops reported that challenges around waiting times and the ability to secure general practitioner referrals to specialist services were experienced by both refugees and the host community.140 Additional barriers for refugees, including high service costs, missing or foreign healthcare records, and language differences, are reported to delay or prevent people with chronic health conditions from accessing essential healthcare assistance or medicines.141 Participants in the Bucharest workshop shared stories of individuals with chronic health conditions whose medical records were in Ukrainian and who faced additional delays in securing needed medical support.142 A study by the Help to Help Ukraine association reported that many patients were asked to translate their medical records or re-submit to a full medical evaluation in Romania, a costly and time-consuming process risky for people with urgent treatment needs.143 In the Czech Republic, 9 percent of refugees surveyed reported that they had a chronically ill child who was unable to receive appropriate treatment.144

**Women seeking sexual or reproductive health support:** The UNHCR has highlighted reports of gender-based violence, including sexual violence toward women and girls in Ukraine, and urged host countries to strengthen their response services and specialised care such as emergency contraception, HIV prophylaxis, and abortion.145

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134 UNHCR REACH (2023). *Slovakia: area based assessment (Bratislava, Kosice, Nitra and Zilina) - February 2023*
135 UNHCR (2022). *Ensuring the protection of persons with disabilities fleeing from Ukraine*
138 The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration (2023). *Amendment to the Act on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine signed by the President, 25 January 2023*
139 World Health Organisation (2022). *Health of refugees from Ukrainians in Poland 2022: survey findings*
141 UNHCR REACH (2022). *Multi-sector needs assessment Poland*
142 Bucharest focus groups workshop 15–16 February 2023.
143 Help to Help Ukraine (2023). *Access to healthcare for Ukrainian refugees in Romania*
145 UNHCR (2022). *Regional Ukraine Refugee Response: Gender-Based Violence Sub-Working Group*
Risks to Community Cohesion between Ukrainian Refugees and Host Communities—Regional Report

Poland is one of only two states within the EU where performing or aiding abortion is criminalised (except in two exceptional circumstances). Even in those circumstances, however, abortions are rarely performed legally. Participants in the research workshops added that this could be shocking to women arriving from Ukraine, where abortion is more accessible as a healthcare right; this leaves women who have experienced sexual violence at risk. Moreover, in Poland, prescriptions are required for emergency contraception, adding another barrier. In Romania, according to a cross-NGO Gender Analysis Brief completed in May 2022, while abortion before 14 weeks is legal, doctors may often refuse to carry out an abortion or refer patients to private practices with higher fees, leaving female Ukrainian victims of sexual violence extremely vulnerable.

People who do not speak the local language or English: Language barriers were mentioned in research workshops in Romania, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland as complicating refugees’ access to information on healthcare services and adding further burdening overstretched healthcare staff who must communicate via an interpreter or in a language they are not (very) familiar with. This was particularly discussed in Romania, where Ukrainian-Romanian interpreters are lacking, and the healthcare system is complex. In Slovakia, 30 percent of refugees surveyed reported language as a main barrier to accessing care.

Refugees living in more remote regions: Residence in more remote and poorer regions with existing service provision gaps can compound the vulnerabilities experienced by refugees. In Romania, the IOM found significant differences in Ukrainian refugees’ ability to access hospitals and general healthcare depending on their region of residence. For example, 82 percent of Ukrainian refugees in Bucharest reported that they had ‘easy’ access to a local hospital compared to just 36 percent of Ukrainian refugees in Constanta. Similarly, while 76 percent of Ukrainian refugees in Bucharest reported that they had ‘easy’ access to a local health clinic, only 44 percent of Ukrainian refugees in Galati said the same. Participants in the research workshops shared examples of Ukrainian refugees residing in rural areas in poorer regions of Slovakia who could not access information about local healthcare provision and cases of refugees who could not access general practitioner assistance and even ambulance services.

People on lower incomes can find accessing some types of healthcare challenging. In Romania, people on low incomes are less able to afford medical treatment that is not publicly funded or not readily available (such as dental care). Those on low incomes living in more remote areas might struggle to afford travel to healthcare providers. In countries where health insurance is required for broader care after a certain period, such as Slovakia, unemployed people might struggle to arrange the necessary support.

2.4. Housing

Refugees’ accommodation includes collective sites, hosted and rented private accommodation, and social/public housing. All five focus countries offer a form of emergency shared accommodation via collective sites or refugee

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146 Centre for Reproductive Rights (2020). European abortion laws, a comparative overview
147 Warsaw workshop 9 February 2023.
149 World Health Organisation (2023). Understanding the obstacles faced by Ukrainian refugees in Romania
152 Bratislava research workshop 7–8 March 2023.
accommodation centres (RACs). These sites are generally intended to provide only short-term accommodation, but some refugees have lived in RACs longer. For example, in Moldova, 90 percent of residents in RACs in December 2022 had been there for more than two months. Some governments have introduced payment charges for refugees staying in collective accommodation for extended periods. For example, in the Czech Republic, refugees in collective accommodation for longer than 150 days must agree on payment terms with the provider or find alternative accommodation; in Poland, as of 1 March 2023, refugees who stay in collective centres for more than 120 days must contribute 50 percent of their costs (not more than PLN 40—approximately $9 USD or £7 GBP), and those who stay for more than 180 days must contribute 75 percent of their costs (not more than PLN 40—approximately $14 USD or £11 GBP).

Hosted private accommodation has been prevalent, particularly in countries close to Ukraine that have welcomed significant numbers of refugees. In August 2022, the UNHCR reported that across Belarus, Bulgaria, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia (collectively recording 1,747,096 Ukrainian displaced persons in the country at that time), 36 percent of Ukrainian refugees were staying with private hosts, making this the most common form of immediate accommodation at that time. Government subsidies have supported host-matched accommodation in the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. For example, the Government of Romania introduced the 50/20 programme under which individuals who host a Ukrainian refugee receive 50 RON (approximately $11 USD and £9 GBP) for accommodation and 20 RON (approximately $4.50 USD and £3.50 GBP) per day for food for each refugee hosted. In Slovakia, the government provides allowances to citizens who host Ukrainian refugees or offer accommodation free of charge. These were increased by 25 percent in September 2022 to a maximum of 710 EUR to 1,790 EUR per month for properties with one to four rooms.

Moldova has had no state-sponsored system to assign Ukrainians to live in privately hosted accommodation, which has been arranged through informal networks.

Under TP status, Ukrainian refugees are entitled to access the private rental market. According to UNHCR data, as of January 2023, up to 44 percent of Ukrainian refugees living in Poland were in private rental accommodation. In the Czech Republic, as of January 2023, approximately 75 percent of Ukrainian refugees were recorded as living in private housing. There is also limited provision of social housing in some focus countries (such as the Czech Republic) and efforts to increase capacity (such as in Romania).

Finding sustainable longer-term accommodation remains an issue in all five focus countries, with contextually specific challenges in each. For example, in Poland, the rapid arrival of refugees occurred in the context of

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154 OECD (2022). Housing support for Ukrainian refugees in receiving countries
157 The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration (2023). Amendment to the Act on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine signed by the President, 25 January 2023
159 OECD (2022). Housing support for Ukrainian refugees in receiving countries
160 Dopomoha / Help for Ukrainians in Romania (2022). The 50/20 programme
162 European Commission (2022). Slovakia: accommodation allowance for refugees from Ukraine to increase
165 Government of Romania (2023). Romania’s Response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis
166 UNHCR (2023). Regional Refugee Response Plan January – December 2023
significant housing challenges, including high demand, insufficient supply, and rising rental and mortgage costs;\textsuperscript{167} there are reports of Ukrainians—particularly those on lower or single incomes—in precarious housing situations and contractual agreements.\textsuperscript{168} In the Czech Republic, the UNHCR reported that social housing capacity outside Prague remains limited, and refugees outside the capital may require additional support (such as cash grants) to access sustainable private rental or social housing.\textsuperscript{169} The groups discussed below were identified by the desk-based research and the research workshops as facing particular challenges at this stage of the refugee journey.

**Elderly people and people with a disability or mobility issue:** Elderly refugees are already more likely to face access barriers due to language barriers, no employment or low-income levels, and difficulties adapting to a new situation. Elderly people with disabilities or mobility issues face additional challenges in accessing appropriate housing, including adapted housing and affordable housing outside of collective sites. In Moldova, the WHO highlights that the UNHCR-led disability taskforce has supported people with disabilities to find temporary accommodation. However, a lack of suitable facilities and assistive equipment, along with lengthy bureaucratic processes, have made it challenging to transition from temporary accommodation to private or independent living for refugees with disabilities.\textsuperscript{170} As of December 2022, 42 percent of RAC residents in Moldova were people living with disabilities and 9 percent had serious medical conditions, suggesting that these groups use RACs more widely than private housing.\textsuperscript{171} This may be in part because 17 percent of RACs in Moldova were adapted from specialist facilities to cater for people with mental health issues or disabilities, making them some of the most adequate long-term housing options to date.\textsuperscript{172}

**People on lower incomes are in more vulnerable and precarious positions in relation to all types of housing:** People on lower incomes will struggle to leave collective accommodation for private rented housing due to cost. This brings additional challenges around access to employment, education, and social assistance. In the Czech Republic, for instance, all these require an official residence address.\textsuperscript{173} Furthermore, the lower an individual’s or household’s income, the greater the percentage spent on rent, which in an inflationary market leaves people with low incomes even more vulnerable to sudden price rises. This also makes them vulnerable to exploitative landlords; one participant in the research workshop cited an example of a tenant being extorted by their landlord.\textsuperscript{174} People on low incomes living in unsafe or abusive situations in hosted accommodation might not be able to secure alternative housing. Participants in the Prague research workshop also noted that refugees who cannot secure independent accommodation, and in cases where local housing capacity and crisis shelters are exhausted, must move to a new location or town. This can lead to additional feelings of displacement and/or challenges accessing services and maintaining or gaining employment.\textsuperscript{175} In Romania, where accommodation provision for refugees continues to be subsidised, an upcoming review of the programme might create uncertainty and risks of entering poorer quality housing or returning to collective centres.\textsuperscript{176}
**Roma:** There have been reports of Ukrainian Roma refugees facing discrimination and prejudice when accessing core services, particularly housing. The UNHCR found that, in Poland, in the initial months after the invasion of Ukraine, proportionally fewer Roma refugees were offered hosted accommodation than non-Roma refugees. As a result, Ukrainian Roma refugees remain disproportionately represented in collective sites and less likely to access other forms of accommodation. At the same time, there are reports of anti-Roma discrimination in collective sites, including hostile behaviour from non-Roma staff and racist verbal attacks. Media coverage by CNN found that Ukrainian Roma refugees in Romania faced issues including accusations of not being Ukrainian, segregation into lower-quality accommodation, and being given misleading information about their rights. Moldova’s Ombudsman’s report of April 2022 cites cases of administrators of RACs refusing to accept Roma refugees, multiple cases of police warning local accommodation centres not to accept Roma refugees, and a heating system being intentionally disconnected at an accommodation centre during below-freezing weather. The report concludes that discrimination has impacted decision-making about the provision of housing to Roma and that ‘intentionally or not, the accommodation of ethnic groups in some temporary centres was nevertheless affected by existing (predominantly negative) social stereotypes about them.’ The European Roma support group reported that the few RACs where all Roma were housed in Moldova lacked food, medicine, and warm clothing, and were often overcrowded.

**Women suffering abuse, including domestic abuse:** If women have few accommodation options, they may be forced to stay in places where they do not feel safe. Research from VOICE reports that poor accommodation in Slovakia affects exposure to gender-based violence and other risks to women, supporting findings from the UNHCR multi-sectoral needs assessment that cited the impressions of women and girls who live in collective centres about lack of safety and security. Workshop participants in Slovakia highlighted that low-income households living in poor quality smaller rented housing were likely to experience challenges in both reporting abuse and in finding suitable and safe alternative housing. In Romania, in the context of significant landlord power and limited tenants’ redress mechanisms, participants in the research workshop noted that single women are particularly vulnerable to both high housing costs and potential exploitation by landlords. The limited visibility of refugees living in private accommodation raises the risk that harms, including gender-based violence, exploitation, inadequate living conditions, and arbitrary eviction go undetected. A UNHCR rapid survey found that over half of all respondents did not know where to report cases of violence or abuse related to the 50/20 housing programme in Romania, demonstrating an important information gap for refugees.

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177 Mirga-Wójtowicz, E., Talewicz, J., and Kolaczk, M., UNHCR (2022). *Human rights, needs and discrimination – the situation of Roma refugees from Ukraine in Poland*

178 Mirga-Wójtowicz, E., Talewicz, J., and Kolaczk, M., UNHCR (2022). *Human rights, needs and discrimination – the situation of Roma refugees from Ukraine in Poland*

179 Kottosova, I., CNN (2022). *You are not a refugee.’ Roma refugees fleeing war in Ukraine say they are suffering discrimination and prejudice*


182 VOICE and HAIS (2022). *Slovakia Assessment Report - Waiting for the Sky to Close: The Unprecedented Crisis Facing Women and Girls Fleeting Ukraine*

183 VOICE and HAIS (2022). *Slovakia Assessment Report - Waiting for the Sky to Close: The Unprecedented Crisis Facing Women and Girls Fleeting Ukraine*

184 UNHCR REACH (2022). *Slovakia multi-sectoral needs assessment 2022*

185 Bratislava research workshop 7–8 March 2023.

186 Bucharest focus groups workshop, 15–16 February 2023.

Workshop participants in Romania noted that refugees might be reluctant to come forward to raise specific issues with authorities due to uncertainty about legal and procedural matters relating to these topics and fears that they will not be believed (especially if they raise a complaint against a Romanian citizen who is likely to be both more familiar with the processes and procedures in the country and able to better express themselves in Romanian to refute any claims).

**Single parents:** Single parents (disproportionately women) face a number of barriers to accessing housing. First, widespread family separation and a lack of social networks in the host country makes childcare a challenge, limiting single mothers’ ability to find employment and thus afford private rental accommodation. Even where single mothers can work, single-salary households face financial challenges in securing private rental accommodation, particularly in the larger, more expensive cities. Second, even when mothers with children can afford private rental accommodation, there can be discrimination or prejudice against renting to single earners with children. This means that mothers with children can find it hard to secure a private rental agreement (or may be asked to provide additional guarantees with public notary assistance). Third, as a result of these barriers, Ukrainian families are often forced to rent accommodation that is smaller or of a lower quality than is needed.

**Residents in collective shelters:** Evidence indicates that residents in collective shelters are among the more vulnerable groups, reporting lower incomes and savings, increased financial pressure, and higher rates of health conditions than Ukrainians in private or hosted accommodation. They are also more likely to experience multiple displacements, increasing the risk of mental health issues. Within collective centres, specific groups may be particularly vulnerable, including women (at risk of sexual exploitation), Roma and LGBTQIA+ individuals (facing discrimination and prejudice in shared sites), and the elderly, as well as solo refugees (experiencing greater isolation and barriers to accessing services). After a certain period, Poland and the Czech Republic require residents to co-fund stays in collective accommodation, with exceptions in Poland for certain vulnerable groups. This means that those who do not fall within those groups might find themselves in even more vulnerable situations. Standards of collective centres also vary. The Refugee International team has noted that some centres have relatively high-quality facilities and services, including physical and mental healthcare, language classes, and facilities for mothers and children. Other centres have lower standards (including poor preparation for winter weather), are less sustainable (due to funding or dependence on volunteers), and may face closure as they are returned to their original use (such as schools). Therefore, residents of collective sites are often in a precarious position in terms of longer-term sustainability and the appropriateness of accommodation. Furthermore, collective centres might not be suitable for people with special needs. For example, a UNHCR REACH multi-sectoral needs assessment in Slovakia found that only 34 percent of collective accommodation sites were accessible to people with disabilities. Participants in the Bratislava research workshop also

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188 Bucharest focus groups workshop, 15–16 February 2023.
189 UNHCR (2022). *Displacement patterns, protection risks and needs of refugees from Ukraine – regional protection analysis 1*
188 For example, according to the Protection Profiling in Poland, since the invasion of February 2022, the majority of respondents (80 percent) have been separated from their immediate family members. UNHCR (2022). *Refugees from Ukraine in Poland Regional Profiling Update October 2022*
190 Warsaw research workshop 9 February 2023; Bratislava research workshop 7–8 March 2023; Chisinau research workshop 1 March 2023.
192 Norwegian Refugee Council (2023). *One year on: seven out of ten refugees from Ukraine risk falling into poverty in neighbouring countries*
193 UNHCR REACH (2022). *Multi-sector needs assessment shelter Poland*
194 Relief Web (2023). *Poland: Amendments to Ukrainian refugee hosting laws showcase the need for continued humanitarian support*
195 Panayotatos, D., and Cone, D. (2022). *Preparing for the unpredictable: ensuring the protection and inclusion of refugees from Ukraine in Romania and Moldova*
196 UNHCR REACH (2022). *Slovakia multi-sectoral needs assessment 2022*
commented on the strict rules attached to certain forms of collective temporary accommodation,\textsuperscript{197} noting that, while rules are in place to protect some vulnerable groups, they may inadvertently impact other groups. For example, one participant commented on the link between trauma and alcohol and drug use and expressed concern that people suffering from addiction could easily fall afoul of social behaviour rules in the centres and face eviction and homelessness.\textsuperscript{198}

**People renting privately without a formal contract:** Workshop participants highlighted that people without formal rental contracts are among the most vulnerable refugees.\textsuperscript{199} Participants in the Moldova workshop indicated that many landlords were unwilling to pay the 12 percent\textsuperscript{200} withholding tax applied to rent and preferred to make informal arrangements.\textsuperscript{201} This was echoed by a participant in Bratislava who shared examples of landlords using ‘unofficial’ contracts as a way to avoid tax payments, which can be appealing to refugees because of the flexibility but leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and without access to proper tenants’ rights.\textsuperscript{202} People without legal rental agreements are also vulnerable to eviction and sudden homelessness. In addition, refugees without a rental contract may face issues when renewing their TP status without this proof of residency.\textsuperscript{203} Workshop participants also discussed landlords’ common perception of Ukrainians as short-term, unreliable tenants and reluctance to sign formal contracts with them for less than a one-year period. The law in Moldova also allows landlords to change the rent on private property in case of changes in price, without regulation, so renters across the board face a potentially precarious situation.\textsuperscript{204}

2.5. Education

According to the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), up to 2 million children have been displaced from Ukraine since February 2022.\textsuperscript{205} Under TP, school-age Ukrainian children have the right to access education. However, levels of enrolment in primary and secondary schools across the five focus countries are varied—and generally relatively low—as many Ukrainian children continue to receive online education. For example, fewer than 1,000 Ukrainian children were registered as fully enrolled in Romanian schools as of January 2023.\textsuperscript{206}

In the Czech Republic, enrolment in pre-primary, primary, and secondary grades (up to the age of 15) is mandatory for all children, including refugees. For the 2022–23 school year, UNICEF reported that 50,285 Ukrainian children had been accepted into Czech kindergartens, primary schools, and secondary schools (it was estimated that, at the end of 2022, 70 percent of kindergarten-aged refugee children attended kindergartens, 90 percent of primary school-aged children attended primary schools, and less than half of adolescents attended secondary schools).\textsuperscript{207} In Poland, Moldova, Romania, and Slovakia, all school-age children must be enrolled in education; for Ukrainian refugee children, this can include enrolment in an online Ukrainian school. Many Ukrainians in these countries report choosing to continue with online schooling provided by Ukrainian authorities for reasons including language barriers, uncertainty over length of stay in the host country, bureaucratic...
difficulties, costs, space restrictions in schools,\textsuperscript{208} concerns that school certifications may not be recognised in Ukraine in future, and a general preference for schooling in Ukrainian.\textsuperscript{209}

Governments and NGOs across the five focus countries have developed extracurricular educational support and provision, both attached and unattached to schools. For example, in Romania public schools and local authorities deliver after-school Romanian language programmes.\textsuperscript{210} Poland’s Ministry of Education has prepared guidance for teachers and educators on supporting Ukrainian refugees, including training in multi-cultural and intercultural education and teaching Polish as a foreign language, and recommended school-led initiatives such as Polish language classes and the hiring of Ukrainian-speaking teaching assistants.\textsuperscript{211} In Slovakia, the UNHCR has noted a number of informal learning opportunities are available for Ukrainian students and encouraged further expansion of these activities.\textsuperscript{212} The groups below were identified by the desk-based research and the research workshops as facing particular challenges at this stage of the refugee journey.

**Pre-school children:** Evidence from UNICEF’s work on early childhood development indicates that access to quality care and education programmes helps to provide children with emotional, social, cognitive, and language foundations that are linked to positive education and wellbeing outcomes throughout childhood.\textsuperscript{213} Before the arrival of refugees from Ukraine, kindergartens, especially in large cities, experienced serious pressure on places; this has become more severe since February 2022.\textsuperscript{214} In the Czech Republic, it is estimated that 15 to 20 percent of preschool children may be excluded from education precisely because of the insufficient capacity of schools and kindergartens.\textsuperscript{215} Furthermore, Ukrainians arriving with few or no social-communal networks struggle to access both informal and formal childcare. Limited access to preschool care and educational programmes outside the home adds to the vulnerability of younger preschool children displaced from Ukraine. In the Czech Republic, an alternative and temporary solution was the opening of adaptation groups and centres (which in practical terms means separate classes for Ukrainians). While some argue these may make children feel segregated and excluded,\textsuperscript{216} those who have attended such adaptation groups more often moved on to formal education (85 percent).\textsuperscript{217}

**Children who do not speak the local language:** Language barriers were mentioned as a significant barrier to education in all workshops, particularly Romania, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. According to a PAQ survey, in the Czech Republic fewer than one-quarter of children under the age of three (22 percent) can communicate

\textsuperscript{208} For example, it is estimated that 3 percent to 5 percent of primary school pupils and roughly 10 percent of teenagers may be excluded from education because of the insufficient capacity of Czech schools. PAQ Research (2023). *Hlas Ukrajinců: Vzdělávání*, accessed 28 March 2023.


\textsuperscript{210} Bucharest research workshop 15–16 February 2023.


\textsuperscript{212} UNHCR (2023). *Slovakia regional refugee response plan 2023*.

\textsuperscript{213} UNICEF (2021). *The formative years: UNICEF’s work on measuring ECD*.

\textsuperscript{214} Public Information Bulletin of the Commissioner for Human Rights (2022). *Problems of education of children and youth from Ukraine - recommendations of the Ombudsman. The answer of MEIN*;


in common situations, and almost half of children (45 percent) know few or no Czech words.\textsuperscript{218} This also applies to those children who have been in the Czech Republic for more than half a year.\textsuperscript{219} A survey of refugees in Slovakia reported that, for those who had not completed education, not speaking the language was one of the most commonly reported reasons for not attending school (at 12 percent of respondents).\textsuperscript{220} Language support was also lacking in some schools; none of the nine schools that The Centre for Educational Analysis visited in Bratislava had the necessary tools to support children from Ukraine to overcome the language barrier.\textsuperscript{221} Furthermore, a study by Comenius Institute reported that 85 percent of teachers surveyed said that language barriers were the biggest challenge in educating and integrating Ukrainian refugees, with 67 percent requesting additional language support in education and 58 percent asking for support to adapt curriculum content for non-Slovak children.\textsuperscript{222} Save the Children reported that nearly three-quarters of Ukrainian children had little or no knowledge of Romanian and were unable to continue their education in the Romanian education system due to language barriers\textsuperscript{223} or struggled to join at the correct educational grade.

One participant in the workshop said that Ukrainian parents were concerned about their children falling behind educationally and that this was a key reason for preferring to continue with online Ukrainian schooling.\textsuperscript{224}

In addition, Ukrainian children may face psychological problems such as anxiety, trauma, and fear following displacement and experiences of war that, when combined with language barriers, can make integration into a new school system particularly challenging.

**Children attending online Ukrainian school**: Those attending online-only schools have fewer opportunities for integration, language learning, and building social bonds. Workshop participants raised concerns about isolation, stigma, and demotivation among children, particularly the longer they attend online-only schools.\textsuperscript{225} In addition, it is difficult to monitor how many children not enrolled in local schools are in fact attending online Ukrainian schools, with the UNHCR estimating that up to 16 percent of Ukrainian children in Poland may not be attending school at all.\textsuperscript{226} Young people not attending either in-person or online school are especially vulnerable to exploitation, risky behaviours (such as criminality), and/or negative mental health outcomes.\textsuperscript{227}

**Children experiencing bullying**: Workshop participants in Slovakia and Moldova commented that peers from pro-Russian parts of society might bully Ukrainians at school and online, with specific examples shared of some wearing pro-Russian tee-shirts to taunt Ukrainian children.\textsuperscript{228} Participants highlighted the mental toll on children when peers accuse them of lying about what happened in Ukraine in order to get support and hearing ‘Why don’t you go home? There’s no bombing there anymore’.\textsuperscript{229} Among secondary school children in Slovakia, 28.3 percent reported being bullied multiple times per month, with the figure increasing for those from lower socio-economic
backgrounds. This feeds into a culture where, as workshop participants explained, Slovak children are not told off for bullying and the behaviour is considered ‘kids being kids’. Moreover, without knowledge of the local language, Ukrainian children cannot effectively advocate for themselves. Bullying is also known to have a negative impact on reading performance and wellbeing, risking increased education gaps for Ukrainian refugees.

Youth in their late teens: Students close to or at the point of finishing high school can fall between the Ukrainian and host country education systems. To complete the Ukrainian high school diploma, students need to sit in-person exams in Ukraine, which is in many cases impossible. Older teenagers are more likely to study online, as entrance exams for high schools, for example in the Czech Republic, can be extremely challenging for Ukrainian children who come from a different educational background and do not speak Czech. Older teenagers are also at greater risk of dropping out of full-time education and report higher incidences of mental health issues. One participant in the workshops shared examples of young people approaching the age of 18 expressing guilt and anxiety over whether they should return to Ukraine to fight, adding to the risk of dropping out of school and discontinuing employment or education.

Children with disabilities or neurodiversities: Workshop participants, particularly in Slovakia, highlighted that Ukrainian children with neurodiversities such as dyslexia or autism struggle to get the extra support they need at home and in schools. Participants stated that even being admitted to a school was a challenge. This is partly due to a shortage of support for children with special needs, with only 12.1 percent of children under age seven in Slovakia having access to early childhood services.

Roma children: Roma children might be particularly vulnerable due to: (1) generally lower educational levels in some cases; (2) limited Ukrainian language skills; and (3) discrimination. Before the escalation of the war, the Roma community in Ukraine had higher rates of illiteracy and school dropouts than the wider community, and it was estimated that almost half of Roma had not completed secondary education. This has made it more challenging for Roma communities to integrate into host schooling systems. In the Czech Republic, non-participation of Roma children in education is higher than Ukrainian refugee averages, particularly in preschool and primary education, where surveys estimate up to 90 percent and 78 percent non-attendance rates, respectively. Furthermore, a PAQ Research study found that only 25 percent of Ukrainian Roma respondents attended online Ukrainian schools. There is some evidence to suggest that Roma refugees are also less likely to attend education initiatives provided by the government, such as adaptation groups. These factors increase the challenges of adapting to life in the Czech Republic. Furthermore, estimates suggest as many as 34 percent

231 Bratislava research workshop 7–8 March 2023.
233 See, for example, UNHCR REACH (2022). Slovakia multi sectoral needs assessment October 2022, accessed 13 April 2023.
236 Warsaw research workshop 9 February 2023.
237 Bratislava research workshop 7–8 March 2023.
238 Bratislava research workshop 7–8 March 2023.
of the Roma community do not speak Ukrainian. Some Roma children, particularly those from Western and Southern Ukraine, are more likely to speak Romani at home than Ukrainian. While there are government initiatives to support Ukrainian refugees, efforts are largely focused on supporting children who speak Ukrainian (e.g., through translation of school resources, use of interpreters and dictionaries in exams, etc.), and there is little or no provision for students who do not speak Ukrainian well.

2.6. Employment and income

Under the rights of TP, Ukrainian refugees are entitled to access the host country labour market on par with citizens. Governments in the five focus countries have supported access to employment in different ways, including by establishing online job portals for Ukrainians—for example in Poland, Moldova, Romania, and Slovakia. The Romanian National Agency for Employment also provides free advisory services and training opportunities for Ukrainian refugees. Additional advice is provided by multilaterals such as IOM, which has a website dedicated to Ukrainians seeking employment in Slovakia that contains information on rights and entitlements.

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the pace of taking up employment has been higher among Ukrainian refugees than other refugee groups in Europe, estimating, for example, that at the start of 2023 between 25 percent and 40 percent of Ukrainian refugees in Poland were in employment. However, there are significant variations between countries. Finding work is still reported to be one of the primary difficulties for refugees in many countries, with 25 percent of individuals in Slovakia reporting in a recent survey that their main reason for unemployment is the lack of opportunities. According to IOM research in August and September 2022, in the Czech Republic, financial support (86 percent), language courses (60 percent), and job search support (60 percent) were refugees’ three greatest needs with regard to work. The same survey conducted between October and November revealed changes mainly in regard to the financial support (mentioned by 64 percent), with language courses (48 percent), and employment support (58 percent) remaining among the frequently mentioned needs.

The groups discussed below were identified by the desk-based research and the research workshops as facing particular challenges at this stage of the refugee journey.

Parents or guardians, especially of multiple children: Responsibilities associated with being a single parent can be challenging for separated families, with the burden falling disproportionately on women. The UNHCR estimates that 78 percent of refugees from Ukraine experienced separation during their refugee journeys. This

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247 European Union (2022). Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382, 4 March 2022
254 OECD (2023). What we know about the skills and early labour market outcomes of refugees from Ukraine
255 OECD (2023). What we know about the skills and early labour market outcomes of refugees from Ukraine
257 UNHCR. Protection Risks and Needs of Refugees from Ukraine – regional protection analysis 1
261 UNHCR (2022). Displacement patterns, protection risks and needs of refugees from Ukraine – regional protection analysis 1
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means that familial, social, and communal networks are severely disrupted, and traditional support networks are not in place. A 2021 UNICEF study found that more than 50 percent of parents in Romania relied on informal care provided by family, friends, and neighbours. When refugees arrive with few or no existing social-communal networks, they face challenges in accessing informal childcare. Without access to childcare and therefore employment, parents or guardians are more vulnerable to poverty.

The limited supply of nursery and kindergarten places in all research countries is felt by Ukrainian refugees. Lack of adequate childcare is among the key barriers to single parents entering the labour market in all five countries. Also, many refugee women are not entitled to maternity or parental benefits, which take into account whether the applicant has paid social and health insurance.

People with disabilities: The UNHCR highlights how refugees with disabilities across the world experience obstacles to employment and, without work, lose out on self-reliance, a critical factor in their resettlement. This is the case in the current Slovak labour market, for instance, with refugees with disabilities struggling to access work and the assistance mechanisms that can enable it. Workshop participants highlighted that refugees with disabilities find securing employment challenging due to discrimination by employers and barriers to access, and that many face exploitation at work, including not being paid for hours worked. Some support does exist, however. Slovak citizens who are unable to work due to health issues can apply for an invalidity pension and on 2 December 2022, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, and Family began the provision of a ‘severe disability allowance’ to provide subsidies to support refugees with severe disabilities, either in or out work.

Underemployed refugees: Research workshop participants in all countries raised concerns that highly qualified Ukrainians were not able to find work in their preferred fields in the host countries. Particularly in Moldova, this was linked to the perception that Ukrainians are not regarded as a sustainable workforce since most intend to return to Ukraine, and some might choose to leave the country with little notice. Studies and workshop participants in all countries noted language skills as a barrier to higher-paying jobs, including in Moldova, where proficiency in both Russian and Romanian is required for some higher-skilled roles. During the research workshops in Poland, participants commented that Ukrainian refugees feel that working in jobs that they perceive as below their skill level and professional background creates additional anxiety and mental strain. Participants also shared examples of professionals struggling to have their qualifications recognised in Poland and the Czech

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263 Deloitte (2022). Refugees from Ukraine in Poland: challenges and potential for integration
269 Košice research workshop 7–8 March 2023.
272 Chisinau research workshop 1 March 2023.
273 OECD (2023). What we know about the skills and early labour market outcomes of refugees from Ukraine
274 Chisinau research workshop 1 March 2023.
275 Warsaw research workshop 9 February 2023.
In addition, time and cost barriers to having Ukrainian qualifications recognised in host countries can prevent more Ukrainian refugees from finding employment in their chosen or skilled professions.

**People who were not economically active prior to arrival in the host country:** According to a survey by the Multiculturalism and Migration Observer, approximately 68 percent of adult refugees in Poland were economically active before departure from Ukraine. For those who were not active in the formal labour market in Ukraine (such as carers), seeking employment in a new country can be particularly daunting despite sometimes finding themselves the sole or primary income earner due to family separation during displacement.

**Refugees who rely on employment agencies:** Low incomes can limit access to opportunities such as education, job training, and networking, making improvement of an individual’s social-economic situation more difficult and increasing risks of exploitation. Across the EU, the UNHCR has reported on the likelihood of the exploitation of Ukrainian refugees in employment and other spaces. One form of employment of foreigners in some countries, such as the Czech Republic, is through employment agencies, which can provide accommodation and thus represents a simpler way to obtain both employment and accommodation. However, agency employment, especially if linked to accommodation, can come with potential exploitation issues (e.g., informal work, which can come without guaranteed breaks, with irregular payment, non-compliance with labour regulations, and no contract), as many people do not report abuse, fearing reprisal. Some Czech NGOs that provide legal and social counselling have reported that problems of agency exploitation have worsened with the number of refugees. In Slovakia, there have been stories of temporary staffing agencies sending Ukrainian workers to jobs and accommodation that do not comply with regulations. Workshop participants in Bratislava also highlighted that employment agencies have been reported to take financial cuts and exploit refugee workers, for example by paying them less than the minimum wage.

**People who do not speak the local language:** A survey across EU countries accepting refugees found that 52 percent of women and 45 percent of men reported not being employed due to their language skills, and 48 percent of respondents said that their current job was below their education level. Language skills were raised as an issue in all countries, impacting refugees’ ability to find employment opportunities, take part in interviews, and obtain employment. For example, a PAQ survey in the Czech Republic found that one of the main reasons for unemployment was insufficient knowledge of the Czech language. In Romania, 41 percent of respondents to the UNHCR multi-sectoral needs assessment reported that language barriers were a challenge in obtaining enough income to meet their household needs. Participants in the Bucharest research workshops noted that refugees who speak English may have better access to employment opportunities, but refugees with neither

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276 Warsaw research workshop 9 February 2023, Prague research workshop 1–2 February 2023.
278 UNHCR (2022). Statement on risks of trafficking and exploitation facing refugees from Ukraine attributed to UNHCR’s Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, accessed 11 April 2023.
283 Bratislava research workshop 7–8 March 2023.
Romanian nor English language proficiency were unlikely to secure employment. In Slovakia, multiple studies report that language barriers are the primary reason that refugees struggle to find employment.

People based outside of major cities: There is a disparity in unemployment rates and types of work between larger cities, particularly in Romania, Slovakia, and Moldova. Unemployment rates also differ significantly. For example, in 2021, the Romanian National Institute of Statistics estimated that the lowest rates of registered unemployment were in Bucharest (0.8 percent) and the highest were in the southwest (4.3 percent). After Bucharest, the city of Constanta hosts the second highest number of refugees from Ukraine residing in Romania. Participants in the research workshop discussed the seasonal nature of employment in Constanta, with more work available in the summer season. This makes it challenging for Ukrainian refugees living there to secure stable, reliable work at other times of year. A UNHCR area-based assessment of Constanta from August 2022 found that 92 percent of refugees surveyed were reliant on savings to meet household income needs, and that livelihoods could become a priority need for Ukrainian refugees in the city as the conflict protracts. In Moldova, agricultural work is disproportionately undeclared compared to other industries and a lack of decent infrastructure such as roads and electricity impacts on the ability of rural regions to develop economically. There is also a significant brain drain from rural regions to the capital and to other countries, resulting in a lack of economic growth and opportunities in Moldova’s rural regions. These factors make finding quality employment more challenging for Ukrainians living in rural settlements or outside of the larger cities.

People near retirement age: Participants in the Romania research workshop noted that refugees who are close to retirement age face additional challenges. Those who want to find employment in Romania have fewer routes into the labour market, particularly if they are unable to speak Romanian, and others who were able to work in Ukraine might be compelled to keep working (and, potentially, travelling) due to uncertainty about accessing their pensions. Digital literacy may also limit older people’s access to information on employment opportunities. People aged 60 and above were the group most likely to prefer receiving information in person or from their friends and family.

2.7. Community, social, and political life

Since February 2022, the initial focus in all five countries has been on humanitarian response and immediate needs. However, as the situation protracts, governments are increasingly looking at integration and community cohesion, with different approaches shaped by historic trends of immigration and asylum, the existence of

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290 European Commission (2021). Labour market information: Romania
291 UNHCR REACH (2022). UNHCR Romania: Situation Overview in Constanta, Area-Based Assessment (As of July-August 2022)
296 Bucharest research workshop 15–16 February 2023.
297 Bucharest research workshop 15–16 February 2023.
298 UNHCR (2022). Displacement patterns, protection risks and needs of refugees from Ukraine – regional protection analysis
Ukrainian communities before February 2022, and the political climate. Engagement on integration issues focused on social and community issues by governments and multilateral organisations has been noted in all five countries, and activities are conducted at the national and local government levels and by active civil society and NGO networks. The groups discussed below were identified by the desk-based research and the research workshops as facing particular challenges at this stage of the refugee journeys.

**People suffering from trauma:** Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of adult refugees in a survey reported experiencing trauma since the war started, and 62 percent reported impacts on their wellbeing such as panic attacks and a loss of self-confidence. A workshop participant shared, ‘everyone coming from Ukraine these days is traumatised.’ The impact of trauma means that many Ukrainian refugees may struggle to participate in social and community life, and this was mentioned as a significant characteristic that can impact Ukrainian refugees in all five research countries. One participant in the Bucharest research workshop added that living with family members who are suffering from trauma also created barriers to integration, sharing examples of young people struggling to support parents who exhibited signs of apathy, depression, and anxiety. A participant in the Poland workshop described struggles in the initial months in Poland, commenting:

> "It was difficult for me to understand how people can smile on the streets and look happy when such atrocities were happening in Ukraine, how they could continue with their lives as if nothing was happening. I went to therapy and after six months I started seeing the good things in life again, enjoying the theatre, discovering new places". 

The potential impacts of trauma can become especially acute for people who do not receive adequate mental health support or counselling. This might be due to high demand of such services. For example, 14 percent of refugees seeking medical or psychological support in Slovakia reportedly have not received it. On the other hand, stigma around mental health in both host communities and Ukraine can mean that refugees might not seek help when needed. Slovakia’s League for Mental Health also argues that many refugees who hope to return to Ukraine imminently struggle to integrate as their disbelief in their ‘new reality’ means that they invest less in their current situation.

**People employed in long-hour jobs:** Ukrainian refugees in employment are likely to be working in ‘low-skilled’ sectors, often working irregular or long hours, which makes integration into community life challenging. This challenge can be exacerbated by other barriers such as lack of language skills or childcare, or other caring responsibilities. Participants in the Poland workshops added that the loss of previous peer groups, combined with

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299 UNHCR (2023). Ukraine situational regional response plan January-December 2023 Romania chapter
301 Bratislava research workshop 7–8 March 2023.
302 Bucharest research workshop 15–16 February 2023.
303 Warsaw research workshop 9 February 2023.
few opportunities to meet new people while working long hours and trying to secure meaningful accommodation, education, and employment opportunities made it difficult for Ukrainian adults to integrate into Polish community life and to attend regular Polish language courses.307

**People separated from family and/or in the host country alone:** The UNHCR estimates that 78 percent of refugees from Ukraine experienced separation during their refugee journeys,308 meaning that familial, social, and communal networks are severely disrupted, and traditional support networks are not in place. Separated family members face multiple challenges including difficulty accessing support and resources, negative impacts on mental health, and greater risk of exploitation or harm. Participants in the Romania research workshop noted that elderly people who were separated from family and in Romania alone faced greater risks of social isolation and higher barriers to integration.309

**Elderly people:** Older refugees are particularly at risk of social isolation, having lost their social networks and lacking easy ways to form new relationships through children or education.310 Workshop participants in Slovakia also raised that refugees in this age group are the most vulnerable to social isolation due to lack of targeted activities for seniors.311

**Children and young people in their late teens:** Children and adolescents, particularly if they do not speak the local language or are enrolled in online Ukrainian school, can experience social isolation.312

**LGBTQIA+ refugees** can experience challenges in a range of countries. Discrimination has tangible impacts on how people integrate into society, with just 25 percent of LGBTQIA+ refugees living in the EU reporting that they feel part of their communities, as compared to 34 percent of their non-LGBTQIA+ counterparts.313 LGBTQIA+ rights have become an increasingly politicised issue in recent years, with anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric used for political purposes.314 Since January 2020, more than 100 Polish municipalities have declared themselves ‘free from LGBT ideology’.315 This can create an unwelcoming environment for LGBTQIA+ refugees, particularly outside of major cities. Some activists are working to provide resources such as safe housing and financial aid for medications for LGBTQIA+ refugees, but they face a lack of assistance from the government and rely on grants from international organisations.316 In Slovakia, numerous cases of online harassment of the LGBTQIA community, hate speech, and violence have been recorded.317 LGBTQIA+ persons from Ukraine report having experienced discrimination, physical violence, and, in some cases, detention by Slovak authorities.318 In addition, LGBTQIA+ refugees may have specific needs and sensitivities that are more difficult to meet when they are displaced. For example, 47 percent of Ukrainian LGBTQIA+ respondents in the EU considered lack of privacy in their housing to be a

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308 UNHCR (2022). *Displacement patterns, protection risks and needs of refugees from Ukraine – regional protection analysis*
310 Bratislava research workshop 7–8 March 2023.
311 Bratislava research workshop 7–8 March 2023.
316 Su, Y., Valiquette, T., Greatrick, A., Robinson, C., The New Humanitarian (2022). *How LGBTQI+ to LGBTQI+ support is helping Ukrainian refugees find safety in the EU*
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problem—figures higher than non-LGBTQIA+ refugees surveyed.\textsuperscript{319} Furthermore, in the EU, LGBTQIA+ refugees struggle to know where to access services and information to support their specific needs more than non-LGBTQIA refugees (45 percent versus 30 percent in one survey).\textsuperscript{320}

**People with disabilities and neurodiversities:** People with disabilities can be excluded from community life in several ways, depending on the disability and the social and cultural context in which they live. Many public spaces, such as buildings, sidewalks, and transportation systems, are not designed to be accessible to people with physical disabilities, making it difficult for them to navigate and join community activities. People with disabilities may face social isolation due to stigma, discrimination, or lack of social support. Economic exclusion due to discrimination in employment or lack of access to education or training opportunities can limit the ability to participate and contribute to society. Workshop participants also noted that the lack of accessible state schools or support for children with disabilities may lead to social isolation.\textsuperscript{321} People with some disabilities or neurodiversities may also face communication barriers that make it difficult for them to participate in social interactions, access information, or communicate their needs and preferences. Refugees with disabilities may be overlooked, as they may have limited access to information and may be separated from their support networks, leaving them unable to respond to the situation and navigate through the new environment.\textsuperscript{322}

**Roma refugees:** The Roma community faces deeper issues than other refugee groups regarding discrimination and lack of access to services. In monitoring the treatment of Ukrainian Roma refugees in Poland, Amnesty International reported examples of discrimination and prejudice and expressed concern about the impact of xenophobic stereotypes.\textsuperscript{323} The UNHCR reported that discrimination faced by Roma meant that Ukrainian Roma refugees faced problems with service access and support that non-Roma refugees were less likely to encounter.\textsuperscript{324} In one survey in the Czech Republic, 30 percent of Roma refugees said they encountered intolerance from the general population, including 14 percent by Czech authorities and institutions and 9 percent by other Ukrainian refugees.\textsuperscript{325}

**People who are politically active in supporting the war effort (Slovakia and Moldova):** With a section of society reporting pro-Russian sentiments,\textsuperscript{326} Ukrainian refugees who overtly support Ukraine in the war, particularly in Slovakia and Moldova, risk attracting attention from pro-Russian groups that are actively hostile to their presence and support to the war. Participants in the workshops highlighted cases of Ukrainians in Moldova who faced anti-Ukrainian rhetoric in their hosts’ homes due to the influence of Russian media sources or historic sympathy for Russia.\textsuperscript{327} Indeed, much of the Russian-language media in Moldova has in the past often come from Russia itself,\textsuperscript{328} and some Russian-speaking communities have more sympathetic views of Russia in the context of the invasion—for example, a recent poll in in Gagauzia found that support for the pro-Western


\textsuperscript{321} Bratislava research workshop 7–8 March 2023.

\textsuperscript{322} OHCHR (2022). *Ukraine: 2.7 million people with disabilities at risk, UN committee warns*, accessed 26 March 2023.

\textsuperscript{323} Amnesty International (2022). *Poland: “We came here, they wouldn’t let us in.” Roma from Ukraine treated as unwanted refugees*

\textsuperscript{324} Mirga-Wójtowicz, E., Talewicz, J., and Kolaczek, M., UNHCR (2022). *Human rights, needs and discrimination – the situation of Roma refugees from Ukraine in Poland*


\textsuperscript{327} Chisinau research workshop 2 March 2023.

Moldovan government was as low as 2 percent, with 85 percent to 90 percent of respondents reporting having trust in the Russian Federation.329

Chapter 3: Misleading or Incendiary Discourses About Ukrainian Refugees

3.1. Overview

This chapter discusses key misleading or incendiary discourses about refugees in the region. The analysis is based on the IFES Chain of Harm framework, which maps the path by which disinformation, misinformation, and dangerous speech (DMDS) move through an information ecosystem, depicting the ways in which directed disinformation commonly amplifies hate speech or other divisive narratives to achieve its aims. The Chain of Harm framework enables researchers and practitioners to map DMDS along five stages, from the initial actors creating DMDS to the ultimate risks that manifest. Breaking down the challenges of DMDS in this way enables researchers and practitioners to identify discrete intervention points where the Chain of Harm can be disrupted to reduce the ultimate harms that would otherwise occur.

FIGURE 1. The IFES Chain of Harm Framework

The five stages of the Chain of Harm—actor, message, mode of dissemination, interpreter, and risk—are used below to analyse the different aspects of narratives in circulation in the five focus countries.

3.2. Actors spreading misleading or abusive messages

While public discourse in the five countries regarding the influx of Ukrainian refugees has been largely positive, anti-Ukrainian narratives began percolating online soon after the outbreak of the war. Some have gained greater traction as the war has continued.331

**Russian and pro-Kremlin propaganda/Kremlin aligned sources (trolls):** Russian-aligned stakeholders have been active in spreading disinformation in all five countries. These include anti-Ukraine narratives, for instance ‘blaming Ukraine and NATO for the war and pinning high energy prices on their own government rather than Russia cutting gas supplies’,332 as well as those targeted directly at Ukrainian refugees. The Kremlin ecosystem approach is to spread ‘as many explanations or accusations as possible in order to muddy the waters and to see what sticks’ [in terms of conspiracy theories],333 including with regard to refugees.334

**Pro-Russian groups:** Pro-Russian groups are present in all countries to varying degrees. Slovakia335 and Moldova336 have the most significant proportions of pro-Russian groups of the five research countries. Pro-Russian public demonstrations have taken place in Bratislava, although there have been more in support of Ukraine.337 In Moldova, pro-Russian political figures have spread messages that Ukrainians are harmful to the community and that they steal and are violent toward Moldovans.338 In other countries, a small proportion of individuals held pro-Russian views339 that have not significantly altered since the war began. For example, in the Czech Republic, one group has been influenced by pro-Russian perspectives and disinformation and often wants a neutral foreign policy,340 as there is a feeling that it is not worth distinguishing between allies and opponents because ‘all major powers behave badly’.341

**Far right and populist parties** often have an anti-immigrant and anti-refugee stance. Far-right, ultranationalist, and extremist groups and networks, some linked to Russian actors, have been the most vocal actors spreading misinformation and incendiary narratives regarding refugees.342 Populist parties often appeal to voters who are concerned about the impact of migration on their communities and the economy, and may present themselves as the only ones willing to take a strong stance against migration.343 These parties often position themselves as protectors, ‘proper patriots’, and ‘supporters of conservative values and the traditional family’.344

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332 Bond, S. (2023). From TV to Telegram to TikTok, Moldova is being flooded with Russian propaganda, accessed 29 March 2023.
334 See, for instance, Trollové se aktivovali. Za raketu v Polsku může kdokoli, jen ne Rusko, iDNES (2022); Trollové se aktivovali. Za raketu v Polsku může kdokoli, jen ne Rusko, accessed 20 March 2023.
336 See Section 4.7 of this report.
342 International Republican Institute (2023). Hostile Narrative Brief War In Ukraine, accessed 29 March 2023; INFOSECURITY.SK (2023). Slovak far-right politicians are spreading false narratives about refugees, the West is being blamed for the ongoing energy crisis, accessed 29 March 2023.
Anti-migration, anti-vaccination, and anti-pandemic restriction activists and influencers: The same groups of people who, in recent years, spoke out against migration and/or COVID-19 restrictions can be observed to have switched gradually to the topic of supporting the Russian invasion. In the Czech Republic, according to analyst Roman Máca from the Institute for Politics and Society, this change of focus toward Ukrainian refugees was expected since some participants and speakers at anti-COVID-19 restriction demonstrations openly admitted that they looked up to Russia and the Russian president. Individuals have been documented as starting campaigning against Islam and refugees at the time of the migration crisis in 2015; they then focused on COVID-19 and recently called for demonstrations under the slogan ‘the Czech Republic in the first place’, demanding, among other things, ‘the end of the planned dilution of the nation by Ukrainian refugees’.

Reasons for spreading misleading or incendiary content

The United Kingdom Government Communications Service has identified a variety of reasons why actors could spread misleading or incendiary content. These are applicable to actors spreading misleading or incendiary narratives about Ukrainian refugees in the Central European countries:

1. **Genuine belief in the messages**, which might resonate with strongly held personal beliefs. In some instances, the actors sharing messages may recognise they are false or misleading but believe that the sentiment is illustrative of ‘the kind of thing that goes on’.

2. **Grievances.** As inflation rises, for example, some people’s standards of living are deteriorating. Others might have lost their jobs, even though unemployment on the whole has not risen in the past year. Ukrainian refugees might be easy scapegoats for such problems.

3. **Lack of consequences for promoting misleading messages.** Actors may take advantage of the anonymity of online spaces and gain respect within certain online communities.

4. **Personal or institutional gain** by discrediting specific individuals (e.g., politicians) or organisations (e.g., government institutions, businesses, NGOs, multilateral organisations, etc.). This may also be for the purpose of **mobilising voters** in response to an imagined threat and building support as a result of anti-refugee rhetoric.

5. **Contributions to polarisation**, aiming to crowd out any differing opinions. For example, research from the International Republican Institute (IRI) notes that refugee-related themes attempt, albeit unsuccessfully to date, to ‘divide Polish society, often by highlighting the cost of maintaining refugees or using historical narratives to fuel conflict between Poles and Ukrainians.’

6. **Financial gain**, either benefiting from increased traffic to websites to view posts or by selling specific products. For instance, discourses such as those that Ukrainians are driving up the prices, and, rents in particular, might also be propagated by a broader group of actors who might stand to benefit, such as landlords who might choose to raise rents unnecessarily.

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351 Warsaw research workshop 9 February 2023.
7. **Geopolitical gain**, through which hostile actors aim to destabilise other countries—financially and security-wise. This particularly links to Russian state propaganda activities. The aim of Russian trolling is often to create a sense of chaos and confusion as to what information is true, given the large number of conflicting ‘facts’ being proposed to audiences.352

## 3.3. Types of messages and approaches

The most common narratives fit within six categories.

1. **They’re taking what’s ours, and we are worse off.** First, quite universal discourses are found in all five countries that could be summarised by the sentiment that ‘the refugees are taking what is ours, and we’re worse off for that.’ This might refer to kindergarten spots, subsidised housing, jobs, healthcare capacity, or financial support. For example, in the Czech Republic, with the increase in fuel and energy prices and high inflation (15.1 percent),353 discourses have appeared that say, ‘Ukrainian refugees are draining our social system at a time when domestic citizens are being crushed by inflation—money can be found for “foreigners,” while no one will help ‘our people’’.354 In Poland, workshop participants said that the narrative that Ukrainians are taking the places of Poles for healthcare is relatively widespread, regarding both the general healthcare system and special services set up for Ukrainians (e.g., rehabilitation services that Poles cannot use).355 One participant shared that their organisation took down a social media post about a health service being started for Ukrainian refugees, as within an hour they received 500 negative comments from accounts that the organisation confirmed to be people rather than bots. These included messages such as ‘My wife didn’t get the help she needed because Ukrainians were prioritised’. Another example is the response to a Twitter post from the Polish Ministry of Health (Figure 2), which read, ‘A campaign to promote the vaccination of children from Ukraine in Poland and support for the supply of vaccines – these are the main points of the cooperation agreement signed today by Minister Adam Niedzielski and UNICEF coordinator Rashed Mustafa’.356

There were many negative responses to this post, including (in translation): ‘Already the Ukry [derogatory term for Ukrainians] are running to get whatever vaccination there is. In Ukraine they don’t do this but for sure they’ll do it listening to the criminal Niezielski. Another waste of public funds.’ Another response reads, ‘5 million Ukrainians entered Polish territory without any health checks (…) Poles are dying and waiting for years for specialist health, and you are helping foreigners.’

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353 The average annual inflation rate in 2022 was 15.1 percent. See Public database CZSO and Inflation rate for more details.
2. They don’t deserve what they get. Second, resonating across all five countries, to varying degrees, are discourses referring to the sentiment that ‘they get more than poor locals’ or ‘they don’t deserve what they get’. Whereas the first category refers to scarcity of finite resources, this one refers to merit in receiving support. For example, the illustration in Figure 3 claims that Ukrainians receive more in various benefits than Czechs, citing details that do not match the official figures. Discourses in Moldova compare the circumstances of Ukrainians with Moldovans, often juxtaposing the perceived wealth of refugees against the hardships faced by elderly, unemployed, or disabled Moldovans. Popular discourses under this category also claim that refugees don’t want to work or that they are economic migrants in the country primarily for work. Related to this, workshop participants in all countries discussed narratives about Ukrainians being rich and not needing support; stories of refugees driving expensive cars are abundant. This has also been observed online, with sarcastic comments such as the post illustrated in Figure 4 (below): ‘Poor things. Give them food, some rations to put in those 80-litre tanks, and full medical care, and don’t forget to pin a blue and yellow badge to the lapels of their jackets’. Some also claim that refugees do not appreciate the support they receive. Finally, the topic of social benefits, social security, and a person’s economic status is closely connected with ‘merit,’ a feature particularly valued by Slovak and Czech societies: a belief that a person must earn his or her social and economic status in life and not get it ‘from others.’ Therefore, ideas around the abuse of social benefits and of excessive state support to individuals who do not deserve it can resonate with a wide range of people. Messages under this narrative include, ‘Czechs have to work hard to pay for housing/rents, and Ukrainians get it for free’, or ‘Ukrainian refugees live for free’.

3. They’re making the economic situation worse. A third, related type of misleading and incendiary discourse identified is more specifically about economic fears and concerns that refugees are making the economic situation in host countries worse. For example, in the Czech Republic, posts have appeared linking the two discourses above to making the economic situation worse, such as, ‘Do you understand that they will replace the Czechs?’

357 The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs data on the support received is different (i.e., for the first person in a household, it is CZK 4,470 and not CZK 3,550, as listed in the photo).
362 Bratislava research workshop 8 March 2023.
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4. **Ukrainians are making us less secure.** Fourth, particularly in Slovakia and Moldova, political discourses relate to the war itself. The ‘peace narrative’ is particularly popular in Slovakia, where a broad range of people claim that Ukraine should not prolong the suffering by continuing to fight but should negotiate and concede on whatever is necessary to stop the humanitarian situation from becoming worse. A continuation of Ukraine’s defence can be portrayed as endangering other countries—both economically, through soaring inflation as well as physically, by possibly bringing the war to their doorstep.

5. **Discourses in some countries relate to historic grievances.** The Volhynia massacre, during which it is estimated that up to 60,000 Polish people were killed between 1943 and 1945, is used in particular to stir up historical grievances by characterising Ukrainians as anti-Polish nationalists. Similarly, workshop participants in Moldova noted an emerging discourse about Ukrainian nationals who supported Transnistria in the conflict against the Moldovan state in the 1990s. Narratives ask why Moldovans should provide support to Ukrainians when the Ukrainian state was perceived to have fought against Moldovans’ interests historically. In Romania, a narrative draws upon the allegedly poorer treatment of Romanian minorities in Ukraine and political concerns about their rights. Participants in the research workshop commented that since the Russian invasion there has been increased coverage of this issue in the national media. This narrative has the potential to reduce Romanian support to Ukrainians, leading to apathy or resentment.

6. **Discourses in some countries refer to the effects of refugees on culture and ‘social fabric’.** In Poland, the ‘Ukrainisation of Poland’ discourse refers to the threat of the disintegration of the fabric of Polish national and cultural identity. The narrative includes a range of messages, from focusing on the alleged domination of Ukrainian symbols in public spaces and Ukrainian language to the deterioration and potential dissolution of Polish culture. Some narratives go as far as speculating about the possibility of parts of Ukraine and Poland becoming

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370 Chisinau research workshop 2 March 2023.
372 Balkan Insight (2022), Ukraine seeks closer ties to Romania, vows to resolve minority issues.
unified into ‘Ukropolin’,374 ‘Ukropolin’ would involve large planned population resettlements and come ‘at the expense of Polish national identity’.375 The Ukraine Monitor project reported that the term ‘Ukrainisation of Romania’ originally applied to the alleged efforts of the Government of Ukraine to forcibly assimilate Romanians in Ukraine.376 This has also been noted in the Czech Republic, mainly referring to Ukrainian flags that are often displayed on Czech public holidays. These include specific messages such as, ‘the Ukrainization of the Czech Republic continues. The ceremony of awarding the Memory of the Nation in the National Theater on the anniversary of November 17 was accompanied by the Ukrainian anthem’.377 Similar assertions have been noted in Romania alongside the discourse that ‘Russians and Ukrainians are basically the same’. The latter was partly driven by lower levels of interaction and exchanges between Romania and Ukraine than between other neighbouring countries and Ukraine, along with greater linguistic differences.

**Considerations for Countering Anti-Refugee Messaging**

As much as possible, counter-narratives should be targeted at specific audiences and the fora with which they engage, and should be tailored based on these audiences’ attitudes, perceptions, values, and norms.

It is also important to use emotionally evocative language to capture attention and increase recall of the messages shared,378 and to build on the target audience’s values379—for example, aligning with patriotic ideals and showing how Ukrainians are fighting for all of Europe. Correcting facts alone is unlikely to be effective when attempting to change attitudes regarding sensitive issues tied to people’s values, social norms, and beliefs.

This approach should be combined with a messaging strategy that seeks to assure as much as it seeks to convince. This means including messaging such as, ‘There's enough to go around’, or ‘We're in this together’.

Finally, as much as possible, counternarratives should not be tied to the state of politics so as not to let far-right voters believe that this may be a political campaign of the opposing camp.

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The table below summarises the discourses about refugees that were identified in the workshops and through research by third parties and triangulated through CrowdTangle. The top five discourses in each country are categorised as relatively "low risk", "medium risk", or "high risk", depending on their potential to affect community cohesion in the country in the medium term and taking into account the prevalence of the narratives and the likely severity of impact of the narratives on community cohesion. It is important to stress the ‘relative’ aspect of the risk: this is in relation to other discourses in the country. A discourse noted as ‘relatively high risk’ may still be niche and not likely to create tension for the majority of society, but it can be a much higher risk than other discourses in that country.

**TABLE 3. Misleading or incendiary discourses about refugees in the region**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Misleading or Incendiary Discourses about Ukrainian Refugees</th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
<th>Czech Republic</th>
<th>Romania</th>
<th>Moldova</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legal status, welfare, and benefits</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are economic migrants who could be planning to stay in the host countries permanently</td>
<td>Relatively high risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugees from Western Ukraine/less affected regions are not genuine refugees—the war hasn’t really affected them; they don’t deserve support</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They abuse the benefits system (e.g., cross the border to just get the money)</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is corruption within support systems for Ukrainian refugees</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainians are supported more than other refugees</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Healthcare</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainians are creating a burden on the healthcare system, taking locals’ places</td>
<td>Relatively high risk</td>
<td>Relatively high risk</td>
<td>Relatively high risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local doctors don’t want to treat Ukrainians</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Risks to Community Cohesion between Ukrainian Refugees and Host Communities—Regional Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>They are health tourists</strong></th>
<th>Relatively low risk</th>
<th>Relatively low risk</th>
<th>Relatively medium risk</th>
<th>Relatively low risk</th>
<th>Relatively low risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They misuse services (unnecessary ambulance calls, emergency room visits, doctors’ visits)</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are a health/disease risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Housing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ukrainians are creating a burden on the housing system</th>
<th>Relatively medium risk</th>
<th>Relatively medium risk</th>
<th>Relatively high risk</th>
<th>Relatively medium risk</th>
<th>Relatively medium risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refugees have more or unfair access to housing</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ukrainians are creating a burden on the education system (schools and kindergartens), taking locals’ places</th>
<th>Relatively medium risk</th>
<th>Relatively medium risk</th>
<th>Relatively medium risk</th>
<th>Relatively medium risk</th>
<th>Relatively medium risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainian students are not making an effort at school</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Employment and income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic challenges/energy crisis are fuelled by hosting refugees (‘they drive prices up’)</th>
<th>Relatively medium risk</th>
<th>Relatively high risk</th>
<th>Relatively high risk</th>
<th>Relatively medium risk</th>
<th>Relatively high risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New arrivals from Ukraine are taking jobs from the local population; they are willing to work for significantly lower wages; they are destroying the labour market</td>
<td>Relatively high risk</td>
<td>Relatively high risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively high risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainians don’t want to pay taxes, or they want to work illegally</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They don’t want to work</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively high risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk</td>
<td>Low Risk</td>
<td>Medium Risk</td>
<td>High Risk</td>
<td>Very High Risk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainians are rich, drive around in fancy cars and spend their time</td>
<td>Relatively low</td>
<td>Relatively medium</td>
<td>Relatively high</td>
<td>Relatively high</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at malls and cafes while locals are working; they’re in the host</td>
<td>risk</td>
<td>risk</td>
<td>risk</td>
<td>risk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>country on holiday; they don’t need assistance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugees receive more financial support and better benefits than</td>
<td>Relatively medium</td>
<td>Relatively high</td>
<td>Relatively high</td>
<td>Relatively high</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the local population; help to refugees comes at the cost of the</td>
<td>risk</td>
<td>risk</td>
<td>risk</td>
<td>risk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>local population; ‘We should help our poor, not the Ukrainians’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local populations are excluded from support provided to vulnerable</td>
<td>Relatively low</td>
<td>Relatively low</td>
<td>Relatively low</td>
<td>Relatively medium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>people</td>
<td>risk</td>
<td>risk</td>
<td>risk</td>
<td>risk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They don’t need help as the language and culture in the host country</td>
<td>Relatively low</td>
<td>Relatively low</td>
<td>Relatively low</td>
<td>Relatively low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Ukraine is similar</td>
<td>risk</td>
<td>risk</td>
<td>risk</td>
<td>risk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Community, social, and political life**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk</th>
<th>Low Risk</th>
<th>Medium Risk</th>
<th>High Risk</th>
<th>Very High Risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refugees are ungrateful, have high expectations and demands for</td>
<td>Relatively high</td>
<td>Relatively medium</td>
<td>Relatively medium</td>
<td>Relatively high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>support and shelter; and they abuse hospitality—they leave messy</td>
<td>risk</td>
<td>risk</td>
<td>risk</td>
<td>risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apartments and are disrespectful; refugees are selective about the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>types of support that they receive—e.g., they don’t want to live</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in small cities, only want certain types of products</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They should be in Ukraine defending their country, not here</td>
<td>Medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium</td>
<td>Relatively low</td>
<td>Relatively low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women come to look for husbands and citizenship</td>
<td>Relatively medium</td>
<td>Relatively medium</td>
<td>Relatively low</td>
<td>Relatively low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are not really traumatised; they go to cafes and live a nice,</td>
<td>Relatively medium</td>
<td>Relatively medium</td>
<td>Relatively low</td>
<td>Relatively low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>normal life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugees are coming to nazify the host society</td>
<td>Relatively low</td>
<td>Relatively low</td>
<td>Relatively low</td>
<td>Relatively low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portray local citizens as not welcoming Ukrainian refugees and</td>
<td>Relatively medium</td>
<td>Relatively medium</td>
<td>Relatively low</td>
<td>Relatively low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>refugees not receiving help on arrival or do not support Ukraine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>any more</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Risks to Community Cohesion between Ukrainian Refugees and Host Communities—Regional Report

- **Threaten a country’s national identity, culture, and social fabric (Poland: ‘Ukrainisation of Poland’)***
  - Relatively high risk
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively low risk

- **Ukrainians and Russians are basically the same**
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively medium risk
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively low risk

- **They treat the host country’s minorities in Ukraine badly**
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively high risk

- **Ukraine is not really a country**
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively medium risk

- **Ukrainian refugees create diplomatic tensions with Russia; they need to accept their fate, negotiate, and, if needed, become part of Russia and move on; they are endangering other countries (including the host country) by resisting**
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively high risk
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively medium risk

- **Ukrainian refugees in country create diplomatic tensions between the host country and the EU/other EU countries, as insufficient support is given by the EU**
  - Relatively medium risk
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively low risk

- **They’re not the host country’s responsibility**
  - Low risk
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively medium risk

- **The host country is trying to regain some of Ukraine’s territory (e.g., Poland/Lviv)**
  - Relatively medium risk
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively low risk

- **Historic tensions or figures (e.g., Volhynya in Poland, Transnistria in Moldova [1992 Ukraine’s role])—‘Ukrainians didn’t help us then/fought against us; why should we help now?’**
  - Relatively medium risk
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively medium risk

- **Negative perceptions of refugees caused by political views relating to Russia**
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively medium risk
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively medium risk

- **They are reckless drivers, don’t follow local rules**
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively low risk
  - Relatively medium risk
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Relatively low risk</th>
<th>Relatively medium risk</th>
<th>Relatively high risk</th>
<th>Relatively low risk</th>
<th>Relatively medium risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local men will be required to serve in the military if support to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine and Ukrainians continues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugees are a crime risk or security threats (e.g., prone to</td>
<td>Relatively medium</td>
<td>Relatively high</td>
<td>Relatively medium</td>
<td>Relatively medium</td>
<td>Relatively medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>criminality, anti-social behaviour; organised crime coming from</td>
<td>medium risk</td>
<td>risk</td>
<td>medium risk</td>
<td>medium risk</td>
<td>medium risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.4. Modes of dissemination

Social media, websites, and messaging apps: Social networks have so far been only a minimally regulated environment, serving as relatively cheap and fast platforms to create disinformation campaigns that can reach a large audience. A multitude of right-leaning groups, political parties, and extremist groups operating on social media, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, have been sharing misleading and incendiary messages about refugees. Slovakia, for example, has an extremely active and powerful interlinked online disinformation space with a network of over 1,800 Facebook pages and groups that spread various DMDS. Comments enable individuals and groups to perpetuate disinformation by engaging directly with politicians and political groups. Anonymous social media accounts and fake accounts created by the Russian propaganda machine (trolls) are also used to spread discourses. In addition, some websites, such as the Kancelaria Lega Artis in Poland, share ‘fake news’ regarding refugees. In Moldova, Russian language websites may be more likely to spread such discourse. Chisinau workshop participants noted OK.Ru, as a mode of dissemination, for example. The Chisinau Institute for Public Policy reports that pro-Russian voices play a major role on OK.Ru, for example by perpetuating Russian propaganda, including overtly pro-Russian messaging. In the Czech Republic, disinformation spread in these groups usually originates from pro-Kremlin media outlets with a Czech web presence, such as Sputnik News, Aeronet, and První zprávy. The websites continue longstanding anti-immigration narratives that feed fears about newcomers, even those from a relatively similar cultural background. Interestingly, much anti-Ukrainian refugee messaging on social media has been published by accounts and profiles that previously shared anti-vaccine disinformation in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The most common way to propagate desired messages is through image- and video-based content. Images and videos are ideal for manipulating public opinion because they are easily consumed through social media or other digital platforms and can have a powerful emotional impact. They can evoke feelings of fear, anger, or empathy, which can make them more persuasive and memorable. They can also be edited in ways that change their meaning or impact or be used out of context. One common practice is using old photos and attributing their content to the present.
Email has been used for anti-refugee messaging. According to research by the Ipsos agency, almost four out of 10 Czechs receive chain email messages from acquaintances, and 460,000 of those people forward the chain emails on.392 Experts also noted that chain emails often include a mix of information that may have a basis in reality—but it is taken out of context or the meaning is greatly inflated.393 Participants in the research workshop noted that seniors might be a particular target for chain email messages and are most likely to share them.394 Seniors often do not have the skills to verify information because of their lower digital literacy and thus can become easy targets. In April 2022, Poland saw a large troll attack aimed at diverting attention from Russian war crimes by focusing on the Volhynia massacre and accusing ‘Ukrainian Nazis’ of war crimes. The attack involved threatening emails sent to Polish politicians, email spam to Polish media, and mass postings on Twitter.395

Traditional media: Television and radio are also modes for disseminating harmful narratives; media produced in Russia and by pro-Russian groups has a higher propensity to perpetuate anti-refugee rhetoric396 and is often hostile to Ukraine.397 The Moldovan government’s decision to ban news and political analysis produced in Russia, as well as some domestic television channels in the country, has limited Russia’s ability to push disinformation through traditional media. However, this has led to accusations of bias against Russia in censorship laws.398 The ban applies to analysis from countries that have not ratified the Convention on Transfrontier Television.399 More broadly, mainstream TV channels have been reported to propagate disinformation and fake news accidentally or intentionally, targeting both Romanians and Ukrainian refugees.400

Politicians during campaigns: Populist politicians exploit themes associated with refugees to strengthen their own voter preferences through deflection, misinterpretation, and placing information in a different context.401

Events and public announcements: Politicians from right-wing, conservative parties have made public statements that align with some of these discourses on the news and in public discussions. Cases include a local politician using his platform to suggest that supporting refugees comes at the cost of local citizens402 and a party moderator using his platform to repeatedly suggest that Ukrainians were robbing local businesses.403 These discourses reach a wide audience and may be repeated without fact-checking, in part due to the status of the messenger.

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392 Ipsos (2022). Vnímání dezinformací v České republice a na Slovensku, accessed 22 March 2023; see also Více než třetina Čechů dostává řetězové e-maily, statisíce je přeposílají dál for more details.
397 Bond, S. (2023). From TV to Telegram to TikTok, Moldova is being flooded with Russian propaganda
400 Metamorphosis Foundation (2023). Interview with Romanian anti-disinformation activist reveals disinformation campaigns often target refugees from Ukraine
Sometimes a traditional form of information dissemination is used, as exemplified by the situation in 2018 in Zyrardow, before the Russian invasion. The city was blanketed with hundreds of leaflets by the so-called Stormtroopers, a nationalist faction of the extreme right (see Figure 5). The leaflets read: ‘Pole [woman]! Pole [man]! Find out who is taking your job! Employers are bringing workers from Ukraine, Bangladesh, Uzbekistan, or Moldova en masse. By attracting migrant workers to Poland our salaries are decreasing and jobs are being taken by foreigners! Do not consent to this! Protest!’ The influx of Ukrainian refugees gives those who believe such ideas additional motivation to spread such narratives.404

**Word of mouth:** Some discourses spread through regular conversations between individuals, including narratives that people first came across online, particularly where discourses relate to increasing financial pressures or other ways in which refugees may be impacting people’s quality of life.405

**Considerations for Countering Anti-Refugee Messaging:**

Social media campaigns could be aimed at the groups most likely to be swayed by the economic migrant narratives, engaging influencers for these groups. Social media, especially in the form of engaging videos and visuals, could also provide guidance on how to talk to friends and family members who say incendiary things about refugees.

Media organisations could help identify refugees who can be called on for quotes in the media or appear on TV and news shows as commentators to increase the representation of refugee voices.

**3.5. Host community reactions (interpreters)**

The European Digital Media Observatory found that disinformation about refugees was directed at three groups.406

- Racist-minded individuals who already had negative attitudes toward refugees;
- Supporters of conspiracy theories; and
- Average concerned citizens—this might refer to rising costs of living, and longer queues for healthcare and education.

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Right-wing, anti-immigrant nationalist sentiments were present in some parts of host country societies before the Russian invasion, and individuals holding such views are more likely to share anti-Ukrainian refugee rhetoric—in particular, as fatigue with the war grows. Nationalistic slogans such as ‘Polska dla Polaków’ (‘Poland for Poles’) are used to promote the idea that the country, including its resources, should be reserved for Polish citizens. In the example shown in Figure 6, a member of the public is replying to a post by the politician Pawel Szefernaker, which explains that train stations now have information points for refugees from Ukraine. The reply reads: ‘Poles will give you hell for the privileges granted to Ukrainians. Traitors.’ The main audience of anti-refugee rhetoric is far-right and nationalist supporters which are a small, but not insignificant proportion of the population. Slovakia reports the greatest fear toward ‘other groups’ (migrants and Western societies) in the region related to threats to values and identity. Concurrently, Slovakia has consistently demonstrated greater sympathy for Russia than seen in comparable EU countries. According to IRI’s analysis, narratives on Ukrainian refugees being used as political tools—puppets of NATO or the West, or part of an extremist liberal agenda—were particularly prevalent in Slovakia, largely for an audience of far-right supporters and, to some extent, the general public due to concerns around the economy.

Many people might lack the skills to identify and address disinformation. According to research from 2019, only one-sixth of Czechs have the skills to fight disinformation. In addition, a survey from July 2022 by Ipsos showed that Czechs with only primary education (14 percent) were the most likely to never check the veracity of information, even if they suspect it is disinformation, and then pass it on. The survey also pointed out that fewer than 48 percent of Czechs can easily recognise disinformation. Slovakia is one of the countries in the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) region most prone to believing in various conspiracy theories. This provides a context in which disinformation regarding Ukrainian refugees is likely to flourish.

The third group can be quite broad, as high numbers of people are under significant financial strain due to rising inflation, and there are real challenges related to a strained healthcare system, as discussed in Chapter 4. Therefore, some messages that refer to matters affecting people’s day-to-day lives may increasingly resonate with members of host communities. The financially worse-off segments of a host population, particularly in regions with higher unemployment rates, may see Ukrainian migrants as a threat to their own economic wellbeing and

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411 International Republican Institute (2023). *Hostile narrative brief: war in Ukraine, a year of aggression*.
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According to IRI’s analysis, narratives on Ukrainian refugees receiving treatment that is preferential to that given to Romanians were found to resonate most online, largely for an audience of far-right and nationalist supporters. People looking to rent apartments may be more receptive to discourses regarding Ukrainians’ role in rising housing prices. People who have little first-hand experience interacting with Ukrainian refugees are also more likely to believe generalisations and misinformation about the refugee community. Messages that incorporate a ‘personal touch’ with which the audience can easily identify could resonate more with such groups.

Finally, people who are disillusioned with the current state of politics might be more likely to believe and pass on misleading and incendiary discourses, if these are critical of the current government. According to the NGO Czech Elves, which conducts long-term monitoring of the disinformation scene in the Czech Republic, the war in Ukraine confirmed the hypothesis that ‘a part of society that is extremely dissatisfied with the state of public affairs and is therefore highly distrustful of the authorities, for whatever reasons, is vulnerable to almost any narrative associated with criticism of the current political arrangement’.

Considerations for Countering Anti-Refugee Messaging:

Nudges for people to look at different sources of information could be considered. The Redirect Method is a way to do this online: when an internet user enters keywords ‘that indicate an interest in extremist propaganda’, a pop-up ad directs them to more information on the topic, redirecting to content that counters the extremist messaging. This could be set up through a partnership with social media platforms or search engines such as Google.

Another strategy is using social media platforms to promote counternarratives and help individuals identify misleading narratives in the news. These could include Google’s (GOOGL.O) Jigsaw subsidiary’s initiative, which runs ads on YouTube, Twitter, TikTok, and Meta to educate people on disinformation. Helping seniors navigate the complex internet environment is the aim of several NGOs, such as Život 90 or Elpida. Such initiatives should be supported and expanded.

Accuracy prompts are reminders that ‘most people want to share accurate information’ which can be used online; for example, as promoted posts on social media platforms. Such non-political and non-ideological prompts have been shown to reduce the spread of misinformation.

To support more critical assessments of information spread by the media, another approach is to work with schools to organise activities for youth to promote critical thinking, debating skills, and understanding history from different perspectives.

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415 Hargrave, K., Homel, K., and Dražanová, L. (2023). Public narratives and attitudes towards refugees and other migrants: Poland country profile
416 International Republican Institute (2023). Hostile narrative brief: war in Ukraine, a year of aggression
Events and activities to help Ukrainians and Slovaks meet and get to know one another could help Slovak communities better understand the refugee experience. More educational activities in form of books, events, and theatre performances to explain the diversity of Ukrainian refugee experiences should be promoted.

### 3.6. Risks

Incendiary and misleading discourses about refugees present risks on various levels. First, there are risks to Ukrainian refugees, particularly in relation to discrimination and increased challenges in accessing services, especially for the more vulnerable refugee groups, such as those on lower incomes, women with children, and people with disabilities. Discourses in relation to Ukrainians abusing or unduly straining the healthcare system or could impact their access if some working in the sector internalise such beliefs. As this discourse relates to a sector with which most (if not all) of the host society interacts, increasing strains on the system that are perceived as caused by the influx of refugees can create tensions between the host community and Ukrainians.

Micro-aggression and more overt aggression from host communities toward refugees may develop due to growing frustrations regarding the perceived unfairness of Ukrainians receiving state support. All discourses risk moving from the online and verbal space into tangible actions. This has been observed. Media reported that in Slovakia, during the period of free public travel for refugees, some bus drivers refused access to refugees without payment. As early as May 2022, Euractiv noted that a 'Ukrainian family’s car in Slovakia was sprayed with the Russian Z symbol'.

Highly skilled professionals may also be affected by negative discourses labelling them as economic migrants and accusing them of accessing benefits they are not entitled to. Ukrainian professionals may be discriminated against in the Polish labour market given that, before the war, Ukrainian workers—particularly in Poland and the Czech Republic—worked largely in low-skilled jobs. Should employers believe that Ukrainians do not want to work, this may lead to greater discrimination in the job market. A perception may also grow that Ukrainians are not competent to work in certain professions.

Should the economic situation in the five countries worsen, discourses about refugees driving prices up, deepening economic challenges, or taking locals’ jobs could become much more prevalent, fuelling resentment toward Ukrainians by the host community. Ukrainian refugees could be used as scapegoats for economic problems such as inflation, rising costs of living, housing shortages, and high costs.

Such discourses present risks to community cohesion more broadly. There may be increased distrust and polarisation among the host and Ukrainian communities, which could in some cases manifest in instances of physical and verbal abuse, particularly around specific dates such as, in Poland, the anniversary of the Volhynia massacre. Tensions between polarised parts of host society can lead to protests, clashes between opposing politicians on news channels, and fiery, often aggressive comments and discussions on social media channels.

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426 Keryk, M.(2021), Praca, W. *Poland: naruszenie praw pracowniczych imigrantów z Ukrainy zatrudnionych w budownictwie i sektorze usług*.
427 Hargrave, K., Homel, K., and Dražanová, L. (2023). *Public narratives and attitudes towards refugees and other migrants: Poland country profile*.
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between groups with opposing values. The spread of negative narratives relating to Ukrainian refugees is likely to impede integration efforts by NGOs, foundations, and agencies. In addition, narratives such as ‘Ukrainians are threatening the Polish national identity’ can exacerbate sentiments of isolation Ukrainians in the host country, making them feel unwelcome.429

Finally, this could have an effect on politics. In Slovakia, due to high levels of belief in conspiracy theories and disinformation, as well as latent sympathy for Russia,430 these discourses risk gaining a hold on the country’s political situation. This is a potentially serious issue, taking into account the upcoming Slovak election in September 2023 that in turn can have an effect on the host community’s support for refugees. In 2022, 56 percent of Slovaks believed that NATO deliberately provoked Russia by surrounding it with its own military bases,431 and 68 percent (particularly in households that do not believe Russia is responsible for the war) agreed that support to Ukrainian refugees should be decreased.432 This highlights how existing political perceptions directly impact perceptions and opinions of Ukrainian refugees and provides a fertile ground for DMDS to be believed and spread.

Considerations for Countering Anti-Refugee Messaging:

Continue to monitor and analyse discourses around refugees to understand trends regarding their prevalence and acceptance by the public, as well as their impact on community cohesion.

432 GLOBSEC (2022). New report shows that the V4 population supports Ukrainian refugees with some reservations, accessed 22 March 2023. There has been debate about methodological approaches to polling conducted by GLOBSEC and the Slovak Academy of Science, such as the different scales given to participants to respond to questions (1–5 or 1–10) and how responses were collected (online and in-person), even when the question posed is the same. See GLOBSEC (2002). New poll: Slovaks want Ukraine to win the war, Not Russia, accessed 22 March 2023.
Chapter 4: Potential Tensions

4.1. Overview

This section discusses the phenomena, policies, and characteristics that are (or could be in the future) sources of tensions between Ukrainian refugees and host communities. It is important to stress that, at the time of writing, these had not necessarily harmed community cohesion. However, they could do so in the medium term—for example, should contextual factors change or should disinformation actors take intentional actions be taken to magnify the tensions. This chapter notes the specific types of risks related to each aspect of the refugee journey, how they have manifested to date, and signs pointing to the likelihood of the tensions becoming more significant.

While the overall risks are generally low, the risk ratings below are in relation to the risks to community cohesion in each country. This means that a tension noted as ‘relatively high risk’ might still be unlikely to materialise, but it is likely to be a higher risk than other tensions in that country. For example, tensions around the generally lower benefits received by TCNs not eligible for TP are unlikely to significantly threaten community cohesion given the very small number of such TCNs in the region; on the other hand, economic concerns are widely felt by the host and refugee populations.

**TABLE 4. Potential sources of tensions between Ukrainian refugees and host communities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential sources of tensions between Ukrainian refugees and host communities</th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
<th>Czech Republic</th>
<th>Romania</th>
<th>Moldova</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perception that Ukrainians abuse the benefits system (e.g., cross the border to just get the money)</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown, unclear, or bureaucratic procedures to register for TP and services; (perceived) lack of information on the rights and obligations of people with TP status</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure parallel to state institutions that is created specifically to support Ukrainian refugees</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences in welcome and support to refugee or migrant groups not from Ukraine</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainian men smuggled across borders and taking low-paid positions or working illegally</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Healthcare**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Additional pressures on the health system that is already experiencing challenges (including long waiting times)</th>
<th>Relatively high risk</th>
<th>Relatively high risk</th>
<th>Relatively high risk</th>
<th>Relatively low risk</th>
<th>Relatively medium risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Differences in how services are used, resulting in a perceived abuse of the services (unnecessary ambulance calls, emergency room visits, doctors' visits)</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ukrainians facing additional challenges, bureaucratic hurdles, in receiving healthcare**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relatively low risk</th>
<th>Relatively medium risk</th>
<th>Relatively low risk</th>
<th>Relatively medium risk</th>
<th>Relatively low risk</th>
<th>Relatively medium risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Housing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Additional pressures on and raising costs of housing (also in the context of a lack of social housing)</th>
<th>Relatively high risk</th>
<th>Relatively medium risk</th>
<th>Relatively high risk</th>
<th>Relatively medium risk</th>
<th>Relatively medium risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More support provided for Ukrainian refugees than other refugee groups, such as better housing options[^433]</td>
<td>Relatively low - medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively low - medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively low - medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively low - medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively low - medium risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overcrowding of refugees in apartments and state-run dormitories, creating pressures on surrounding communities</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively high risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[^433]: Covered in more detail under the registration for benefits section.
### Risks to Community Cohesion between Ukrainian Refugees and Host Communities—Regional Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Description</th>
<th>Relatively Low Risk</th>
<th>Relatively Medium Risk</th>
<th>Relatively High Risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ukrainian refugees (Roma in particular) seen as undesirable tenants</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Uncertainty regarding length of stay for Ukrainian refugees in host country, leading to lack of commitment to long-term contracts</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ukrainians adding to pressure on schools</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ukrainians adding to pressure on kindergartens and available spaces for children</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Integration issues in schools and a lack of specialised programmes, resulting in negative social experiences (such as Ukrainian children experiencing bullying, especially in Russian schools)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty regarding length of stay for Ukrainian refugees in host country, leading to poor school attendance and high dropout rates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Employment and income</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>High inflation pressures on host and refugee communities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rising inequalities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Low Ukrainian engagement in the labour market and entrepreneurial activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tensions over distribution of scarce resources between disadvantaged local population and Ukrainians, including poverty among local population</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risks to Community Cohesion between Ukrainian Refugees and Host Communities</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
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<tr>
<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduction in financial assistance to refugees could lead to more refugees experiencing poverty and the need for the state (or other organisations) to step in to support the vulnerable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>High/rising unemployment strains host community and Ukrainian refugees and could lead to scapegoating of refugees</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underemployment of refugees, including difficulties with recognition of qualifications</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money received by NGOs is earmarked for Ukrainians and can’t be used for local populations</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainians receiving higher benefits than host communities, including poor communication about the amount and sources of support</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainian refugees receiving more support (such as financial support and labour market access) than other refugee groups, including TCNs from Ukraine</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty regarding length of stay for Ukrainian refugees in host country, leading to low retention of jobs among refugees</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brain drain to multilaterals and international NGOs (INGOs) from the public sector</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Community, social, and political life**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risks to Community Cohesion between Ukrainian Refugees and Host Communities</th>
<th>Relatively medium risk</th>
<th>Relatively high risk</th>
<th>Relatively medium risk</th>
<th>Relatively low risk</th>
<th>Relatively high risk</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative views of Ukrainians provoked by political discourses and parties</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of integration of Ukrainian refugees into host society</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Risks to Community Cohesion between Ukrainian Refugees and Host Communities—Regional Report</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language barrier/not learning local language (lack of opportunity or difficulty of language)</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively high risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences between Ukrainians’ experiences (including origins in Ukraine, pre- and post-war arrivals, level of integration in Poland, etc.)</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural differences and lack of cultural understanding</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of understanding of Ukrainian trauma and its consequences</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protracted crisis in Transnistria</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of insecurity and war, refugees seen as making the situation worse</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively high risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tensions between Ukrainians and host community about who started, is responsible for, or should de-escalate the war and how, leading to tensions between host communities and refugees</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively high risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Historic grievances over the Volhynia massacre (Poland)</td>
<td>Relatively high risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Perception of poor or poorer treatment of, e.g., Romanian communities in Ukraine than Ukrainian communities in, e.g., Romania</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locals’ fatigue of supporting refugees</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectation of more gratitude from refugees</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singular incidents that harm people (e.g., car crash) framing Ukrainians as a danger to host society</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively medium risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td>Relatively low risk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Risks to Community Cohesion between Ukrainian Refugees and Host Communities—Regional Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Factor</th>
<th>Relatively medium risk</th>
<th>Relatively low risk</th>
<th>Relatively medium risk</th>
<th>Relatively low risk</th>
<th>Relatively low risk</th>
<th>Relatively low risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prior conceptions of Ukrainians as economic migrants (pre-February 2022)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Stereotypes of Ukrainians as ‘low-skilled’</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Xenophobia and discrimination</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2. Legal status, welfare, and benefits

Perceptions that Ukrainian refugees abuse the benefits system (e.g., cross the border just to get money):
In the research workshops in Moldova, Romania, and Slovakia, there were discussions about Ukrainian refugees potentially abusing the benefits system by living in Ukraine and claiming support in other countries. There have been border crossings between Ukraine and its neighbours in both directions. For example, by November 2022, 370,918 Ukrainian refugees and TCNs who had entered Moldova had crossed back into Ukraine.\(^{434}\) Many of the Ukrainians (46 percent) intended to return home for a short visit and then either return to Moldova or migrate onward.\(^{435}\) Ukrainians expressed that they made these trips to reunite with family members (60 percent) or collect their belongings (46 percent),\(^{436}\) but some Moldovans perceived them as efforts to claim benefits in Moldova while living in Ukraine. Under the changes introduced by the TP directive, remaining outside Moldova for more than 45 cumulative days between 1 March 2023 and 1 March 2024 would invalidate TP status, and the individual would lose the right to work and access key public services in Moldova.\(^{437}\) In several countries, including both Slovakia and the Czech Republic, claims of abuse of the benefit system related in part to Ukrainians not generally fitting conventional narratives or stereotypical images of destitute refugees. The perception that Ukrainians abused benefits also aligned with the narrative that the war is not active across all of Ukraine and that Ukrainians should either stay in those regions or fight for their country from Ukraine.\(^{438}\)

Unknown, unclear, or bureaucratic procedures to register for TP and services; (perceived) lack of information on the rights and obligations of people with TP status: In each of the five countries, a TP directive was initiated to ensure Ukrainians are appropriately registered. However, Ukrainian refugees noted a lack of clarity around TP and the service registration processes. Lack of clarity about the procedures is likely to be compounded as TP frameworks—which were generally intended to cover a period of one year—were extended and reregistration is required.\(^{439}\) In the case of Moldova, the TP process was introduced in March 2023, whereas previously refugees’ stays were extended every three months and came under the country’s state of emergency legislation. Workshop participants indicated that a lack of clarity around the procedures had raised concerns among Ukrainian communities.\(^{440}\) Specifically, this related to which documentation would be required to obtain TP status, the availability of in-person appointments at the General Inspectorate of Migration, and the ability to access legal assistance.

One workshop participant shared her account of visiting the information office to ask where she could access some required documentation to register for TP (specifically, an attestation of place of residence) that was not required previously. An employee didn’t know and treated her dismissively, saying she needed to figure it out herself.\(^{441}\)


\(^{438}\) Bratislava research workshop 7–8 March 2023.


\(^{440}\) Chisinau research workshop 1 March 2023.

\(^{441}\) Chisinau research workshop 1 March 2023.
Risks to Community Cohesion between Ukrainian Refugees and Host Communities—Regional Report

Given language barriers and other factors such as location and access to technology, it is possible for Ukrainians to slip through the cracks and lose their legal residence status. In the Czech Republic, workshop participants mentioned that this could be a particular risk for youth ages 16 to 17 years who do not have legal guardians and might therefore not re-register process, thus becoming more vulnerable and more easily exploited. Ukrainians who do not understand the bureaucratic processes may feel unwelcome, and host communities may perceive refugees as not conforming with required procedures.

Parallel infrastructure created to state institutions: The creation of parallel support systems for Moldovans and Ukrainians was discussed throughout the Moldova workshops, often inflected with the assumption that NGO- and multilateral-supported services for Ukrainians were superior (often with significant or even greater funding than some pre-existing government structures). For example, in 2022, over $200 million USD was dedicated to support for Ukrainian refugees in Moldova. This equates to approximately $1,868 USD for each refugee in Moldova in the medium to long term. This spending takes place in a country with limited financial resources; as an illustration, per capita expenditure on health for Moldovan citizens is only $284 USD per year. Some humanitarian actors aim to work through the government system; for example, the World Food Programme aims to use Moldovan social protection systems to provide support. Working through national systems is important both to avoid creating parallel infrastructure and the potential perception that refugees are receiving more or better services and support. Although the concern was mentioned only in Moldova, efforts to streamline provision of aid and ensure that state structures are strengthened through the refugee response may also help to address underlying equity issues.

Differences in provision of welcome and support to refugee or migrant groups not from Ukraine: Ukrainian refugees benefit from a regime that differs from those faced by other groups. Specific protections were set up for Ukrainian refugees, and the process to access these protections was easier than those available to other groups. This was the case across all five Central and East European countries. For instance, in Poland and Slovakia, non-Ukrainian asylum seekers are restricted from the labour market for the first six months while the decisions on their applications are pending. Though this would concern a small group of people, workshop participants noted that it could create resentment among other refugee groups that did not receive such treatment (and experience associated tensions), as it can be perceived as unfair to them.

Government or NGO funding that is allocated specifically, and for a long period, to support Ukrainians can be a source of tension: Participants in the Slovakia research workshop commented on a sudden—and visible—availability of funding to support Ukrainian refugees. Such support, while valuable, can create tensions, particularly if it is perceived as exclusively for the assistance of Ukrainians, without providing benefits or additional funding for Slovak citizens in need (such as single mothers, people facing homelessness, or people in poverty). This tension was linked to the discourse that ‘refugees are better supported than the host

442 Prague research workshop 1–2 February 2023.
443 Chisinau Research Workshops 1–2 March 2023.
449 Bratislava research workshop 7-8 March 2023.
450 Bratislava research workshop 7-8 March 2023.
451 Bratislava research workshop 7-8 March 2023.
population, and that such support comes at the expense of funding for the host population.452 Workshop participants added that, for Slovak citizens, achieving a good quality of life on benefits was challenging and that, should the economic situation in Slovakia continue to worsen, this narrative might gain more traction.453 This tension may be linked to the length of time government-funded support is offered. Opinion polling by the Institute for Sociology and the Institute for Research in Social Communication in March and December 2022 found that a growing number of people polled approved of only short-term support to Ukrainians, and that overall public support for people displaced from Ukraine to Slovakia had decreased slightly.454

Ukrainian men being smuggled across borders, taking low-paid positions, and working illegally: Under Ukraine’s martial law, men of fighting age were prevented from leaving, with some exceptions, such as on the basis of their dependents.455 In workshops in Chisinau, concern was raised that men may enter Moldova illegally to take low-paying positions. It is unclear whether this is the case, although the international media has reported on men being smuggled into Moldova to escape involvement in fighting.456 In light of Moldova’s rising unemployment and economic inequality, singular cases that seem to validate this discourse have the potential to stoke tensions.

4.3. Healthcare

Pressures on health systems that were already experiencing challenges, including long waits: Before the arrival of refugees from Ukraine, the healthcare systems in all five countries were experiencing challenges such as staff shortages457 and long waiting times.458 In many of the research countries, spending on healthcare is also below the OECD average, as illustrated by the table below.

TABLE 5. Healthcare statistics in the region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Czech Republic</th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>Romania</th>
<th>Moldova</th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
<th>OECD/EU average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% GDP spent on healthcare (2020)</td>
<td>9.2% 459</td>
<td>6.5% 460</td>
<td>6.3% 461</td>
<td>6.38% 462</td>
<td>7.2% 463</td>
<td>8.1% 464</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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452 Bratislava research workshop 7–8 March 2023.
453 Bratislava research workshop 7–8 March 2023.
Workshop participants said that the arrival of Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia exacerbates these pre-existing issues and could be perceived as an additional burden on an already over-burdened system.\(^{465}\) The arrival of Ukrainians increased the number of people seeking healthcare and demand for specific issues (e.g., war-related injuries and psychosocial issues) that require scarce specialist support that is already stretched in many countries.\(^{466}\) The additional complexities of registering and treating Ukrainian patients (such as translation, verifying foreign documentation, and explaining a new healthcare system) were mentioned as increasing pressure in Romania.\(^{467}\) In the early stages of the war, Moldova’s health minister stated that the refugee crisis had placed the country’s health system under ‘very big pressure’,\(^{468}\) and Moldova’s healthcare system has been supported by international donors and multilateral organisations throughout 2022. Host communities also feel the pressure: a study conducted by the Union of Polish Metropolises in April and May 2022 found that 68 percent of respondents were concerned about the negative impact that Ukrainian refugees might have on the healthcare system in Poland.\(^{469}\) Ukrainian communities may become scapegoats for systemic issues, and the pressure placed on the healthcare system has the potential to contribute to tensions. Ukrainians can also be perceived as receiving more support than local populations:

A participant in the Chisinau workshop raised concerns that, whilst systemic issues in healthcare impact Ukrainian refugees, they also receive additional support from international organisations whereas Moldovans are perceived as ineligible for such additional support.\(^{470}\)

**Differences in how services are used, resulting in perceived abuse:** Workshop participants in all countries discussed norms around the health-seeking behaviours of Ukrainians compared to host country populations. Participants believed that Ukrainians call doctors more frequently, ask for ambulance services more readily, and request more support from specialists.\(^{471}\) This could be due in part to differences in how the system works in Ukraine and host countries, as well as challenges in accessing healthcare through usual means (e.g., due to restrictions on the type of care that refugees’ insurance might cover in Slovakia). However, local populations may also visit an emergency room when other services are difficult to obtain. For example, according to the OECD, in 2017, the Slovak Republic had the highest proportion of patients in Europe (74 percent) reporting that they had visited an emergency department because no appropriate primary healthcare was available to them.\(^{472}\) Some experts also point out that Ukrainian refugees use health systems differently in part because of their profile—the majority of Ukrainian refugees are female and/or children and so are likely to seek different health care services (for example, maternal and child health services, vaccinations, and/or reproductive health services) compared to the host country population. Furthermore, a population that has fled war will require more mental health support services.\(^{473}\)

Workshop participants mentioned that the complexity of the Romanian healthcare system and lack of understanding among Ukrainian refugees meant that Ukrainians were

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\(^{465}\) Bratislava research workshop 7–8 March 2023.

\(^{466}\) Bratislava research workshop 7–8 March 2023.

\(^{467}\) Bucharest focus group workshop 15–6 February 2023.


\(^{470}\) Chisinau research workshop 2 March 2023.

\(^{471}\) Prague research workshop 1–2 February 2023; Warsaw research workshop 9 February 2023; Bucharest focus group workshop 15–16 February 2023.


more likely to use or be directed to the wrong referral process.\textsuperscript{474} One participant cited examples of Ukrainian refugees who did not need to go through the same referral steps as Romanians—in effect, skipping a step and accessing specialist treatment more quickly. In the context of long waiting lines for healthcare in Romania, the participant noted that some people viewed this as unfair treatment for Romanians who ‘paid into the system, so why are they waiting?’.\textsuperscript{475}

In Romania and Poland, workshop participants noted that the lack of interpretation services increases the possibility of misinterpretation\textsuperscript{476} and widens differences in health seeking behaviour.\textsuperscript{477} Participants in Romania noted the lack of incentives for Romanian doctors to register Ukrainian patients, because a doctor receives a set fee per consultation regardless of the length of appointment (and a bilingual or translated consultation with a Ukrainian may take up to twice as long as a consultation with a Romanian).\textsuperscript{478,479} Friction can arise between host community doctors due to the additional work of communicating with patients who do not speak the local language, particularly as they are already very stretched.

**Ukrainians face additional challenges and bureaucratic hurdles in receiving healthcare:** Participants in Moldova, Romania, and Slovakia reported that registration requirements contributed to bureaucratic barriers for Ukrainians seeking healthcare.\textsuperscript{480} In Moldova, Ukrainians reported being unable to make appointments using the online system, not understanding the mechanisms of a new healthcare system, and not finding information on which services require additional insurance and which are covered.\textsuperscript{481} In Romania, participants commented on the complexity of the healthcare system and shared examples of small, bureaucratic obstacles to equitable healthcare delivery.\textsuperscript{482} Several participants discussed specific challenges around registering with a doctor, reporting that Ukrainian identification numbers differed from Romanian ones in format and therefore could not be entered into the public healthcare information technology (IT) systems for doctors to receive payment. This in turn could cause some doctors to refuse to treat Ukrainian patients. In Slovakia, one of the primary challenges experienced by Ukrainians was lack of information about where to go and what services were available.\textsuperscript{483} Workshop participants agreed that Ukrainians can have limited knowledge of the system.\textsuperscript{484} A UNHCR/REACH assessment’s sample polling found that 23 percent of Ukrainians residents in collective centres and 19 percent of Ukrainian residents in other accommodation reported refusal by service providers as a reason for failing to access healthcare.\textsuperscript{485} Other potential barriers to accessing healthcare could include having the incorrect insurance provision or evidence, or using the incorrect referral route.\textsuperscript{486} Challenges to accessing healthcare can lead to discontent on the part of Ukrainians, which can be perceived as ingratitude by the host population and contribute to tensions.

\textsuperscript{474} Bucharest focus group workshop, 15–16 February 2023.
\textsuperscript{475} Bucharest focus group workshop, 15–16 February 2023.
\textsuperscript{476} Bucharest research workshop 15–16 February 2023; Warsaw research workshop 9 February 2023.
\textsuperscript{478} Help to Help Ukraine (2023). Access to healthcare for Ukrainian refugees in Romania
\textsuperscript{479} Bucharest research workshop 15–16 February 2023.
\textsuperscript{480} Chisinau research workshop 1 March 2023.
\textsuperscript{481} Chisinau research workshop 1 March 2023.
\textsuperscript{482} Bucharest focus groups workshop, 15–16 February 2023.
\textsuperscript{483} UNHCR (2022). Slovakia: Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment
\textsuperscript{484} Bratislava research workshop 7–8 March 2023.
\textsuperscript{485} UNHCR (2022). Slovakia: Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment
\textsuperscript{486} One workshop participant shared that her husband needed an excessive number of medical appointments to continue his cancer treatment because the quality of his documentation was deemed insufficient. Warsaw research workshop 9 February 2023.
4.4. Housing

Pressures on housing and the rising cost of housing; pressures on social housing: This study found that housing prices have increased in all five countries in the recent past, and the stock of social and affordable housing is systemically low. A 2022 report from Investigate Europe found that housing prices in all European Union countries (except Cyprus, Italy, and Spain) had risen since 2010 at rates higher than the average rate of growth or inflation.\footnote{Kálmán, A., Investigate Europe (2022). Europe strains under rising prices as renters bear brunt of housing crisis} In Moldova, rent prices climbed in 2022 by as much as 40 percent.\footnote{Strajescu, C. (2022). On the rental market in Chisinau, prices have exploded, accessed 28 March 2023.} The arrival of Ukrainian refugees poses two challenges in this context: first, Ukrainian refugees place additional demand on tight markets; second, social and affordable housing is sometimes allocated to refugees, at times despite a lack of sufficient housing for the host populations. Perceptions that the most vulnerable in Moldova do not receive adequate housing support from the government could catalyse increased tensions if out-of-context representations of working-age Ukrainians receiving housing support are pitted against the plight of elderly, poor Moldovans.\footnote{Ukrainians have received cash support of up to 2,200 MDL per person per month, which is intended to support housing alongside other needs, as well as access to RACs and private apartments in the short term through a partnership between IOM and Airbnb. UNHCR (2023) Cash assistance for refugees in Moldova, accessed 28 March 2023; IOM (2022) IOM AND AIRBNB: PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION IN MOLDOVA, accessed 28 March 2023.} In addition, the arrival of refugees has exacerbated regional differences in some contexts, such as the Czech Republic, where refugees have been more likely to settle in cities than in rural areas where housing challenges were already more acute.\footnote{According to data from the Statistical office of the European Union, in 2020, almost 40 percent of the Polish population lived in overcrowded dwellings, almost double the EU average rate. Eurostat (2022). Living conditions in Europe – Housing, accessed 28 March 2023; on social housing in Romania, see Turcu, C. (2017). Mind the Poorest: Social Housing Provision in Post-Crisis Romania.} In these challenging circumstances, it is easy for tensions to arise, as increasing costs can threaten the stability of lower income locals’ living situation and way of life, particularly in countries such as Moldova where rent increases and inflation have been especially high.

Overcrowding of refugees in apartments and state-run dormitories, creating pressures on surrounding communities: Issues associated with overcrowding generally affect both host communities and refugee populations, particularly in Poland and Romania,\footnote{Reliefweb (2023). Living in the moment: Ukrainians find hope in Slovakia} and the stock of social housing in central and eastern European countries is low. For refugees in particular, overcrowding has been recorded in collective centres. Workshop participants commented that, if the refugees’ economic situation worsens, this could lead to more significant overcrowding of collective centres. The humanitarian centre in Gabčíkovo,\footnote{Reliefweb (2023). Living in the moment: Ukrainians find hope in Slovakia} Slovakia, was cited as an example of where the number of refugees (reportedly 900)\footnote{Reliefweb (2023). Living in the moment: Ukrainians find hope in Slovakia} is very high in comparison to the local population\footnote{City Population (2022). Gabčíkovo, Trnava Region, Slovakia, accessed 10 April 2023.} of approximately 5,250\footnote{City Population (2022). Gabčíkovo, Trnava Region, Slovakia, accessed 10 April 2023.} to 5,550.\footnote{City Population (2022). Gabčíkovo, Trnava Region, Slovakia, accessed 10 April 2023.} Overcrowding can affect specific marginalised groups. For example, in Moldova, concerns around overcrowding have been raised about the RACs used to house Roma refugees; Oxfam’s October 2022 report highlighted crowding and lack of privacy as humanitarian priorities, giving the case of one RAC where 10 to 16 people were staying in one dormitory-sized room.\footnote{Oxfam (2022). Seeking Safety: Roma Refugees in Moldova, accessed 28 March 2023.} Such crowded collective sites can contribute to the emergence of localised tensions, including concerns about burdening local services and the impact of concentrated groups of refugees seeking support in a single area.\footnote{Bratislava research workshop 7-8 March 2023.} In addition, workshop
participants expressed concerns about the impact of long-term overcrowding on both refugees and host communities, citing fatigue with the situation and lack of long-term solutions.

’We’ve been talking about this for one year, but nothing changes. We still have dormitories with three families living in one room.’499

– Workshop participant discussing refugee accommodation

Ukrainian refugees, and Roma in particular, are seen as undesirable tenants: Likely in part due to the tightness of the housing market, landlords may be selective regarding the tenants they accept. Ukrainian refugees can be considered undesirable tenants, with one participant in the Poland workshop quoting from an advertisement for accommodation for ‘Poles only’.500

Workshop participants reported instances of advertisements that explicitly excluded Ukrainians, or being told they could not view properties because they were Ukrainian.501

Specific groups within the refugee community—notably Roma—experience particular discrimination in the housing market (and have since before February 2022).502 Mothers with children are especially at risk: according to workshop participants, landlords are likely to discriminate against them due in part to tighter restrictions around eviction of tenants that include mothers and children. Landlords also were noted to have the perception that children will damage the property.504 Workshop participants noted that high demand for housing causes some landlords to engage in exploitative practices, such as insisting on informal rent agreements, and significantly increasing rents and even evictions (particularly when no official contract is signed).505 Poor housing conditions not only affect refugees’ quality of life, but they could also reinforce negative stereotypes about refugees.

Uncertainty regarding Ukrainian refugees’ length of stay in the host country, leading to lack of commitment to contracts: Ukrainians may be at a structural disadvantage in the housing market. Their return intentions are complex; regional surveys indicate that the majority of refugees say they plan to return to Ukraine once the war ends.506 This uncertainty translates to unwillingness to sign long-term rental contracts with landlords. In a tight housing market, unwillingness to commit to longer periods can disadvantage Ukrainian tenants and could breed resentment similar to that discussed above in relation to discrimination in the housing market. Participants in the Moldova workshops reported a perception that landlords did not want to rent to Ukrainians,

499 Bratislava research workshop 7–8 March 2023.
500 Warsaw research workshop 9 February 2023.
501 Chisinau research workshop 1 March 2023.
504 Prague research workshop 1–2 February 2023.
505 Warsaw research workshop 9 February 2023.
regarding refugees as a risky investment, since it is unclear how long they will stay in the country.\textsuperscript{507} This has also been noted in the press; for example, Euronews quoted Warsaw estate agent Michał Możarowski as saying ‘Landlords prefer a year-long lease, and no one knows how long the war will continue. This means Ukrainians are not the preferred tenants’.\textsuperscript{508}

‘No one thought the war would last this long’, was a repeated phrase during the workshops in Chisinau.\textsuperscript{509} This was reflected in Ukrainians’ accounts of interactions with landlords who were unwilling to sign short-term contracts or asked for prohibitively high deposits (equivalent to three months’ rent—or more) before entering into an agreement.\textsuperscript{510}

This could lead to increased housing vulnerability and a potential need to live in overcrowded conditions that could contribute to tensions between Ukrainians and those living in the vicinity.

\subsection*{4.5. Education}

\textbf{Pressure on schools:} This is generally a medium risk in countries where larger numbers of Ukrainian children attend local schools, such as the Czech Republic and Poland. The risk is low where fewer Ukrainian children attend local schools, such as Slovakia, where about 9,000 children were enrolled in preschool and primary and secondary schools;\textsuperscript{511} Romania, where fewer than 1,000 Ukrainian children were fully enrolled;\textsuperscript{512} and Moldova, where 1,665 were enrolled.\textsuperscript{513} However, as time goes on, these numbers are likely to rise—and have the potential to disproportionately affect areas where refugee populations are higher.\textsuperscript{514} Ukrainian students can increase overall class sizes and pose challenges associated with lack of knowledge of the language. This might be particularly felt in countries where per-pupil spending is relatively low, as demonstrated in the table below.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Characteristic} & \textbf{Czech Republic} & \textbf{Poland} & \textbf{Romania} & \textbf{Moldova} & \textbf{OECD/EU average} \\
\hline
% of GDP spent on education (2020) & 5.1%\textsuperscript{515} & 5.2%\textsuperscript{516} & 3.7% & 6.4%\textsuperscript{518} & 4.6%\textsuperscript{519} & 4.8%\textsuperscript{520} \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Education investment in the region}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{507} Chisinau research workshop 1 March 2023.
\textsuperscript{509} Chisinau research workshop 1 March 2023.
\textsuperscript{510} Chisinau research workshop 1 March 2023.
\textsuperscript{513} Moldpres (2023). Over 1,600 Ukrainian children study in schools in Moldova, accessed 28 March 2023.
Ukrainians in smaller towns and rural areas also might encounter challenges due to lack of experience amongst teachers and schools in integrating foreign pupils. Ukrainian children also face mental and psychological trauma due to their recent experiences; for teachers who are already poorly paid and face practical challenges, it can be difficult to cope with this additional burden. Specific pressures exist with regard to transitioning older students into the education system in some countries, such as the Czech Republic, where high school students need to pass exams to register for secondary school. In part due to these issues, a significant proportion of Ukrainian youth enrol in online education rather than host countries’ national school systems. Workshop participants also raised the challenges associated with language barriers and the risk that teachers spending additional time working with students who do not speak the local language well could be perceived as a decline in the quality of education provided to the class.

Pressure on kindergartens: The inclusion of refugee children in the primary school system was raised as a challenge for both host populations and Ukrainian refugees. The arrival of Ukrainians places additional demand on a system that is already stretched in many areas; it can affect both children’s development and parents’ engagement in the labour market. One EU research piece quoted a participant: ‘It is impossible to find a place in a kindergarten (it is a vicious circle, if a mother arrived alone with a child, she cannot go to work but must stay at home with the child), it is difficult with free places in schools’. Workshop participants suggested that problems are more acute in rural areas. However, participants across all countries mentioned a shortage of kindergarten spaces; this could lead to the perception that Ukrainian refugees are taking the places of citizens. One key informant in Poland also shared that local authority representatives attribute Ukrainian children’s low attendance in nurseries and kindergartens to distrust of state childcare facilities and a custom of sending children to school at a later age.

Integration issues in schools: Ukrainians entering national school systems face a number of challenges to integration. The first concerns their own experiences of trauma; the UNHCR reported that many Ukrainian children arriving in host countries are in need of mental health and psychosocial support. Participants in the research workshop talked about the psychological burden on children entering new schools or studying full-time online while dealing with the trauma of displacement, and how this limits opportunities for integration and relationship building. One participant said that teenagers are particularly overburdened between pursuing education, trying to support parents and families emotionally, and seeking friendships and social bonds in a new environment. Schools across the region are often unable to provide specialised programmes and specific mental health and psychosocial support. If Ukrainian children’s mental health concerns are not supported, this could lead to the perception that they are disruptive in class. The second challenge concerns bullying.

522 OECD (2022). Slovakia Country Profile
523 Bratislava research workshop 7–8 March 2023.
524 Bucharest research workshop 15–16 February 2023; Warsaw research workshop 9 February 2023.
525 In 2022, the percentage of Slovak children in early childhood education was among the lowest among OECD countries. OECD (2022). Slovakia Country Profile
526 UNICEF (2021). The formative years: UNICEF’s work on measuring ECD
529 Prague research workshop 1–2 February 2023.
530 Prague research workshop 1–2 February 2023.
531 UNHCR (2023). Refugee Response Plan: Slovakia Chapter
532 Bucharest focus groups workshop 15–16 February 2023.
533 Warsaw research workshop 9 February 2023.
534 Chişinău research workshop 1–2 March 2023; Bratislava research workshop 7–8 March 2023.
workshops in Chisinau, participants raised concerns that Ukrainian children integrated into the Russian language stream of Moldovan education were subject to bullying and intimidation from classmates. 535

In Moldova, Ukrainians shared concerns that their children felt that they could not express pride in where they were from and were concerned that the content taught also emphasised Russia’s culture and history and, in some cases, pro-Russian political views. 536

Workshop participants suggested that teachers and school administrations do not sufficiently address bullying. 537 UNHCR have reported similar concerns and have urged Moldova’s government to support the sensitisation of teachers to bullying concerns arising from refugees’ experiences. 538 In sum, bullying could drive young people to absenteeism or drive parents to withdraw their children from schools. The existence of Ukrainian online schools somewhat mitigates this risk, although it does present other risks such as potential loneliness and social isolation. 539 Third, a significant proportion of Ukrainian students study online due to differences between the Ukrainian and local education systems. 540 This can cause integration issues when Ukrainian and host country students do not meet and Ukrainians do not learn about the host country language and culture or build friendships with local children. In the Czech Republic, workshop participants also noted that Ukrainian children who follow the Ukrainian online curriculum in addition to host country curriculum might become exhausted and struggle to make time for new friendships where there is a language barrier. 541

Uncertainty regarding the length of stay for Ukrainian refugees in the host country, leading to poor school attendance and high drop-out rates: Return intentions among Ukrainians living in host countries are uncertain, and this has consequences for decisions regarding school attendance. Workshop participants said the comparatively low numbers of students enrolled in host country public schools, compared to online Ukrainian schools, was in part a reflection of this uncertainty and refugees’ hopes to return to Ukraine in the short or medium term. 542 In Poland, uncertainty around length of stay was a reason for 25 percent of respondents to the UNHCR/REACH survey not to enrol children in local schools. 543 In Moldova, prior to the TP directive, there was little clarity about the security of refugees’ status. Other reasons for not registering Ukrainian children in local educational systems include language barriers, challenging bureaucratic processes, differences in curricula, 544 and concerns about the recognition of Romanian or Moldovan education qualifications in Ukraine. 545 Lack of attendance at in-person schools with host country children could lead to the perception that Ukrainian refugees do not want to integrate, and also presents a missed opportunity for social interaction and building friendships and trust between communities.

Workshop participants pointed to the expectation that refugees are in Poland only temporarily as a reason for lack of enrolment at Polish schools. Enrolment would require a significant investment on the part of the children—learning Polish, adapting to a new

535 Chisinau research workshop 1 March 2023.
536 Chisinau Research Workshops 1–2 March 2023.
537 Bratislava research workshop 7–8 March 2023.
539 European Union (2022). Slovakia: Ukrainian children at risk of unsuccessful integration into educational system
540 See for example: UNHCR (2023). Refugee Response Plan: Slovakia Chapter
541 Prague research workshop 1–2 February 2023.
542 Bucharest research workshop 15–16 February 2023; Chisinau research workshop 1–2 March 2023.
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4.6. Employment and income

High inflation pressures on host and refugee communities: 2022 saw not only an inflow of Ukrainian refugees but also a significant increase in inflation rates in all the countries included in this study, as noted in the table below.

TABLE 7. Inflation statistics in the region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inflation</th>
<th>Czech Republic</th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>Romania</th>
<th>Moldova</th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harmonised index of consumer prices in January 2023</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moldova was particularly affected, with year-on-year inflation reaching 30.24 percent in December 2022 and remaining high into 2023 at 27.31 percent in January. Concurrently, reduced Russian gas exports catalysed a spike in energy prices, and consumers faced energy price increases of up to 200 percent in 2022. An October 2022 EU poll showed that an average of 93 percent of respondents across the EU, and 95 percent of Slovak respondents, were worried about rising costs of living, including increasing food and energy prices. In another study, over 70 percent of Polish citizens in major cities thought hosting Ukrainians would have a negative impact on state finances.

Ukrainian refugees have the potential to improve the economic situation in host countries, but the economic benefits that Ukrainians could bring might: (1) be longer-term; (2) not be very visible to the population as a whole at this stage, particularly in the context of rapid and noticeable price increases in basic goods; and (3) be concentrated among the more affluent, such as business owners. This in turn might lead to tensions between Ukrainian refugees and those who stand to lose out from the evolving economic situation.

The impact of Russia’s invasion on European energy prices is also widely reported in the Slovak media, linking the energy crisis to ongoing inflation and economic pressures in Slovakia. As inflation rises, there is a risk that...
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frustrations about the economy will be directed at Ukrainian refugees; this can be exacerbated by perceptions that Ukrainian refugees appear well-off (through material items such as expensive cars, jewellery, and clothes).\(^{555}\) This perception of affluence can attract resentment, especially when inflation and the cost of living crisis worsens; Ukrainians are at risk of becoming scapegoated for the situation.\(^{556}\) Workshop participants also noted that the upcoming 2023 elections in Slovakia could be a trigger point for some of these tensions, particularly because early elections were called following criticism of the government’s handling of inflation and rising energy costs.\(^{557}\) This is an important tension to monitor.

**Rising inequalities:** Inequality is strong in some host countries that accept Ukrainian refugees; for instance, In 2015, the European Parliament reported that Romania had the worst income inequality within the EU.\(^{558}\) In Slovakia, the October 2022 EU poll showed that 84 percent of Slovak respondents worried about poverty and social exclusion.\(^{559}\) Price increases generally have a disproportionate effect on the poorest populations; as a result, some pockets of resentment have been noted over the distribution of government support amongst refugees and worse-off segments of local populations.\(^{560}\) In Romania, research workshop participants disputed how much the narrative that ‘poor Romanians should be helped before Ukrainians’ resonated. However, they noted that poverty levels, income inequality, and a difficult macroeconomic climate\(^{561}\) meant that rising inequality remained a tension that risked undermining community cohesion efforts.\(^{562}\) Some support to Ukrainians also has the potential to increase inequalities among local populations. For example, the Slovak government’s allowance to individual citizens who host Ukrainian refugees or offer accommodation free of charge\(^{563}\) was raised in September 2022 to a maximum of 710 EUR to 1,790 EUR per month for properties with one to four rooms.\(^{564}\) Such generous support to landlords has the potential to further increase inequalities in a context where lower-income Slovaks have to absorb rent rises. Workshop participants in Romania raised that the 50/20 scheme was profitable for wealthy Romanian landlords (particularly those with multiple properties) who were incentivised to house Ukrainian families on a short-term basis instead of those seeking to rent longer-term, particularly on lower incomes.\(^{565}\)

‘While (relatively) wealthy Romanians benefited from 50/20 by receiving government subsidies and Ukrainians benefited from 50/20 by receiving free accommodation, the average low-middle income Romanian did not benefit and may in fact have been worse off due to rising rental market costs’.

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\(^{555}\) As discussed in Section 3.3.

\(^{556}\) Bucharest research workshop 15–16 February 2023; Bratislava research workshop 7–8 March 2023.

\(^{557}\) Bucharest research workshop 15–16 February 2023; Bratislava research workshop 7–8 March 2023.

\(^{558}\) Reuters (2023). *Slovakia’s former coalition heads agree to early parliamentary elections*.


\(^{561}\) GLOBSEC (2023). *Despite challenges, V4 societies generally remain supportive of Ukrainian refugees, with more negative attitudes apparent in Slovakia*, accessed 30 March 2023; Chisinau research workshop 1–2 March 2023.

\(^{562}\) UNHCR (2023). *Ukraine Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan: Romania Chapter*.

\(^{563}\) Bucharest research workshop 15–16 February 2023.

\(^{564}\) Bucharest research workshop 15–16 February 2023.


\(^{566}\) European Commission (2022). *Slovakia: accommodation allowance for refugees from Ukraine to increase*.

\(^{567}\) Bucharest focus group workshop, 15–16 February 2023; Balkan Insight (2023). *Romanians Hosting Ukrainian Refugees Complain of Delay in Payments*.

\(^{568}\) Bucharest focus group workshop, 15–16 February 2023.
Low Ukrainian engagement in the labour market and entrepreneurial activities: Broadly speaking, workshop participants in the country workshops, apart from Poland, stated that that host communities perceived Ukrainian refugees as not wanting to work or engage in the labour market. This perception was most pronounced in Romania. Across countries, access to employment has been challenging for Ukrainians due to a lack of understanding of where to access information and opportunities, childcare issues, language barriers, and psychological barriers such as dealing with the impacts of trauma and displacement.

Whether Ukrainians wanted to work generated heated discussions among workshop participants, with some stressing the difference between refugees wanting to and being able to work, particularly for mothers of multiple children accessing childcare and those who had been out of work for multiple years. The perception of low levels of refugee employment can lead to discourses about ‘freeloading’ and has strong potential to develop into a notable tension, especially in tandem with discourses that Ukrainians receive state support that is greater than that available to host community citizens or of which they are not entirely deserving.

Tensions over the distribution of scarce resources between disadvantaged local populations and Ukrainians, including poverty among the local population: While poverty rates in all countries included in this research are at medium or low levels, distribution of wealth is often critically uneven. In both the Czech Republic and Slovakia, there is a strong rural and urban divide; in Romania, high levels of income inequality and housing inequality affect rural areas and the Roma community. Many Moldovans face challenging financial circumstances, and support extended to Ukrainian refugees, such as cash assistance and job matching services, can be perceived as overlooking the needs of Moldovans. In this context, it is likely that tensions will develop around distribution of scarce resources in the form of benefits and services.

This potential tension is linked to the discourse that ‘Ukrainians have nice things and don’t need support.’ In the research workshops in Romania, one participant shared a story of a Ukrainian arriving in a BMW to collect donated goods, triggering the Romanian volunteer to charge for the goods instead of donating. Participants in all country workshops conducted under this project noted the risks of discourses around ‘we should support our poor, not the Ukrainians’ gaining traction if the economic situation worsens, although these remain fringe narratives.

Reductions in financial assistance to refugees could lead to more refugees experiencing poverty, and the state (or other organisations) might need to step in to support the vulnerable: Poverty among Ukrainian refugees in most host countries in Europe is high compared to the poverty rates of citizens. In the Czech Republic, for instance, poverty among Ukrainians, taking account of humanitarian aid, is at 35 percent—more than three times the poverty rate of the Czech population. Reductions in financial assistance are being planned as the...
war continues. For example, in March 2023 the Polish government indicated that some types of assistance to refugees would be reduced.\textsuperscript{576} Workshop participants feared that the international community would stop funding refugees; this would put more pressure on the social services system, the government, or local NGOs.\textsuperscript{577} This in turn could exacerbate the perception that Ukrainians receive more support via local finances than local populations. As these changes take place, it becomes more critical to monitor the ways in which refugees are affected, the degree to which parallel systems are being established, and any incendiary or misleading narratives and tensions that might emerge around refugee support systems. In countries where poverty levels are higher—namely, Moldova and Romania, where poverty rates were around 30 percent\textsuperscript{578}—there might be particular challenges in relation to the perception that refugees are receiving more support than host communities, as described below.

**Rising unemployment:** The potential for tensions to arise around Ukrainians taking the jobs of locals was mentioned in all research countries but Romania.\textsuperscript{579} This was regardless of whether unemployment rates were low (e.g., in the Czech Republic, at 2.5 percent, but with regional differences)\textsuperscript{580} at the time of research, rising sharply (e.g., in Moldova, where the unemployment rate rose sharply in early 2023 to 4.6 percent, particularly in rural and agricultural regions, after a year of stability between 2.5 and 3 percent).\textsuperscript{581} Narratives have already been noted to circulate around Ukrainians taking locals' jobs.\textsuperscript{582}

In the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia, workshop participants noted that, as the economic situation becomes more strained, Ukrainian refugees might be scapegoated for locals’ unemployment, as they might be perceived as willing to work for less money and longer hours.\textsuperscript{583} Participants in Poland noted that certain jobs can be seen as exclusively filled by Ukrainians and that Poles can no longer obtain them (e.g., care workers).\textsuperscript{584}

In Slovakia, sensitivity around jobs is likely to be high. Recent polling suggests that the general economic outlook among the Slovak population is pessimistic, with 56 percent of people polled by Eurobarometer stating that Ukrainians were weakening the Slovak economy.\textsuperscript{585} Segments of the Slovak population are experiencing long-term unemployment.\textsuperscript{586} This could lead to localised tensions, felt more strongly in regions with high unemployment, around perceived competition for jobs.\textsuperscript{587} The addition of significant numbers of long-term residents to host countries can place pressure on the labour market and provide an easy target for frustration about economic challenges, including unemployment. Participants in the Chisinau workshops highlighted fears that political parties would leverage economic troubles to scapegoat refugees.\textsuperscript{588}

\textsuperscript{576} Specifically, Ukrainian refugees who live in collective centres for more than 120 days will have to cover half of their accommodation costs; after 180 days, they will have to cover 75 percent of their accommodation costs. Caps apply. The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration (2023). Amendment to the Act on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine signed by the President, 25 January 2023

\textsuperscript{577} Bratislava research workshop 7–8 March 2023.


\textsuperscript{579} Where there was a more dominant perception that Ukrainian refugees did not want to work.


\textsuperscript{582} As discussed in Chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{583} Prague research workshop 1–2 February 2023.

\textsuperscript{584} Warsaw research workshop 9 February 2023.

\textsuperscript{585} Hudec, M. Euroactiv (2023). Slovaks believe Ukrainians are making the country worse.

\textsuperscript{586} The Slovakia Spectator (2022). Unemployment under 20% in all Slovak districts.


\textsuperscript{588} Chisinau Research workshop 2 March 2023.
Underemployment of refugees, including difficulties with recognition of certifications: Across the five research countries, refugees were often employed below their qualifications and experience. In the Czech Republic, PAQ research found that 44 percent of Ukrainians who worked for Czech employers were in ‘significantly less qualified jobs’ than they held in Ukraine. As such, respondents to one survey in Slovakia noted that many jobs taken by refugees are those ‘in which the local population is not interested,’ categorised as ‘unqualified work’ (33.1 percent), machinery operation (26.3 percent), or related to trade and services (12.8 percent). OECD’s Europe-wide assessment found that Ukrainians’ current employment patterns reflect networks available to them rather than their skill levels and that, with improved recognition of qualifications and facilitation of job matching, Ukrainians have the potential to play important roles in the labour market. Underemployment is driven by a range of factors. Those raised in the five countries included lack of certainty about length of stay, which can lead Ukrainians to seek more temporary jobs and employers to discriminate against Ukrainians; difficulties recognising higher-level skills and qualifications among the refugee population; language barriers; and experience of trauma. In Romania, research workshop participants commented that jobs taken by Ukrainians below their qualifications were often seen as temporary, while they looked for other opportunities. This in turn fuelled narratives around Ukrainian employees being unreliable.

Workshop participants noted that traumatised refugees may not be in the right state of mind to undertake complex work that might require long hours away from their children, who are also suffering, and that they may prioritise lower-paid manual work with more predictable hours (especially if they are sole guardians).

Stereotypes of the Ukrainian diaspora, as in some countries such as Poland and the Czech Republic, where relatively large numbers of Ukrainians work in low-skilled positions, can also contribute to underemployment. In Poland, lack of housing opportunities close to urban centres was identified as a reason for unemployment or underemployment. Underemployment of Ukrainian refugees could lead to missed opportunities for them to realise their potential and showcase their broad skills and experience; this could mitigate potential tensions due to Slovaks’ frustrations with Ukrainians not making significant contributions to Slovak society.

Money received by NGOs is earmarked for Ukrainians, but cannot be used for local populations: In some countries, such as Slovakia, Poland, and Moldova, workshop participants shared that some organisations received funding for Ukrainian populations that could not be used for other potentially vulnerable local populations. Workshop participants in Moldova raised concerns that money from NGOs was used to establish public service support structures that should have existed before but were prioritised only once refugees arrived. They noted that this contributed to a perception that Moldovans were treated as second-class citizens in their own country.
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One NGO representative in the workshops noted that tensions can arise because of perceptions that ‘there are finances for integration for refugees only, not much for single mothers, families, or the homeless. Money is here to sustain the Ukrainian community’. This has the potential to cause discontent among the local populations. Such narratives can be amplified if the source of funding for Ukrainian refugees is misunderstood, as discussed below.

**Ukrainians are perceived to receive higher benefits than host communities, and communication about the amount and sources of support is poor:** The perception that Ukrainians receive higher benefits than host communities can cause tension in the Czech Republic, Romania, Moldova, and Slovakia. It is somewhat grounded in reality as systems for refugees were set up quickly and provided status-based rather than means-tested benefits. In Slovakia, the tension is heightened due to the public perception that a large proportion of the government budget is spent on Ukrainian refugees. In Romania, resentment could arise around the lack of means testing for the 50/20 housing scheme. In all countries, workshop participants noted misconceptions about the sources of the funding, such as assuming that EU or voluntary NGO donations came from local taxpayers, which could lead to frustrations.

**Levels of support for Ukrainian refugees differ from support for other refugee groups:** Ukrainians have received unprecedented levels of support from governments and communities in CEE—benefits that have not necessarily been enjoyed by other groups of refugees and asylum seekers. In Romania, they are eligible for the 50/20 housing scheme, whereas other refugees are not. In Poland, Ukrainians are immediately eligible to participate in the labour market, whereas asylum seekers who do not fall under the TP directive need to wait for six months. The Polish Economic Institute estimated that, in the first three months of the war, the Polish government and private citizens spent 5.45 billion EUR, or close to 1 percent of Poland’s GDP, on support for Ukrainian refugees. Procedures are also quicker for Ukrainians, with one workshop participant in Romania suggesting, ‘Documentation for Ukrainians can take a few hours, for the rest of the refugees it’s two years’. Differential treatment has the potential to foster discontent among groups of refugees; however, the numbers of refugees that are not eligible for TP in the research countries are low.

**Uncertainty regarding the length of stay of Ukrainian refugees in host countries, leading to low retention of jobs among refugees:** In all five countries, workshop participants stated that uncertainty around the length of stays for Ukrainians affects not only refugees’ intentions to look for and retain jobs, but also employers’ perceptions of the suitability of Ukrainian refugees for different jobs. In the Czech Republic, participants noted a perception by employers that refugees will not stay in employment long, so they prioritise others if they have a choice. In Moldova, workshop participants shared that employers might prefer to employ refugees on service agreements for discrete tasks rather than agreeing to long-term investment in opportunities. This limits Ukrainian earning potential and contributes to financial insecurity. Conversely, Moldovan participants suggested

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596 Bratislava research workshop 7–8 March 2023.
597 Bucharest research workshop 15–16 February 2023.
599 Prague research workshop 1–2 February 2023.
601 Polish Economic Institute (2022). How Polish society has been helping refugees from Ukraine; Warsaw: Polish Economic Institute, accessed 27 March 2023.
602 Bucharest research workshop 15–16 February 2023.
604 Chisinau Research Workshops 1–2 March 2023.
that since the battlegrounds in Ukraine have pushed east, western Ukrainians are returning home in larger numbers and do not offer employers the security that they expect of staff. These factors can impact refugees’ financial stability and contribute to further unwillingness to support Ukrainians from the private sector, especially micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, which may be more impacted by staffing changes. Uncertainty around the length of stay in host countries could contribute to lower levels of refugee employment as well as underemployment—and, in turn, tensions about the perceptions of refugees taking advantage of benefits and support provided, alongside a perceived lack of contribution to the host society.

**Brain drain to multilaterals and INGOs from the public sector:** In Moldova, a workshop participant raised concerns that public sector staff have also sought better-paying jobs with INGOs and multilaterals since the beginning of the crisis. International organisations were perceived to offer better career prospects, and this could result in a brain drain from Moldovan public services at exactly the time when they are under the most pressure. If the phenomenon increases in scale, this may reduce the capacity of Moldova’s public sector.

### 4.7. Community, social, and political life

**Negative views of Ukrainians provoked by political discourses and parties:** To date, most mainstream parties in the research countries have not openly endorsed misleading or incendiary discourses about Ukrainian refugees. However, nationalist right wing political parties present a risk in relation to the rhetoric about Ukrainian refugees. Risks arise particularly around election times, as the fatigue of supporting Ukrainian refugees sets in, and from more fringe political activists or Russia-aligned stakeholders. During the 2022 presidential election period in the Czech Republic, the primary opposition candidate adopted a steadily more anti-refugee platform and was seen as taking the viewpoint that Czech Republic was providing too much support to Ukrainian refugees. Other parties adopted positions of ‘Czech citizens come first,’ including advocating to halt temporary protections to Ukrainians. In Moldova, workshop participants linked pro-Russian mobilisations to an opposition party and suggested that politicians have manipulated economic issues to build opposition to the war in Ukraine and to scapegoat Ukrainian refugees by extension. The public visibility of protests and some politicians’ pro-Russian rhetoric can be inflammatory and leave Ukrainians feeling unwelcome. Sizeable portions of the Slovak population harbour pro-Russian sentiments.

In March 2023, anti-NATO rallies were held in Slovakia, with attendees calling for Slovak military neutrality. In Poland, such discourses remain on the fringes, with some ultranationalist and right-wing parties promoting various negative stereotypes and misinformation about refugees, including from Ukraine. Given the polarising nature of such discourses, this tension risks affecting community cohesion within host societies as well as potentially between host societies and Ukrainian refugees.

**References:**

605 Chisinau research workshop 2 March 2023.
606 Chisinau research workshop 2 March 2023.
607 Chisinau research workshop 2 March 2023.
610 Chisinau research workshop 2 March 2023.
Lack of integration into host societies: Integration can generally be considered to refer to the degree to which Ukrainian refugees engage with their host communities as colleagues, neighbours, and friends. The countries included in this study varied in their theoretical openness to Ukrainian refugees; the majority of respondents to one survey in Slovakia expressed negative perceptions of refugees. However, on a personal level, respondents from all countries, including Slovakia, expressed willingness to engage with Ukrainians as friends and colleagues. However, participants in all research workshops agreed that the two communities remain poorly connected, with limited occasions to build relationships. Lack of integration is driven partially by return intentions in some contexts. A February 2023 survey by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights found that 49 percent of Ukrainians surveyed in Romania wanted to return to Ukraine despite overall favourable responses on their experiences in Romania. One workshop participant commented that she had not thought initially about integration because her hope had been to return to Ukraine quickly, although this appeared increasingly unlikely. Workshop participants also shared that, as Ukrainian refugees have been in Romania for more than a year now, they will now be very much expected to integrate or migrate further. Contrasted with Ukrainians’ uncertainty of length of stay and the difficulty learning Romanian, possibilities for tensions arise.

Other challenges to integration include linguistic barriers, ongoing effects of trauma, and lack of opportunities or time to participate in broader community life, particularly for single parents. This can be a missed opportunity to build trust and connections among the communities.

Language barriers: Language barriers were identified as a potential source of tension across all countries. Particular challenges exist in Romania, as the Ukrainian and Romanian languages are very different. Fewest challenges were identified in Moldova, though some remained—particularly in the context of administrative requirements and higher-skilled jobs that require Romanian language skills, as well as in the context of integration. The lack of a common language has two consequences. First, it impacts refugees’ ability to carry out day-to-day tasks and access services. One study found that 20 percent of Ukrainian refugees in the Czech Republic could not visit a doctor due to the language barrier. Language was also cited as a key barrier to many areas of life and service access for Ukrainians in Romania. Such barriers can exacerbate tensions in contexts where the health and education systems are already stretched and not equipped to manage an inflow of people who do not speak the local language. The second major consequence of the language barrier is on integration. In Slovakia, in February 2023, 48 percent of people surveyed by UNHCR (including Ukrainian refugees and the Slovak host community) reported that communication difficulties contributed to existing tensions in community life, making this the primary barrier found in this survey preventing further integration. Reasons for lower engagement in language courses include lack of childcare, well as the cost, lack of awareness and lack of availability of language courses. Research workshop participants also noted that it is difficult for working parents to juggle work, childcare, and mental stress or trauma, and to make time for regular language classes.

614 GLOBSEC (2023). Ukrainian refugees in Visegrad countries: Societal Attitudes and Challenges of Accommodating People Fleeing the War
615 Romania Insider (2023). Ukrainians in Romania say they have been treated fairly, but they wish to go home and European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2023). Fleeing Ukraine: displaced people’s experiences in the EU
616 Bucharest research workshop 15–16 February 2023.
617 Bucharest research workshop 15–16 February 2023.
619 UNHCR REACH (2022). Romania Protection Profiling October 2022
622 Warsaw research workshop 9 February 2023.
Language barriers can reduce the opportunity to build friendships and community cohesion and can increase the risks of misunderstanding, frustration, and potential resentment between groups.

**Cultural differences and lack of understanding:** Cultural differences were mostly mentioned in Romania. Despite being neighbouring countries, the culture, history, and language of Romania and Ukraine are very distinct. Before the arrival of Ukrainian refugees in Romania, there was little knowledge of each other’s culture or language. One Romanian citizen who rushed to the Romania-Ukraine border to help refugees as soon as he heard about the war said: ‘I never even thought of crossing the border to Ukraine or Moldova before, because in my head these places are Russian (…) But now I see these people arriving: this is not Russia’. Lack of cultural understanding could lead to prejudice and tensions, and indeed one of the potentially most impactful misleading discourses about refugees in Romania is that ‘Russians and Ukrainians are the same’.

**Lack of understanding of Ukrainian trauma and its consequences:** The WHO estimates that one in five people fleeing war will have a mental health condition within 10 years, with one in 10 developing a severe condition such as PTSD or psychosis. The effects of trauma can be debilitating and last for years, and people deal with trauma very differently. According to the UNHCR, 14 percent of Ukrainian refugees surveyed in Poland had mental health issues, reporting feeling so upset, anxious, or worried that their functioning was affected. In the Czech Republic, one study found that 45 percent of Ukrainian refugee respondents had at least moderate depression or anxiety—four times more than the average Czech population. A workshop participant in the Czech Republic explained that she started working to support Ukrainian refugees in the country to manage trauma, but her work exacerbated her own trauma and caused additional stress. A workshop participant in Poland noted that their trauma was so crippling when they arrived in Poland that they could not function normally and did not want to think about participating in various activities. The participant noted that it took six months of therapy to overcome the crippling trauma. Another workshop participant in Romania commented that they knew Ukrainian refugees who struggled to complete normal daily tasks and were unable to engage positively in Romanian society, as they were acutely aware of the suffering back in Ukraine.

Lack of understanding of trauma can lead to friction between local populations, which might perceive some refugees’ behaviour as ‘lazy’ or ‘ungrateful’, while in reality, the behaviour might be due to strong trauma. The traumatised individuals might also perceive insistence on finding work immediately as very challenging and participating in ‘fun’ community activities as irritating and diminishing their experience.

**Differences between Ukrainians’ experiences:** Two characteristics could give rise to tensions between different Ukrainian groups: (1) time of arrival to the host country (concerning those who were in the country before February 2022, such as members of the Ukrainian diaspora and migrants) and (2) refugees’ place of residence within Ukraine before February 2022. For example, in Poland and the Czech Republic, Ukrainian migrants had held low-skilled jobs for years. This was perceived as contributing to tensions due to the potential stereotyping of Ukrainians as low-skilled labourers. In Moldova, tensions could arise between Ukrainians, with a Ukrainian ethnic minority that consumes news produced in Russian, as the majority of Moldova’s Russian-speaking

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623 ReliefWeb (2022). WHO promotes action on urgent mental health needs of Ukrainian refugees
626 Prague research workshop 2023.
627 Warsaw research workshop 9 February 2023.
628 Bucharest research workshop 15-16 February 2023.
629 Chisinau research workshop 2 March 2023.
population, often from within the Russian Federation; many of these individuals have adopted more pro-Russian perspectives as a result. Second, in all countries, the possibility of tensions relating to the specific origin of Ukrainians was mentioned. Workshop participants noted discourses about Ukrainians who came from the Western regions of Ukraine but were not seen as genuine refugees—they rented their flats in Western Ukraine to internally displaced people from the eastern part of the country and came to the Czech Republic or Romania to claim financial support, or were economic migrants and not refugees. Similarly, workshop participants in Slovakia shared a narrative that the war did not affect all parts of the country; therefore Ukrainians could stay in the safe areas and fight for their country; and that their presence in Slovakia is more akin to being economic migrants than refugees. Such narratives have the potential to generate tensions between different communities and make refugees from Western Ukraine feel less welcome.

Fear of insecurity and war: In all five countries, significant segments of host populations fear insecurity and war, and fear of insecurity has been a topic in the media. The fear was particularly acute in Moldova where, in 2023, Moldovan intelligence confirmed it was monitoring potentially hostile activities within the country. President Maia Sandu has spoken internationally about the potential for the conflict to spread. Participants in the Slovakia workshops shared concerns about conscription, and an EC poll from October 2022 showed that 85 percent of Slovak respondents worried about the spread of the war in Ukraine to other countries. Political parties can use fear of conflict as a tool to generate anti-refugee discourses. The Polish Anti-War Movement (supported by Russian state propaganda) used fear of insecurity, with social media posts advocating against the war. One example is shown in Figure 7: ‘Let’s not go to this war! This is not our war!’ The fear of war, and resulting political discourses, generate hesitation and uncertainty among host communities, potentially leading to reduced support and resentment of Ukrainians and thus causing issues for social cohesion between refugees and host communities.

Tensions between Ukrainians and host communities about who started, is responsible for, or should de-escalate the war—and how: In Slovakia and Moldova, responsibility for the conflict and de-escalation of the war was brought up as a source of tension. In Slovakia a prominent ‘peace narrative’ suggests that Ukraine should seek to end the war and ‘unnecessary suffering’, which might include compromises on the part of Ukraine. One
study has called this narrative ‘a euphemism for stopping the military support for Ukraine’; it has also been extended beyond the war to refer to support to Ukrainian refugees.638

Workshop participants reported cases of families hosting Ukrainians who claimed Ukraine was the aggressor in the war; this made some Ukrainians feel unsafe and unwelcome in their accommodation and led to tensions in families and between friends.639

As the war in Ukraine continues, this tension could pose a risk to community cohesion and potential hostility to Ukrainian refugees if they become a focus for frustrations about the continuation of war.

Local fatigue for supporting refugees: Across all countries, strong support for refugees continued during the first year of the war, but workshop participants mentioned that local populations are starting to feel fatigue associated with hosting refugees and that people did not expect the war to last so long. These opinions have been borne out in public opinion polls, research, and media sources.640 For example, the proportion of Czechs who ‘refuse to accept Ukrainian refugees’ grew from 13 percent in Spring 2022 to 27 percent in December 2022.641 Fatigue is associated with the unexpected length of the conflict, poor economic conditions (e.g., high inflation in all countries), and perceptions that Ukrainians receive better services and support than vulnerable members of the host communities (Slovakia and Moldova). This is an area of growing potential tension between communities.

Expectation of more gratitude from refugees: Across the five countries, workshop participants indicated that some segments of host country populations expected Ukrainian refugees to be more grateful for the support provided. These sentiments are underpinned by perceptions that Ukrainian refugees are generally better off than vulnerable populations, particularly in Moldova and Romania.642 Slovak perceptions of ingratitude were linked to a perception that the government is spending a significant amount of its budget, meant for host country populations, on refugees. In Poland, specific narratives were raised around Ukrainian families rejecting aid (e.g., accommodation) that Polish families would be willing to accept.643 Workshop participants also observed that such perceived lack of gratitude could arise from a misunderstanding of refugees’ needs, the trauma they have experienced, and their specific needs and/or the services available to them.644 It is possible that depicting Ukrainians as ungrateful may stoke further division and tension between Ukrainian and Slovak communities.

Single incidents that harm people (e.g., car crashes) might frame Ukrainians as a danger to the host society: Research workshop participants noted the risk that the media or populations could generalise individual

639 Chisinau Research Workshops 1–2 March 2023.
640 Chisinau research workshop 1–2 March 2023; Bucharest research workshop 15–16 February 2023.
642 Prague research workshop 1–2 February 2023.
incidents involving Ukrainians to portray all Ukrainians in a negative light.645 One participant cited issues of public safety (such as road safety) as potential triggers for worsening this tension—for example, if a car accident involved a Ukrainian refugee.646 Another participant highlighted the risks around Ukrainians working in jobs that involve physical danger and a workplace accident or health and safety issue that trigger conflict (particularly when there is a language barrier between employer and employee).647 Some participants in Poland expressed frustration about the media reporting the nationality of Ukrainians who commit crimes, for example: ‘A Ukrainian person stole a car.’648 Backlash against Ukrainians supposedly committing crimes has been noted on social media. For example, anonymous Internet users have disseminated rumours that the offender in one crime was Ukrainian, although the authorities had not determined whether foreigners were involved in the incident.649 It was noted that such singular incidents could have particular effects during sensitive periods such as election campaigns and be used for political gain to stoke tensions between communities.

Conceptions of Ukrainians as economic migrants (pre-February 2022) and stereotypes of Ukrainians as low-skilled: Before February 2022, significant numbers of Ukrainians worked in Poland and the Czech Republic, particularly in low-skilled manual labour sectors.650 While there is acknowledgement that low-skilled Ukrainian workers have contributed positively to GDP growth, in both Poland and the Czech Republic, stereotypes have also developed of Ukrainians as low-skilled. Ukrainians in the Warsaw research workshop noted that it felt demeaning to read advertisements looking for ‘Ukrainian cleaning ladies’ which implied that Ukrainians were only capable of performing such roles.651 One participant shared how such prejudice was displayed by a Pole who knew of her multiple qualifications, including a PhD, and told her: ‘If I ever have children, I’ll hire you to be their nanny’.652

Due to previous host community engagement with low-skilled Ukrainian workers, an assumption might arise that Ukrainians are planning to remain in the host countries.

Xenophobia and discrimination: According to some indexes, the five countries in this study have relatively high levels of xenophobia.653 Still, Ukrainians have received a warm welcome in the region, and discrimination toward refugees is mitigated by the understanding of their situation as well as the relative cultural similarity of Ukrainians and host communities. Refugees International suggests that, as the war continues, empathy fatigue may engender some level of xenophobia, and continued vocal and visible support for Ukrainians will be important to counteract this risk.654 An Overseas Development Institute (ODI) report notes that ‘since 2015, the dominant narratives around refugees [in Poland] has been one of “us” versus “them,” however the refugees from Ukraine have been included as part of the “us.”’655 Participants in the Warsaw workshop commented that discrimination appeared in subtle ways—for example, Poles resenting the accents of Ukrainians who work in the service

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645 Bucharest research workshop 15–16 February 2023.
646 Bratislava research workshop 7–8 March 2023.
647 Bucharest research workshop 15–16 February 2023.
651 Warsaw research workshop 9 February 2023.
industry, saying ‘they can’t understand them’; or complaining that all care workers in certain places are Ukrainian and that discrimination was particularly noticeable in the rental market. At one extreme, xenophobic acts in Poland have included physical and psychological violence, which has also been documented anecdotally. For example, the Monitoring Centre on Racist and Xenophobic Behaviour reported that two Ukrainians were beaten in Łódź ‘for xenophobic reasons. The attackers did not take money from the victims, they shouted “We hate you! Go to Ukraine!” and kicked those lying down.’ Specific minority groups among Ukrainian refugees, such as the Roma, TCNs from minority groups, and transgender refugees are particularly at risk of discrimination. Participants in the Slovakia workshop noted that discriminatory political discourses could increase in the run-up to the 2023 elections; this, in turn, could increase tensions between different parts of society.

Country-specific historic grievances

Historic grievances related to the Volhynia massacre: At least 40,000 Polish people were killed by Ukrainian nationalists during the Volhynia massacre in German-occupied Poland in 1943, with estimates of up to 60,000 people killed between 1943 and 1945. Despite the role of a variety of political actors (the Nazi government, the Soviet government) in encouraging the massacre, and efforts by individual Ukrainians to rescue Poles, historical grievances remain. Marches take place in Poland in remembrance of those killed in the massacre, as do commemorative ceremonies for each anniversary, with the president of the country in attendance. On the 79th anniversary of the massacre in July 2022, Poland’s president called on Ukraine to admit what he called ‘the shameful truth about how Ukrainian nationalists had massacred over 100,000 Poles during World War II.’ He added that, ‘Those who we know were murderers were also heroes for Ukraine, at other times and with a different enemy, and often died at the hands of the Soviets, fighting with deep faith for an independent, free Ukraine’, referring to resistance against the Soviet Union by some of the same militias that were involved in the massacre. Indeed, in 2021, 78 Ukrainian lawmakers proposed to Parliament to name Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevych, who fought for Ukrainian independence in the 1930s and 1940s but who also took part in the massacre, as ‘Heroes of Ukraine’. This matter was also raised in the UK’s House of Lords, where Lord Glasman said:

656 Warsaw research workshop 9 February 2023.
'I absolutely support Ukraine. I went to Ukraine to show my solidarity with its people against the invasion, but they created a national holiday for Bandera’s birthday only last week. I urge the Minister to please say that in this war, we absolutely support Ukraine, but we must also resolutely oppose any rehabilitation of the murderers and perpetrators of the Holocaust.'

Workshop participants noted that the massacre features prominently in some media and TV series, particularly those watched by the older generations. One Ukrainian workshop participant shared that their son was asked about his views on the Volhynia massacre when applying for his national identity number in Poland.

There is a general agreement that the Volhynia massacre has not directly affected support for Ukrainian refugees, but workshop participants noted that historical grievances have the potential to exacerbate tensions, particularly around annual remembrances of the massacre. There are fears that far right groups may exploit the 80th anniversary in July 2023.

**Perception of worse treatment of Romanian communities in Ukraine than of Ukrainian communities in Romania:** Approximately 150,000 people of Romanian origin (and approximately 300,000 of Moldovan origin) reside in Ukraine, primarily in border areas. The treatment of the Romanian minority in Ukraine is a political issue, with Romanian President Klaus Iohannis reportedly having called for improvements in Ukraine’s recognition of rights for the Romanian community. Issues include the provision of Romanian language education in Ukraine, with reports of education segregation and the closure of Romanian schools. Participants in the research workshop raised this as an issue that has gained attention since February 2022 and that risks reducing public support for Ukrainians in Romania.

**Protracted crisis in Transnistria:** The situation in Transnistria is beyond the scope of this research project, and the differential services and treatment received by Ukrainians in Transnistria necessitate their own research. Nonetheless, the protracted crisis emerged as an area for concern among Moldovans and Ukrainians in the workshops in Chisinau. A recurring message among Moldovans was the perception that Ukrainian soldiers had supported Transnistria in its conflict against the Moldovan state in the 1990s. One participant suggested that questions were asked about why Moldovans should provide support to Ukrainians when the Ukrainian state was perceived to have fought against Moldovans’ interests historically. The protracted crisis has the potential to divide host communities within Moldova and stoke aggressive nationalistic or pro-Russian feelings.

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669 Warsaw research workshop 9 February 2023.
671 European Centre for Minority Issues (2022). *Romanians and Moldovans in Ukraine and their kin state’s engagement before and after the war*.
672 Balkan Insight (2023). *Romania president pushes Ukraine on minority rights*.
673 Balkan Insight (2022). *Ukraine seeks closer ties to Romania, vows to resolve minority issues*.
674 Bucharest research workshop 15–16 February 2023.
675 Chisinau research workshop 2 March 2023.
Chapter 5: Programmatic Approach Recommendations

5.1. Overview

This report has focused on medium-term risks to community cohesion. While we present a range of overarching recommendations to facilitate the Ukrainian and host communities to get to know one another better and in turn develop strong relations and trust, other recommendations are more operational. In addition, our research demonstrates that many of the concerns that host communities expressed—and, with them, incendiary and misleading narratives shared by actors with malicious intent as well as some segments of the population—are rooted in longstanding issues such as a strained healthcare or housing system, which the arrival of Ukrainian refugees has highlighted. Indeed, their arrival could speed the resolution of some of these issues, which have become even more visible, and because in some cases different sources of funding might become available to address them, which could improve the situation for both Ukrainians and host communities.

The research team selected the potential approaches noted below based on desk-based research and a survey circulated to key experts. The survey focused on the key five tensions in each country, the potential effectiveness of the proposed mitigation approaches, and lessons learnt from existing programmatic interventions in each country.

5.2. Cross-cutting programmatic approaches

Some best practice programmatic approaches can be integrated across programme interventions and funding streams to better understand and reduce potential tensions between Ukrainian refugees and host communities.

Conduct conflict and context analysis: A cornerstone of cohesive and conflict sensitive programming is a solid conflict and context analysis. A conflict analysis can take a variety of forms and cover different elements, but at a minimum it should include: (1) a situation profile or an overview of the historic, economic, security, socio-cultural, and environmental contexts; (2) causal analysis of conflict factors, including the proximate causes and intermediate factors and potential triggers of conflict; (3) a mapping and analysis of stakeholders and their relationships that might directly or indirectly influence or be affected by the topic; and (4) conflict dynamics or drivers of change, including outlining the interactions between causes of conflict and the actors. To be effective, conflict and context analyses must examine various points of view, including those of women and marginalised groups. Analyses, which can be performed at various levels (from the intervention or project level to entire sectors), should outline current political, economic, and social factors, as well as historical contexts and conditions that may contribute to conflict. Some factors that should be taken into account in the context of refugee and local population community cohesion include: (1) the medium-term macroeconomic context, including volatility in housing prices and inflation rates; (2) the relative strength of public services, including the strength of the education system and the contrasting weakness of the health system; (3) analysis of who stands to gain or lose


from various changes; (4) internal dynamics around social exclusion and the ways in which responses to refugees can affect existing excluded populations; and (5) political factors, including the prevalence of Russia-aligned rhetoric.

**Share positive stories through social media:** Social media is used as a tool to disseminate incendiary and misleading discourses about Ukrainian refugees, as discussed in Chapter 3.678 This use of social media corresponds with wider literature showing that it can be an effective conduit for misinformation and disinformation.679 In part to counter this tendency, sharing positive stories on social media would support the creation of a countermovement to mobilise communities to come together. There is evidence that counter-messaging can be effective, particularly when coupled with local in-person activities and activism.680 Dynamics around sharing stories, including which ones to share, by whom, and through what outlets, should be planned around the most effective ways to penetrate current information bubbles. Findings from business research show that sharing positive stories can improve morale.681 There is also evidence that social cohesion or ‘glue’ can form around social media messages and stories.682 Positive stories and messages can and should be developed both around the contributions of Ukrainians to the host economies and society, and the hospitality of host communities toward Ukrainians. For example, stories could build on findings such as those of a 2023 GLOBSEC survey which found that Slovaks are open to having Ukrainians as neighbours, close friends, and colleagues,683 along with positive individual stories. Positive messages should be developed within the context of a strong context analysis, including existing political attitudes and preconceptions. For example, a workshop participant in Poland pointed out that what was meant as a positive story about medical support for Ukrainian refugees received hundreds of negative comments within hours, suggesting that local citizens were suffering while Ukrainians received treatment.684 Building stories on a solid understanding of local sensitivities and testing messages to ensure the framing of the message is optimal can help minimise similar situations.

**Implement strategic communications to reach target audiences and penetrate information bubbles:** A range of tools is available to counteract misleading and incendiary discourses, including those that support proactive efforts to ‘pre-bunk’, or increase society’s resilience to misleading content. Tactics can include campaigns to raise awareness supporting resilience to disinformation and to build networks.685 Reactive efforts to ‘de-bunk’ could include counter-narratives, crisis communications, and policy responses.686 These should be tailored and targeted to specific audience groups and their interests, values, language, norms, and beliefs. While providing accurate information to audiences is important—for example, by engaging dedicated fact-checkers—the dissemination of facts is usually not sufficient to change attitudes and behaviours around sensitive issues.687 An ODI report on understanding public attitudes toward refugees and migrants suggests that communications should clarify that the situation is manageable and emphasise shared values.688 Fact-checking, while particularly important in the context of policy debates and strategy, should be accompanied by other strategies that may

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Resonate with diverse groups of people. These might include: (1) framing messaging to align with the target audiences’ moral values (which has been proven to shift attitudes on highly sensitive and often politised topics);689 (2) appealing to emotions, which are strong drivers of decisions and behaviours and result in content that is more likely to be accessed and remembered;690 and (3) shifting social norms or using normative messaging regarding the expectations of behaviour (or its frequency) to promote desired behaviours.691

When factual information is used to counter specific falsehoods, it should be repeated multiple times in targeted fora. Repeated statements are shown to be easier to process and therefore are perceived as more truthful, even for those with prior knowledge of the facts.692 Thus, repeating facts is crucial, because doing so can counter falsehoods that audiences have been exposed to multiple times. Research indicates that misinformation and disinformation can be promoted through specific media outlets that local and foreign actors use to influence public opinion.693 After information is disseminated, it can be taken up by individuals who do not actively question the information they receive, since there is a global bias toward believing ‘fake news’ is something that affects other people.694 Finally, it is crucial that the target audience consider the messenger credible; therefore as much care should be taken to select the messengers as the message.695 In the Czech Republic, for example, there are active efforts to counter disinformation and engage in positive strategic communications, such as the Czech Elves, a citizens’ group that focuses on this topic.696

Organise joint activities that enable refugees and host populations to get to know each other: Due to daily pressures related to work, family life, and the broader challenges mentioned in Section 4.7, host country and refugee communities might not engage socially. All types of stakeholders—governments, municipalities, NGOs, or citizens’ groups—could organise activities to bring the host and refugee communities together socially and build informal networks. Such activities have been observed to reduce prejudice.697 A workshop participant from the Czech Republic shared that a community held film screenings with short ‘chat to your neighbour’ intervals designed to help people who watch the movie get to know each other, with the movie providing a basis for conversation.698 In Slovakia, some NGOs noted that activities designed to bring Ukrainian and host community youth together were poorly attended. However, one NGO shared that their activities usually attract equal numbers of local and refugee children, but they do not advertise them as opportunities to meet Ukrainians but rather focus on the games or activities that the children enjoy. They also advertise to Ukrainian and Slovak youth separately, using posters in the two languages.699

Offer additional free or affordable after-school activities: Support for after-school activities—whether free or highly subsidised—has multiple benefits. First, they can help to bridge the gap between the school day and the workday, enabling mothers to work without seeking childcare and/or incurring additional costs. Second, they

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698 Prague research workshop 1–2 February 2023.
create opportunities for Ukrainian and host country students to meet, get to know each other, and build trust and mutual understanding. Third, they could include language classes, which Ukrainian students need. They can also facilitate organic language learning by bringing Ukrainian and host community children together for in joint activities. Fourth, after-school activities can be beneficial for young people’s mental and physical health. Participants in project workshops in all five countries noted that teenagers were particularly vulnerable to social isolation and poor mental health; some noted potential risks of youth engaging in harmful behaviours if they do not have hobbies or take part in other activities.

Train search engines and generative artificial intelligence to recognise bias and potential abuse: Digital advances, including social media platforms, have enabled more rapid spread of messages and disinformation, facilitating the creation of echo chambers that can reinforce confirmation bias. Research has shown that false information can spread more quickly than facts, potentially due to the novelty and emotional reactions the false stories can evoke. On the other hand, some technological advances, such as ChatGPT, have built-in safeguards to limit the spread of negative rumours about refugees. When asked to generate negative headlines about Ukrainian refugees, ChatGPT instead provided recommendations for how to approach news stories about refugees ‘with empathy and sensitivity, and to give a voice to those who are often marginalized and underrepresented in the media’. The programme also appears to use built-in mechanisms to recognise false assumptions, as demonstrated in the example below. Search engines, for example, could use similar notices to seek to minimise the spread of falsehoods about refugees.

| Request: Why do Ukrainian refugees in Poland not want to integrate? |
| GPT-3: I’m sorry, but I cannot provide an answer to this question as it is based on a false assumption. The majority of Ukrainian refugees in Poland do want to integrate and establish a new life in their host country. Like any other refugees, they face significant challenges in terms of language, culture, and finding employment, which can make integration difficult. However, many Ukrainian refugees actively seek out language classes, job training, and other resources to help them integrate successfully. |

5.3. Legal status, welfare, and benefits

Any changes to (re)registration processes and procedures should be simple and communicated clearly to refugees via a range of media. Digital literacy support could help vulnerable groups understand and use online services. Processes and procedures for Ukrainians that streamline the complexity and length of time required to...
prove they qualify under the refugee definition could be provided to other refugees fleeing war and persecution who are eligible under the 1951 Refugee Convention.

**Phase programmes (focusing on the most vulnerable):** Phasing programmes involves changing targeting approaches to support more vulnerable people, as would be done for longer-term conflicts. Phasing is an underlying principle of ‘nexus’ programming that brings together humanitarian, development, and peace actors and links relief, rehabilitation, and development programming. Shortcuts associated with quick assistance—notably, status-based targeting with little analysis of needs (for example, providing the same assistance to all people granted TP)—are likely to be used during the initial phases of a crisis. However, as time passes, it is possible to change the structure of support to ensure equitability and access. This might involve extending more support to those who are most vulnerable and need additional assistance (e.g., the disabled or unemployed), in line with national benefit systems. Across all countries, respondents have expressed concerns about the degree to which Ukrainians are in need. Adopting needs-based targeting criteria is likely to be an effective method of mitigating such tensions. Phasing programmes can help manage potential tensions associated with communities’ resentment of refugees who receive support while poor host populations continue to struggle.\(^{704}\) It helps to demonstrate that refugees who receive benefits are in need, and that determinations of their needs are in line the evaluation of national citizens’ eligibility for benefits.

**Link humanitarian cash to social protection:** Concerns about inequity between Ukrainians and host country citizens can be mitigated in part by linking the humanitarian system to the national government benefits system.\(^{705}\) A range of tools have been developed to do just this in response to COVID-19.\(^{706}\) One key well-documented weakness in linking humanitarian cash and social protection, however, is coordination.\(^{707}\) In all host countries analysed in this report, several contributory benefit schemes are in place for both healthcare and housing. Humanitarian support that expands the system horizontally to include host country citizens and Ukrainian refugees helps alleviate concerns about inequity as all individuals are subject to the same type of means testing and will receive benefits through the same systems. Implementing this recommendation will require humanitarian actors and national governments to develop streamlined systems and for humanitarian assistance to be delivered through existing government social protection systems to support egalitarian distribution of support.

**Utilise inclusive beneficiary accountability and feedback mechanisms:** Beneficiary accountability and feedback mechanisms developed and implemented by INGOs, the UN system, and other stakeholders should focus on inclusivity to ensure that any complaints from both the host community and refugees are registered, for instance within the education systems. Such mechanisms could be linked with a wider effort to monitor tensions at the community level regularly.\(^{708}\)

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\(^{704}\) Analysed in more detail under Sections 3.2 and 4.6.


5.4. Healthcare

Overarching recommendations to mitigate potential tensions related to healthcare revolve around addressing the operational challenges related to an overstretched healthcare system, which predated the arrival of Ukrainian refugees in Europe. The inflow of Ukrainians could be seen as further stressing already weak healthcare systems. It may be possible to mitigate some of these tensions by channelling part of the funding for Ukrainian refugees to broader, existing efforts to reform or improve the health system. In the short term, this report makes the recommendations below.

**Streamline staffing processes to involve skilled Ukrainians in the health sector:** Programmes that identify Ukrainians with appropriate health sector qualifications and skills, support them with language or other needed training, and place them in local health systems could be beneficial. Such programmes would likely involve outreach to identify qualified Ukrainians, processes to speed recognition of skills and qualifications, tailored language training, and placements in national hospitals and clinics. In the Czech Republic, UNICEF is conducting similar programming with the Institute for Post Graduate Medical Education in Prague and the Centre for Nursing and Other Healthcare Professionals in Brno to support Ukrainian healthcare professionals to obtain required accreditations.

**Increase the number of interpreters:** Evidence shows that poor health outcomes, including low vaccination rates, are driven in part by a lack of interpreters in healthcare settings. Indeed, the presence of interpreters is a best practice for provision of healthcare to refugees, supporting cultural sensitivity and helping to ensure that refugees understand both their health issues and the procedures and systems they engage with. Investment in interpreters could reduce the strain on doctors who are already stretched and by making it easier for them to communicate with their patients.

5.5. Housing

Tensions around housing often relate directly to a stretched rental market and public rental housing infrastructure. At an overarching level, addressing the operational challenges of the lack of affordable housing, including social housing, would help mitigate tensions related to housing and could benefit both Ukrainians and host communities. National governments are making efforts to invest in housing; to the degree possible, housing aid to Ukrainians should be harmonised with these programmes and efforts.

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709 Discussed in Section 4.3 of this report.
710 Channeling international support to health care through national systems can help to alleviate pressure on the social services system in a way that also mitigates tensions between host communities and refugees. In the Czech Republic, the international community is providing support for healthcare; the European Investment Bank is providing 200 million EUR to the Czech government. Similar on-budget support could be considered in different countries. Such an approach would be targeted at the systemic improvement of the healthcare system and could support an integrated approach that improves outcomes both for Ukrainian refugees and for host country citizens. European Investment Bank (6 February 2023). [EIB and Czech Republic take steps to mitigate the impact of the Ukraine war](https://www.eib.org/press/pressrelease/2023/02/20230206), accessed 29 March 2023.
714 International actors can support housing availability and system resilience by (1) providing funding dedicated to supporting national actors to coordinate; (2) channelling housing and rent support through the government housing allowance and subsidies.
Provide viable opportunities for people to live, work, and go to school outside of major cities: Choosing whether to live in large or smaller cities or in rural areas often poses a dilemma for refugees. Larger cities have more employment opportunities, more options for education, and often greater proximity to healthcare facilities, but smaller cities have more affordable housing options. One workshop participant in Poland cited a pilot project offering relocation to smaller villages or towns, with both housing and employment offers and funding to renovate old homes. This kind of scheme could be expanded across countries to ease housing pressures in cities. Good practice also exists around companies (including in the private sector) providing well-rounded support to refugees. For example, PepsiCo provided support to 900 Ukrainian PepsiCo associates and their families to relocate to Romania, arranged for the employees to continue working for PepsiCo after relocation (in addition to recruiting other Ukrainian refugees), arranged housing, and established the PepsiCo learning centre—a Ukrainian school for refugee children, employing Ukrainian teachers. Such holistic multi-sectoral models that enable Ukrainians to participate meaningfully in work could be explored, and policies could help address the barriers that companies might face in moving operations from Ukraine to host countries.

Support social intermediaries in rental processes: A social rental agency model could be piloted. In this model, a non-profit intermediary would negotiate between property owners and people in need of housing. The intermediary would guarantee rent payments and minimum tenancy standards to owners, who, in turn, would discount rents and guarantee stable, affordable, and quality accommodation to the tenant. The intermediary could help mitigate challenges and issues associated with discrimination against Ukrainian tenants and could support the management of concerns and issues related to Ukrainian refugees’ short-term housing needs. Habitat for Humanity founded the Social Rental Agency in Poland, which provides such housing and employment services. The approach could be leveraged to support the provision of housing to refugee groups, particularly those who are more likely to experience discrimination and stigma, such as Roma. Social intermediaries can act as interlocutors between Ukrainian tenants and landlords to mitigate stigma; they may also be able to act as guarantors to protect against risks associated with short-term tenancies.

5.6. Education

Education can be a source of tensions if places, particularly in kindergartens, are scarce, and some families are turned away. On the other hand, joint classes for local and refugee children can help build relationships between different communities and therefore increase trust and cohesion. Investment in kindergartens and early childhood education may be useful in the five countries of research, as it would support parents to find jobs and work standard hours and encourage contact between host communities and Ukrainian children and their parents. This would lay a foundation for longer-term positive perceptions. To enable this, this report recommends:

Provide language support for Ukrainian children: Language classes were the most significant need identified by Ukrainians looking to engage with the national education system across several multi-sectoral needs systems (i.e., using mechanisms associated with linking cash and social protection and adapting them to the housing market); and (3) supporting and investing in new housing developments. All activities should take place in line with, and ideally directly through, existing government mechanisms to enhance housing infrastructure and access to housing. See OECD (2021). Housing Affordability in the Czech Republic; Chapter 2 Housing 2030 (2023). Slovak State Housing Policy; and Spirkova, D. (2018). Housing Policy in the Slovak Republic.

Language classes have not been identified as a key need for students enrolled in the Ukrainian online system—but lack of language skills could create challenges with integration in the medium to long term.

**Embed mental health support in the education system:** Mental health issues are prevalent and likely to be undertreated among Ukrainian refugees, with studies demonstrating the high incidence of mental health issues in Poland, the Czech Republic, and Romania. Integration of more mental health services into the school system could provide mental health support to children and identify parents who need support (and it could be possible to provide support to parents at school). As the amount of time spent in displacement extends, and given that children’s mental health situation is particularly fragile, embedding mental health in schools is highly promising.

**Train teachers and educational staff to better support Ukrainian students:** Training teachers in how to support Ukrainian refugees would be useful across the different contexts examined in this research. Specifically, training could address mitigating conflict, managing and providing support for psychosocial issues, and tailoring pedagogical methods to language learners. There are some indications, primarily from a project conducted by International Alert in Lebanon, focusing on Syrian refugees, that training for social services workers (teachers, health workers, and others) can generate positive community cohesion benefits. Trainings include analysis of the context with social services workers, development and implementation of tailored capacity development programmes, accompanying service providers in their work, and raising awareness around the impacts of psychosocial issues and health requirements of refugees. The results of this programme were demonstrable: shorter waiting times, more willingness on the part of refugees to discuss issues and problems, and the return of host community members to service centres that they had left. In several countries hosting Ukrainian refugees—notably Romania and Slovakia—programmes should respond to the fact that teachers receive low pay and have little institutional support; these programmes should use a relatively light touch.

**Provide spaces in schools, libraries, and community centres for refugee children to follow the Ukrainian curriculum online in a social setting:** Continuing education in a Ukrainian online school is the preferred option for many children, although it carries risks of social isolation. Making spaces available in schools, libraries, or community centres could facilitate social interaction and the building of social bonds among both Ukrainian and local students. This approach could also enable parents to work more easily. The Moldova Inter-agency Refugee Education working group found that 48 percent of parents polled named making opportunities to socialise among their top priorities, demonstrating demand for these services. Individual and pilot programmes of this sort already exist, as well as resources that could be easily adapted; for example, UNICEF, in collaboration with municipalities and local civil society organisations, opened six ‘Spilno Hubs’ around Poland ‘to provide comprehensive and longer term support on integration, mental health, legal assistance, protection and educational and social activities to the most vulnerable refugee children and families who have fled war in Ukraine’

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and ‘to provide a safe space to connect with the local community’. UNICEF launched similar ‘Blue Dot’ hubs in Romania.

5.7. Employment and income

While potential tensions related to high inflation and the cost of living were significant in all countries, respondents noted a range of other possible tensions associated with employment and income. Approaches to alleviate these tensions would be broad-ranging: higher-level macro-economic approaches and further engagement with multilateral organisations for macroeconomic support on imports and exports, approaches to ensure and communicate equity in the distribution of resources among the Ukrainian and local populations that are in need, and boosting labour market participation and entrepreneurship. Shorter-term recommendations are explored in more detail below.

Establish employment creation programmes with flexible work structures: Several efforts have been made to establish employment creation programmes to support peacebuilding and conflict mitigation initiatives. Such programmes could address areas with labour shortfalls, such as healthcare and construction. Flexible work structures could include work-from-home arrangements and flexible work hours so, for instance, mothers can pick up their children from school. It will be critical to tailor employment opportunities to the skills of the target populations. One programme in the Czech Republic, for example, integrated language courses into employment placement programs. A good practice could also be taken from Turkey and Jordan, where employment creation programmes systematically included host and refugee communities, with host community beneficiaries often representing 50 percent of those supported.

Increase day care provision, possibly by employers: Provision of day care could support refugees’ engagement in the labour market. Possibilities include (1) subsidising childcare for refugee children; (2) supporting the start-up of daycare centres by Ukrainian refugees, which would support both businesses and day care needs; and (3) encouraging businesses to provide daycare, together with conflict sensitivity training.

Offer community facilitators and peer support groups for parents: It can be challenging for refugee parents arriving in a host country to engage in the labour market. The provision of community facilitators could ease entry into the labour market. One option, through group work, is for facilitators to meet with groups of refugees to discuss common issues and solutions or provide individual coaching and mentorship. Groups could be set up for parents to discuss challenges associated with leaving children at home. Lessons could be learnt from current programmes. For example, the WHO has recruited and deployed cultural mediators who raise awareness of health systems among refugee communities, building on the recognised profession of cultural mediation, which has a base in Romania. The programme could offer lessons and possibilities for greater effectiveness for other countries and sectors, including employment.

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728 Deutsche Welle (2023). Well integrated: Ukrainian refugees in the Czech Republic
730 WHO (2023). The crucial role of cultural mediators in Romania’s Ukrainian refugee response.
Increase job advertising in Ukrainian, or offer language and job counselling support programmes to enable refugees to respond to advertisements and interview for jobs: Participants in workshops repeatedly commented that they did not know where to look for jobs that were suitable for Ukrainians\(^\text{731}\) despite efforts by governments to support Ukrainian engagement in the labour market\(^\text{732}\) and entrepreneurial activities. Other support is provided by multilateral organisations, such as the European Bank of Development and Reconstruction online platform and business guide (ghidul afacerii) to facilitate the establishment of start-ups.\(^\text{733}\) Support to Ukrainian refugees to access job advertisements could help them enter the labour market. However, advertising and recruitment processes should be tailored. Information should be available in both Ukrainian and the host country language, and websites should be widely promoted among Ukrainian refugee communities. In addition, linkages with employers are needed to ensure that there are sufficient jobs to support long-term credibility. In one context, over 9,000 refugees registered on an online platform to seek work, but only 2,200 employers were on the platform.\(^\text{734}\) Tailoring the platform and outreach to different segments (e.g., employers) could support the effectiveness of job advertisement programmes.\(^\text{735}\) Counselling support programmes for Ukrainians looking to respond to job advertisements could also be useful. Some services have been established, including on Layboard and JobAidUkraine; and, in some contexts, such as in Romania, the private sector has taken an active part in setting up independent job boards. Programmes to make job boards available could also include coaching. One workshop participant shared the example of their employer, a private sector company, hosting workshops with Ukrainian refugees to help find job opportunities and subsequently supporting them with interviewing, which can be daunting in an unfamiliar language.\(^\text{736}\)

Develop codes of conduct for organisations that work in politics, data, and media: Developing and disseminating a code of conduct could limit the effects of disinformation in Central European countries. Signatories of the code are likely to include academics and civil society organisations; but they could also include media outlets, trade associations, fact checkers, and politicians. Such an initiative would clearly spell out obligations and minimum standards. A code of conduct would be particularly timely in Moldova, where the prohibition of Russian television stations in summer 2022 and some Moldovan stations in December 2022 provoked protest and accusations of political bias and censorship\(^\text{737}\) pointing to regulations that were intended to curb disinformation.\(^\text{738}\) Given the highly political nature of these decisions, public and private sector interest in implementing a code of conduct on disinformation would be valuable to drive broad-base support for such an initiative.

Train business leaders and managers in conflict sensitivity: A small but promising amount of work has been conducted on the linkage between business and conflict. International Alert studied business and conflict in East Africa and Nepal.\(^\text{739}\) While the findings are context-specific, some lessons can be generalised. For example, the

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731 Chisinau Research Workshops 1–2 March 2023.
732 See Section 2.6 of this report for details of online platforms established.
734 Romania Insider (2023). Jobs for Ukraine: 9,000 users active on recruitment platform launched in Romania for Ukrainian refugees
735 Romania Insider (2023). Jobs for Ukraine: 9,000 users active on recruitment platform launched in Romania for Ukrainian refugees
736 Bucharest research workshop 15–16 February 2023. Lack of employment options or knowledge of employment options, as well as language barriers, were also identified as two of the top reasons for livelihood challenges by REACH/UNHCR survey respondents. UNHCR REACH (2022). Multi-sector needs assessment Romania December 2022
737 Reuters (2022). Russia denounced Moldova’s ban of TV channels as ‘Political Censorship’, accessed 28 March 2023
studies pointed to the need for businesses to be engaged in and conduct conflict analyses themselves; the findings also suggested that job opportunities need to be matched to both the skills and the constraints of the conflict-affected and host communities.\textsuperscript{740} The importance of fair recruitment practices, peace-sensitive investments, and good business practices was also highlighted. In Central Europe, conducting conflict sensitivity training for business leaders and managers may be important to support businesses in adapting employment practices to Ukrainian refugees and identifying investments for which Ukrainian refugees may provide value.

**Introduce and publicise incentives to start businesses:** A more favourable environment to start businesses could reduce potential challenges associated with unemployment and contribute to economic growth. Literature on best practices for supporting small business start-ups suggests focusing funding on innovation labs rather than investing directly in small businesses.\textsuperscript{741} Multilateral organisations’ learnings recommend (1) profiling migrants’ and refugees’ skills, their complementary to host community skills, and associated entrepreneurship possibilities; (2) clarifying and simplifying the regulatory environment for refugee businesses, including by removing restrictions on ownership of property, access to finance, and right to work; (3) strengthening synergies amongst education initiatives (e.g., vocational training) and entrepreneurship opportunities; and (4) developing digital ‘bazars’ to support the export of products and exchange of information.\textsuperscript{742} To date, initiatives to support Ukrainians in host countries have focused on job search platforms, but there are indications from other countries that providing support for new businesses could be profitable and support integration.\textsuperscript{743}

**Engage with businesses and organisations to make the most of a more diverse workforce:** For decades, business research has suggested that a diverse workforce boosts creativity and innovation, enhances problem-solving and understanding of consumers’ diverse needs, leads to better decisions, and can have reputational benefits and reduce prejudice.\textsuperscript{744} These benefits in turn can boost the economy.\textsuperscript{745} The Ukrainian population, and particularly Ukrainian professionals, can help catalyse such benefits for national businesses. To take full advantage of the benefits of a more diverse workforce or candidate pool, it would be useful to train businesses on working in diverse environments and identifying and addressing potential bias in recruitment processes. This might also include working to reduce challenges that skilled Ukrainians face in accessing employment, such as through language training and workplace activities that engage both Ukrainian and national staff.

**Streamline procedures to recognise qualifications:** Ukrainians have skills that could be useful in the host country labour market; in particular, staff with health qualifications would be greatly valued. Ukrainians with other...
high-level qualifications could contribute to the labour market, thus supporting both economic growth and the wellbeing of refugees. Many Ukrainians work in jobs below their qualification level, largely due to the complexities of recognising qualifications. Streamlined and fast-tracked procedures to enable refugees and other immigrants with in-demand skills to enter the host country labour market more quickly would be beneficial. Some programmes to support qualification recognition, with the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees are being piloted in Romania. The degree of success of these interventions is not clear, but additional resources and focus could be beneficial.

Engage with multilateral organisations (such as the World Bank) for macroeconomic support on imports and exports: The World Bank is committed to supporting forcibly displaced populations, including governments in central European countries that struggle with inflows. The EU Investment Bank developed a programme with the Czech government that targets health care specifically. The European Council’s recent decision to grant European Union Candidate Country status to Moldova is expected to facilitate greater economic investment, which will be supported by the 2023–27 World Bank Country Partnership Framework’s investment in regulatory reform, human capital development, and the energy sector. Similar programmes could be developed to support the expansion of economic growth, imports, and exports, and to manage inflation.

Provide education about decent labour conditions, including agency contract risks: International Alert’s studies on business and conflict in East Africa and Nepal point out the importance of appropriate use of outcome-based contracts to minimise exploitation and of analysing the effect of investments on different communities before making final business decisions. Pre-investment considerations (e.g., a factory is built) should include a conflict analysis, considering matters such as how the investment will affect host and refugee communities and who the suppliers will be. In multiple workshops, participants noted that Ukrainian refugees have been exposed to risks associated with output-based contracts and that they felt pressured to accept these opportunities to avoid financial insecurity. Education for business leaders and refugees about decent labour conditions and contract types, risks, and mitigation could reduce vulnerabilities.

5.8. Community, social, and political life

Potential tensions in community, social, and political life are diverse, as discussed in Section 4.7. A range of tensions could escalate if appropriate mitigation measures and prevention measures are not put in place. The approaches below, in addition to the cross-cutting measures suggested at the start of this chapter, could be particularly useful.

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746 Council of Europe (2022). European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR) supports Ukrainian refugees’ access to job market in Europe.

747 European Investment Bank (2023). EIB and Czech Republic take steps to mitigate the impact of the Ukraine war, accessed 5 April 2023.


750 Where an individual is paid a certain amount for a job done but the wages per hour or day might be very low, often below minimum wage, if the contracts are drawn up in an exploitative manner and the refugees are not aware of how long a task is likely to take.

751 Chisinau research workshop 1 March 2023; Prague research workshop 1–2 February 2023; Bratislava workshop 7–8 March 2023.
Establish an infrastructure to support refugees’ dialogue with local and national governments: A significant amount of literature discusses infrastructures for peace; these can take place in a bottom-up fashion or through top-down mechanisms. Such infrastructure could allow for clearer and more open discussion amongst representatives of disadvantaged local groups, such as the Roma and rural communities, and refugees. Top-down mechanisms are those in which formal structures for discussion and engagement are built between a host country government and a displaced community, often involving local and national institutions. The advantages of a top-down approach are that a government agency has a clear mandate for conflict resolution, accountability mechanisms can be established, and media coverage and strategic communications can take place around established peacebuilding efforts. The disadvantages include reliance on the willingness of the national government and the possibility that the process might become excessively bureaucratic.

Foster community dialogues: Community dialogue programming refers to targeted efforts to bring different elements of a community together to exchange information, experiences, and stories around specific topics. These dialogues may be organised around sources of tension such as fear of insecurity and war, Ukrainian history and culture, distribution of resources between disadvantaged host community populations and refugees, and the realities of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. The goal would be the development of mutual understanding and mitigation of emerging issues. Community dialogue programmes have been used across geographies including the Balkans, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia. Benefits include the ability to scale up over time, leverage local resources, and put forward practical small-scale solutions; cost-effectiveness and relevance to local contexts. Challenges include the possibility of sabotage, lack of sustained funding, and reliance on volunteers. The literature indicates a slight but positive relationship between the presence of community dialogues and mitigation of local tensions. Dialogues can be accompanied by community efforts to develop and engage in longer-term activities that encourage interaction between Ukrainians and local populations.

Address tensions through radio and TV programming: Radio and TV dramas have been used as peacebuilding tools over decades and in many contexts. In general, there is evidence that such dramas can affect attitudes and counteract negative messages, although they do not significantly affect deep-seated beliefs. Challenges associated with setting up radio and TV drama programmes relate to the willingness and interests of media owners; lack of audiences for peace stories compared to those on violence and conflict; resource constraints; legal and regulatory restrictions; and lack of media outreach. Stabilisation funding might be used to be used to overcome some of these hurdles. Radio and TV dramas and mass campaigns can be aired in collaboration with governments, academic institutions, and civil society. This joint engagement can focus on reconciliation around historical tensions.

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752 For example, through community dialogues, as discussed below.
Work with the media to avoid spreading incendiary messages: Quality journalism that does not contribute to the spread of incendiary discourses should be supported, including by providing journalists evidence of what works and what does not to debunk misinformation, as this is not always obvious. For example, directly countering ‘fake news’ by repeating it brings it to the attention of audiences again—and can therefore reinforce acceptance. Countering disinformation also requires strong collaboration between multiple actors and a variety of actions—mapping and tracking disinformation actors, providing intelligence reports, and conducting information literacy activities. It is possible to build or leverage coalitions among media, civil society, and government entities that would allow access to disinformation tracking mechanisms and promote information sharing amongst different types of actors (specifically, mapping and analysis by civil society, academia, and government actors that influence policy).

Review school curricula, including in history and digital literacy: Various organisations have recognised the role of history education in helping students to better understand the past, approach information critically, and reduce risks of prejudice and discrimination. During the research workshops, participants discussed the need for longer-term engagement of young people in critical analysis—including through mainstream education curricula—to proactively prevent polarisation, misinformation, and prejudice. Apart from the curricula themselves, history and/or social sciences education can be used effectively to improve critical thinking and source analysis. A 2021 publication by the OECD that examined digital literacy among young people found that only 54 percent of students reported receiving training at school on identifying bias in information sources. However, the European Commission has recognised the role of education, particularly in source literacy, in combating misinformation.

Increase opportunities for Ukrainians and host community members to meet and help each other learn languages: ‘Conversation cafes’ are amongst many approaches to support host communities and refugees to interact. Such initiatives for Ukrainian and host communities could support further engagement.

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762 Warsaw research workshop 9 February 2023.


764 European Commission (2022). *Commission steps up action to tackle disinformation and promote digital literacy among young people*. 101
# Annex 1: Acronyms and Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CEE</td>
<td>Central and Eastern Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19</td>
<td>Coronavirus Disease 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>CZK</td>
<td>Czech Koruna</td>
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<tr>
<td>DMDS</td>
<td>Disinformation, Misinformation, and Dangerous Speech</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECD</td>
<td>Early Childhood Development</td>
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<td>EDMO</td>
<td>European Digital Media Observatory</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>EUR</td>
<td>Euro</td>
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<tr>
<td>GBP</td>
<td>British Pound Sterling</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<td>HIV</td>
<td>Human Immunodeficiency Virus</td>
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<td>IFES</td>
<td>International Foundation for Electoral Systems</td>
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<td>INGO</td>
<td>International Non-governmental Organization</td>
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<td>IOM</td>
<td>International Organization for Migration</td>
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<td>IRI</td>
<td>International Republican Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGBTQIA+</td>
<td>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Plus</td>
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<tr>
<td>MDL</td>
<td>Moldovan Leu</td>
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<tr>
<td>MMR</td>
<td>Combination of vaccines against measles, rubella, and mumps</td>
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<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>ODA</td>
<td>Official Development Assistance</td>
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<td>ODI</td>
<td>Overseas Development Institute</td>
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<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
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<td>OSCE</td>
<td>Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe</td>
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<td>PLN</td>
<td>Polish Złoty</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPP</td>
<td>Purchasing Power Parity</td>
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<td>PTSD</td>
<td>Post-traumatic stress disorder</td>
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<td>RAC</td>
<td>Refugee Accommodation Centre</td>
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<td>RON</td>
<td>Romanian Leu</td>
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<td>TCN</td>
<td>Third-Country National</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>TP</td>
<td>Temporary Protection</td>
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<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization</td>
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<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children's Fund</td>
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<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>USD</td>
<td>United States Dollar</td>
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<td>V4</td>
<td>Visegrád Group</td>
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<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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Annex 2: Statistics, Surveys, and Research Reports

The sources below can be used to source up-to-date statistics and also provides materials for deeper dives into specific subject matter areas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject area</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type\textsuperscript{765}</th>
<th>Language</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of Ukrainian refugees</td>
<td>UNHCR (2023). Operational Data Portal</td>
<td>MLR</td>
<td>ENG</td>
<td>Data for Poland, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Republic of Moldova, Romania.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demographics of Ukrainians under TP</td>
<td>UNHCR (2022). Ukraine situation: Regional protection profiling and monitoring factsheet</td>
<td>MLR</td>
<td>ENG</td>
<td>Source type is multilateral, but the report’s original data source is data aggregated from national governments.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UNHCR (2022). Displacement patterns, protection risks and needs of refugees from Ukraine, Regional protection analysis</td>
<td>MLR</td>
<td>ENG</td>
<td>Data for Belarus, Bulgaria, Hungary, Republic of Moldova, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support for Ukrainians under TP</td>
<td>OECD (2022). Rights and support for Ukrainian refugees in receiving countries</td>
<td>MLR</td>
<td>ENG</td>
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<td></td>
<td>EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (2022). Online survey on persons displaced from Ukraine</td>
<td>MLR</td>
<td>ENG</td>
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<tr>
<td>Access to social services</td>
<td></td>
<td>MLR</td>
<td>ENG</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{765} AR = Academic research; DR = Donor report; ENG = English; MLR = Multilateral report; MR = Media report; NG = National government; PD = Polling data; PL = Polish; SM = Social media; NGO = NGO report
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Public attitude polling</td>
<td>Bne.Intellinews (2022). <em>Poll shows Moldovans’ pro-EU sentiment remains fragile</em>; article based on a poll conducted by IDIS Viitorul (The Future) think tank</td>
<td>MR ENG</td>
<td>Data for Moldova.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Parliament (2023). Public opinion on the war in Ukraine</td>
<td>MLR ENG</td>
<td>MR ENG</td>
<td>A variety of studies and polls on how citizens view Russia’s conflict with Ukraine and its consequences in EU nations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donor support</td>
<td>UNHCR (2023). <em>Ukraine Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan: Romania Chapter</em></td>
<td>MLR ENG</td>
<td>Data for Romania: Documentation focused on the issues that children who must study outside of their home nation experience, and shares solutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Commission (2022). The Blue Line and the Czech Red Cross Prague—Czech Republic: Social assistance helpline for citizens of Ukraine</td>
<td>MLR ENG</td>
<td>MLR ENG</td>
<td>Data for the Czech Republic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNHCR Operational Data Portal Poland Refugee Response Plan 2022</td>
<td>MLR ENG</td>
<td>MLR ENG</td>
<td>Data for Poland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deeper dives</td>
<td>UNHCR (2022). <em>Displacement patterns, protection risks and needs of refugees from Ukraine, Regional protection analysis</em></td>
<td>MLR ENG</td>
<td>Data for Belarus, Bulgaria, Hungary, Republic of Moldova, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (2023).</strong> <em>Fleeing Ukraine: Displaced people’s experiences in the EU</em></td>
<td>PD</td>
<td>ENG</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Amnesty International (2022).</strong> <a href="#">Czech Republic 2022</a></td>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>ENG</td>
<td>Discusses discrimination in its broadest sense and target groups in the Czech Republic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Examples of discrimination</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pressures on social services</strong></td>
<td>MLR</td>
<td>ENG</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>UNHCR (2023).</strong> <a href="#">Ukraine Situation - Moldova: REACH - The impact of cost-of-living changes on Moldovan and refugee populations</a></td>
<td>MLR</td>
<td>ENG</td>
<td>Data for Moldova.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>International Monetary Fund (2022).</strong> <a href="#">Romania: selected issues</a></td>
<td>MLR</td>
<td>ENG</td>
<td>Data for Romania.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Profile of host communities</strong></td>
<td>PD</td>
<td>PL</td>
<td>Data for Poland: research on public opinion, including attitudes regarding the reception of Ukrainian refugees, policy on the Russian war against Ukraine, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GLOBSEC (2022).</strong> <a href="#">Voices of Central and Eastern Europe Czech Republic Fact Sheet</a></td>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>ENG</td>
<td>Data for the Czech Republic: data on conspiracy theories that Czechs tend to believe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GLOBSEC (2022).</strong> <a href="#">Globsec 2022 Trends Slovakia</a></td>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>ENG</td>
<td>Data for Slovakia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Attitudes</strong></td>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>PL</td>
<td>Discourse analysis by the Association of Ukrainians in Poland, showing anti-Ukrainian sentiments in the Polish public sphere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Association of Ukrainians in Poland (2018).</strong> <a href="#">Report on discrimination of Ukrainians, discourse analysis</a></td>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>PL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tensions between host communities and refugees</td>
<td>Disinformation discourses</td>
<td>Good practice examples</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Risks to Community Cohesion between Ukrainian Refugees and Host Communities—Regional Report</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLOBSEC (2020).  <em>Perceptions of democracy and conspiracies in Romania</em></td>
<td>NGO/ENG</td>
<td>Data for Romania.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aneta Zachová, Euractiv (2022).  <em>Czech's divided over support for Ukraine</em></td>
<td>MR ENG</td>
<td>Data for the Czech Republic.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Vision (2022).  <em>WARM WELCOMES, LURKING TENSIONS, Vital lessons from the global south for countries hosting refugees from Ukraine</em></td>
<td>NGO ENG</td>
<td>Research on attitudes of Poles about Ukrainian refugees and narratives around their reception and stay in Poland, based on qualitative interviews.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD (2022).  <em>Disinformation and Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine: Threats and governance responses</em></td>
<td>MLR ENG</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunse, S. (2021).  <em>Social media: A tool for peace or conflict?</em></td>
<td>NGO/AR ENG</td>
<td>Explains the potential of social media and how it can be used to better comprehend</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Alert (2020). Model on integrating conflict sensitivity and social stability into services provision</td>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>ENG</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Communication Service (2021). Resist 2: Counter-disinformation toolkit</td>
<td>NG</td>
<td>ENG</td>
<td>It addresses the topic of disinformation and how to recognise it, address it, and prevent its spread.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Annex 3: Key Statistics—Regional Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
<th>Czech Republic</th>
<th>Romania</th>
<th>Moldova</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic factors</td>
<td>GDP/per capita purchasing power parity in USD for 2021 (in thousands)(^{766})</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Harmonized index of consumer prices in Jan. 2023(^{767})</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>27.3%(^{768})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ODA eligible?(^{769})</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Refugee Response</td>
<td>Regional Refugee Response Plan funding requested for 2022 (USD million)(^{770})</td>
<td>777.8</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>226.6</td>
<td>391.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regional Refugee Response Plan funding requested for 2023 (USD million)(^{771})</td>
<td>709.4</td>
<td>80.1</td>
<td>81.6</td>
<td>153.6</td>
<td>427.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political factors</td>
<td>Next election—presidential(^{772})</td>
<td>2025</td>
<td>2024</td>
<td>2028</td>
<td>2024</td>
<td>2024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Next election—parliamentary(^{773})</td>
<td>Autumn 2023</td>
<td>2023</td>
<td>2025</td>
<td>2024</td>
<td>2025</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^{768}\) Moldova does not calculate inflation according to EU HICP, so the figure given is not directly comparable.


### Country demography

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2024</th>
<th>2026</th>
<th>2026</th>
<th>2024</th>
<th>2023</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Next election—local</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total population (million)</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>19.02</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty rates</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate in Dec. 2022</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**
- **777** Poland, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Romania: Eurostat I Euroindicators (2023). *December 2022 Euro area unemployment at 8.6%, EU at 6.1%*, accessed 30 March 2023; Moldova: Statistica Moldovei, *Labour Force in the Republic of Moldova: Employment and unemployment in the fourth quarter 2022* (2023), accessed 29 March 2023. Eurostat explains: ‘Methods and definitions Eurostat publishes harmonized unemployment rates for individual EU Member States, the euro area and the EU. These unemployment rates are based on the definition recommended by the International Labour Organisation. The measurement is based on a harmonized data source, the European Union Labour Force Survey. Based on the International Labour Organisation definition, Eurostat defines unemployed persons as persons aged 15 to 74 who: are without work; are available to start work within the next two weeks; and have actively sought employment at some time during the previous four weeks. The unemployment rate is the number of people unemployed as a percentage of the labour force. The labour force is the total number of people employed plus unemployed. In this news release unemployment rates are based on employment and unemployment data covering persons aged 15 to 74.’
- **778** Statistics Poland (2023). *Unemployment rate 1990-2023*, accessed 28 March 2023. ‘The registered unemployment rate is calculated with the use of data on employed in the national economy including i.a. persons working on private farms (comprising a part of economically active civilian population) estimated on the basis of the results of Censuses’.
## Risks to Community Cohesion between Ukrainian Refugees and Host Communities—Regional Report

**Migrant population**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Refugees from Ukraine recorded in country as of March 2023 (UNHCR)</th>
<th>1,583,563</th>
<th>113,702</th>
<th>504,107</th>
<th>104,823</th>
<th>106,485</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Number of refugees hosted**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ukrainian refugees hosted as a % of total population</th>
<th>4.2%</th>
<th>2.1%</th>
<th>4.5%</th>
<th>0.5%</th>
<th>4.1%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total refugees hosted in 2022</th>
<th>1,210,582</th>
<th>84,885</th>
<th>388,274</th>
<th>88,137</th>
<th>79,477</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total refugees hosted in 2021</th>
<th>4,875</th>
<th>1,046</th>
<th>1909</th>
<th>4200</th>
<th>349</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total refugees hosted in 2020</th>
<th>2,771</th>
<th>1,006</th>
<th>1919</th>
<th>3581</th>
<th>405</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total refugees hosted in 2019</th>
<th>12,658</th>
<th>965</th>
<th>2054</th>
<th>3860</th>
<th>417</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% women and children</th>
<th>86%</th>
<th>84%</th>
<th>80%</th>
<th>53% women, 22% children (Mar. 2023)</th>
<th>63% women, 26% children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ukrainian refugee demographics</th>
<th>% refugee households with at least 1 member with disability</th>
<th>18%</th>
<th>12%</th>
<th>44%</th>
<th>12%</th>
<th>12%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% refugee households with at least 1 elderly member</th>
<th>14%</th>
<th>11%</th>
<th>9%</th>
<th>9%</th>
<th>9%</th>
<th>9%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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782 Authors’ calculation taking total population and refugee population figures provided in the table.


## Risks to Community Cohesion between Ukrainian Refugees and Host Communities—Regional Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Access to services</th>
<th># of refugees employed(^{790})</th>
<th>740,000 (Mar. 2023)</th>
<th>32,000 individuals (Nov. 2022)</th>
<th>98,000 individuals (Nov. 2022)</th>
<th>5,067</th>
<th>800-850 individuals (Sept.–Nov. 2022)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of total Ukrainian children in country enrolled in school(^{791})</td>
<td>187,405 as of 13 January 2023</td>
<td>9,000</td>
<td>57,366</td>
<td>&lt;4,000 (Dec. 2022)</td>
<td>1,800</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of host population positive toward Ukrainian refugees (in winter 2022)(^{793})</td>
<td>80% are positive towards Ukrainian refugees</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>51.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Attitudes of Host Communities

- % of host population believing that Russia is not responsible for starting the war (it’s NATO/Ukraine)\(^{792}\):
  - 4% for Ukraine (4.5%), NATO (3.9%), West provoked Russia 22%.

- % of host population positive toward Ukrainian refugees:
  - 80% are positive towards Ukrainian refugees.

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Risks to Community Cohesion between Ukrainian Refugees and Host Communities — Regional Report