



# Risks to Community Cohesion Between Ukrainian Refugees and Host Communities

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## Poland Report

WHITE PAPER | AUGUST 2023



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# Risks to Community Cohesion Between Ukrainian Refugees and Host Communities

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# Risks to Community Cohesion Between Ukrainian Refugees and Host Communities in Poland

In Poland, 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, the generosity shown to date might wane, including due to the challenges Polish host communities face, such as a rising cost of living, an overstretched healthcare system, and shortages of affordable housing, as well as disinformation campaigns relating to refugees, including by Russia-aligned stakeholders. This report

aims to help understand the factors that might undermine cohesion between Ukrainian refugees and host communities in Poland in the medium term. It provides programmatic recommendations to local, national, and international stakeholders for 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, and it discusses incendiary and misleading discourses about Ukrainian refugees that have appeared and have the potential to be spread further.

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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 4.9 million having registered for temporary protection (TP) or similar national protection schemes on the continent and 1,573,267 having registered for TP in Poland.<sup>1</sup>

Ukrainian refugees have been warmly welcomed in Poland. Governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), 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, it is possible that the conflict will become prolonged, and therefore likely that displaced Ukrainians will continue to reside in neighbouring and other European countries.

Poland, however, also faces significant challenges—rising economic pressures and relentless disinformation efforts, among others. There is a risk that these factors may erode the currently strong inter-community relationships in the longer term. In other crises, over time, tensions have led to the increased polarisation of society and discrimination or hate crimes against minorities. Some early signs point to support for refugees beginning to erode in some countries. In Slovakia, for instance, GLOBSEC polling from December 2022 indicated that only 42 percent of the population viewed Ukrainian refugees positively.<sup>2</sup> 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 the communities hosting them. Despite these challenges, the disruption to the status quo leads to clear opportunities to improve the situation and general standards of living for both refugees and local communities.

## 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 Poland 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 a research workshop in Warsaw on 9 February with 22 experts from government,

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR. 2023. [Operational Data Portal](#). Accessed 22 March 2023.

<sup>2</sup> 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 noting the different scales given to participants to respond to questions (1–5 or 1–10) and how responses were collected (online or 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.



multilateral organisations, local and international NGOs, and academia. These research activities focused on (1) the characteristics that can make refugees more vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation, and difficulty accessing services; (2) incendiary and misleading discourses about Ukrainian refugees in the country; and (3) tensions that might arise between refugees and host communities in the medium term. 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 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, and can increase, different Ukrainian refugees' vulnerabilities to exploitation, discrimination, and their 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); the possible tensions that might occur between Ukrainian refugees and host communities in the medium term (Chapter 4); and the 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 bring out more clearly 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

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

Financial concerns are a key area of worry for Poles. For example, 97 percent of Poles interviewed for the European Parliament's 2022 Special Barometer said they worried about the rising cost of living.<sup>3</sup> The high inflation rate (13.2 percent in 2022,<sup>4</sup> up from 5.1 percent in 2021<sup>5</sup>) contributes to an increasingly difficult economic situation, particularly for the more vulnerable segments of the population. As a result, these concerns, as well as perceptions of inequity in the distribution of resources between disadvantaged local populations and Ukrainians, may contribute to tensions between host communities and refugees.

Challenges around employment could also fuel tensions. While the unemployment rate fell from 5.9 percent in February 2022 to 5.5 percent in February 2023,<sup>6</sup> long-term unemployment for unskilled workers, who may see themselves in competition for government resources with refugees, remains an issue. Research workshop

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<sup>3</sup> European Commission. 2023. [EP Autumn 2022 Survey: Parlemeter](#). Accessed 10 April 2023

<sup>4</sup> European Commission. 2023. [Economic forecast for Poland](#). Accessed 25 March 2023.

<sup>5</sup> World Bank. 2023. [Poland](#), World Bank Open Data Set. Accessed 25 March 2023.

<sup>6</sup> Statistics Poland. 2023. [Unemployment rate 1990-2023](#). Accessed 26 March 2023.

participants noted that certain jobs, such as care work, became seen as exclusively Ukrainian and that Poles could no longer get those positions.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps not surprisingly, therefore, and despite majority support for refugees, a range of misleading and incendiary discourses regarding refugees that circulate in more niche circles in Poland relate to economic concerns.<sup>8</sup> Narratives state that refugees make inflation worse for local residents or that Ukrainians are taking jobs from the local population, as they are seen as willing to work for significantly lower wages. Some discourses relate to fairness, claiming that Ukrainian refugees receive more financial support and better benefits than either the local population or other refugees. Moreover, discourses have emerged around Ukrainians not needing economic help to settle, as the language and culture in Ukraine and Poland are similar.

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

- Ensure and communicate equity in the distribution of resources among the Ukrainian and Polish populations that are in need, and publicise the additional resources (international funding and voluntary domestic donations) that the country received to support the refugees.
- Implement phasing programmes—that is, change approaches to target support to those who are most vulnerable as the war continues.
- Share positive stories on social media, for example about Ukrainian and Polish community relationships, support, and solidarity, and the contributions that Ukrainian refugees make to the country.
- Extend programmes 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, have the potential to stir tensions

Russian-aligned stakeholders have been active in spreading disinformation in Poland, including through the use of Russian trolls, or fake social media accounts.<sup>9</sup> This includes a variety of harmful messages aimed at stirring anger at Ukrainians, including by propagating false stereotypes previously unseen in Poland—for example, that most Ukrainians are drug addicts.<sup>10</sup>

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,<sup>11</sup> characterise Ukrainians as anti-Polish nationalists. Such narratives can gain traction on significant dates, such as anniversaries of the Volhynia massacre, when discourses might revolve around Ukrainians threatening Poland's national identity, culture, and social fabric ('Ukrainisation of Poland').

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<sup>7</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>8</sup> These are explored in more detail in Chapter 3.

<sup>9</sup> International Republican Institute. 2023. *Hostile Narrative Brief War in Ukraine*. Accessed 29 March 2023; Tymińska, Ada. 2022. [Granice nienawiści. Mowa nienawiści w kontekście kryzysów humanitarnych na granicy polskiej \(2021/2022\)](#). Helsińska Fundacja Praw Człowieka.

<sup>10</sup> Tymińska, Ada. 2022. [Granice nienawiści. Mowa nienawiści w kontekście kryzysów humanitarnych na granicy polskiej \(2021/2022\)](#). Helsińska Fundacja Praw Człowieka.

<sup>11</sup> Tymińska, Ada. 2022. [Granice nienawiści. Mowa nienawiści w kontekście kryzysów humanitarnych na granicy polskiej \(2021/2022\)](#). Helsińska Fundacja Praw Człowieka.

To mitigate potential tensions that can arise due to political discourses, this report recommends:

- Conducting more activities to increase interactions that both the Polish and Ukrainian 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 Polish and Ukrainian children, which also provide avenues 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**

Many of the concerns that host communities in Poland expressed and, with them, the 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 strained healthcare and housing systems. Healthcare provision in Poland faced challenges prior to the arrival of refugees from Ukraine, including long waiting lists and staff shortages.<sup>12</sup> A significant shortage of housing, including social housing, was also an issue prior to 2022.<sup>13</sup> Within this context, since Russia's invasion, discourses have circulated claiming that Ukrainians add undue strain to healthcare and other services, or that doctors prioritise care for refugees and that Poles are suffering as a result.

The arrival of Ukrainian refugees has highlighted some of these longstanding challenges. It also can speed 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, among other actions:

- 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 programmes to improve access to services for the local and refugee populations where

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<sup>12</sup> British Medical Journal. 2022. [Poland's buckling healthcare system nevertheless welcomes Ukraine refugees with open arms](#). *BMJ*. 2022; 377.

<sup>13</sup> OECD, 2020. [Social housing: A key part of past and future housing policy](#). Employment, Labour, and Social Affairs policy briefs. Accessed 26 March 2023.

needed (e.g., by providing translation services for healthcare or supporting social intermediaries in the rental process, guaranteeing rent payments and minimum tenancy standards).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Habitat for Humanity. n.d. [Introducing Social Rental Agencies in Poland](#). Accessed 27 March 2023.

## Introduction

The world was shaken by Russia's brutal escalation of hostilities and full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and the ensuing human suffering. By March 2023, European countries recorded more than 8 million people displaced by the violence in Ukraine, with more than 4.9 million having registered for temporary protection (TP) or similar national protection schemes on the continent and 1,573,267 having registered for TP in Poland.<sup>15</sup>

Ukrainian refugees have been warmly welcomed by Poland. Governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), businesses, multilateral organisations, and ordinary citizens provided whatever support they could to Ukrainians fleeing the invasion. In addition to the government's swift response—both politically and financially—Polish civil society organisations and individual citizens were united in organising and supporting 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.<sup>16</sup> This was particularly important in the initial weeks and months of the Russian invasion, as immediate civil society support, such as hosting Ukrainian refugees, allowed the national and local governments to develop more systemic legal and operational responses. While a quick end to the war is hoped for, it is possible that the conflict will become prolonged, and therefore likely that displaced Ukrainians will continue to reside in neighbouring and other European countries.

Poland, however, also faces significant challenges. These include rising economic pressures and relentless disinformation efforts.<sup>17</sup> There is a risk that these factors may erode the current high levels of community cohesion in the longer term. In other crises, over time, tensions have led to increased polarisation of society and discrimination or hate crimes against minorities. These can decrease the resilience of Polish society to disinformation and to shocks more broadly and, in the worst cases, increase criminality and violence or conflict between communities and lead to human rights violations including the 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, GLOBSEC polling from December 2022 indicated that only 42 percent of the population viewed Ukrainian refugees positively.<sup>18</sup> 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'.<sup>19</sup> In Poland, polls indicate that, while support for Ukraine and Ukrainians remains high, it is decreasing with the rising costs of living and growing influence of Russian disinformation.<sup>20</sup> Financial assistance is also being reduced for some refugees in Poland, for example by requiring those who live in collective centres for longer than 120 days to co-finance their stay.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup> UNHCR. 2023. [Operational Data Portal](#). Accessed 22 March 2023.

<sup>16</sup> Polish Economic Institute. [How Polish society has been helping refugees from Ukraine](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>17</sup> Council of the European Union. 2022. [EU Imposes Sanctions on State-Owned Outlets RT/Russia Today and Sputnik's Broadcasting in the EU](#). Accessed 31 March 2023.

<sup>18</sup> 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 noting the different scales given to participants to respond to questions (1–5 or 1–10) and how responses were collected (online or 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.

<sup>19</sup> Chastand, Jean-Baptiste. Le Monde. 2022. [In the Czech Republic, the social crisis has awakened pro-Russian forces](#). Accessed 23 March 2023.

<sup>20</sup> International Republican Institute. 2023. [Hostile Narrative Brief War In Ukraine](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

<sup>21</sup> 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](#)

## 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 Poland 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<sup>22</sup> as a society in which:

- 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, in schools, and in 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, six research reports were produced: five country reports and a regional report. The 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. This report focuses on Poland.

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 same approach and methodology were used for each country.

The research was undertaken in two phases. The inception phase took place between November and December 2022. The research team developed the approach and methodology and conducted initial desk-based research which examined the key relevant stakeholders in each country; existing programmes 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 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 research team organised interactive workshops with Ukrainian refugees and key experts from government, multilateral organisations, local and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), and academia. The workshops focused on characteristics that can make refugees more vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation, and difficulty accessing services; existing and potential incendiary and misleading discourses about Ukrainian refugees; and tensions that might arise

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<sup>22</sup> Slight variations of this definition are used by various schools and councils in the UK and put forward by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (now called the Department for Education).

between the host communities and refugees in the medium term. The workshops focused on how the situation might evolve by September 2023, to orient the discussion toward the risks that might become significant in the medium term. In Poland, the workshop was conducted over a full day, on 9 February, with 22 experts from a broad range of organisations. In total, the project engaged with 229 workshop participants across the five countries. The research team then followed up with a survey, asking key experts to rate the potential effectiveness of various programmatic responses to mitigate the five tensions that were identified as most likely to affect community cohesion by September 2023. The team also asked the experts to share programmatic lessons learnt 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 and included in the report.

The report is structured according to the different 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 (6) community, social, and political life. This allows the report to bring out more clearly the links between misleading and incendiary discourses, underlying challenges that such discourses exploit, increased vulnerabilities of certain groups of Ukrainian refugees, and where tensions between Ukrainian refugees and host communities might emerge or become more significant, and to offer more targeted recommendations.

**Chapter 1** provides a broad overview of the response to the refugee influx in Poland, including legal structures to facilitate the reception of the refugees and the support provided to them by various organisations.

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

**Chapter 3** focuses on incendiary and misleading discourses about Ukrainian refugees. This chapter is based on IFES's Chain of Harm framework,<sup>23</sup> 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 discourses section uses 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.<sup>24</sup> This approach led to the development of recommendations regarding discrete intervention points where the Chain of Harm could be disrupted.

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

**Chapter 5** provides programmatic approach recommendations, first cross-cutting and then specific to the stages of the refugee journey, aimed at reducing potential tensions between Ukrainian refugees and host communities. The chapter draws on the survey on programmatic responses, information gathered during the workshops, and the desk-based research. The programmatic recommendations are intentionally broad, but they include

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<sup>23</sup> Reppell, Lisa, and Shein, E. IFES. 2019. [Disinformation Campaigns and Hate Speech: Exploring the Relationship and Programming Interventions](#)

<sup>24</sup> 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.

illustrative examples to enable a range of organisations—governments and multilateral organisations, NGOs of various sizes, and small community initiatives—to consider and adapt in their programming.

**Annex 1** is a list of acronyms and abbreviations, and **Annex 2** presents data on key political, economic, and demographic characteristics in Poland and statistics on the numbers of refugees hosted, their demographic characteristics, financial support received, access to services and employment, and polling figures on host population attitudes polling.

Given that the political, economic, and broader context can change very quickly after the publication of this report, **Annex 3** summarises the key links to relevant statistics that can be consulted for an up-to-date picture of the situation. Annex 3 also includes 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, programme lessons learnt, and other topics.

This report was commissioned by the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office and delivered by Palladium and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) in collaboration with British embassies in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, and Moldova.



## Chapter 1. Country Overview

In the 13 months following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, 1,573,267 Ukrainian refugees registered for TP, by far the highest number of Ukrainian refugees in the European Union (EU).<sup>25</sup> Poland has made a significant effort to assist Ukrainian refugees, with a strong demonstration of support from government, NGOs, multilateral organisations, and ordinary citizens in response to the influx. Broad and decisive action was taken despite the country having little infrastructure or recent experience supporting large refugee inflows—in comparison, in 2020 and 2021 it received, respectively, only 2,803 and 7,346 applications for asylum.<sup>26</sup>

As the main destination for people fleeing the war in Ukraine, the government of Poland has put in place legal structures to facilitate the reception of the refugees and their stay in country. Two legal mechanisms provide TP for those fleeing from Ukraine. The 12 March 2022 Act on Assistance to the Citizens of Ukraine allows Ukrainian citizens and their spouses who arrive in Poland to stay legally for up to 18 months and to access rights, services, and benefits on a par with Polish citizens.<sup>27</sup> The second mechanism applies to non-Ukrainian third country nationals (TCNs), who are entitled to immediate TP if they legally resided in Ukraine prior to the invasion and are unable to safely return to their country or region of origin.<sup>28</sup>

In March 2022, the Polish government established a dedicated assistance fund to provide support to refugees.<sup>29</sup> With financial support from multilateral organisations such as the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and International Organization for Migration (IOM), local authorities held a vital role in providing services and delivering activities. Moreover, NGOs mobilised quickly to support and fill gaps around the government support structure, including creating clear information sources regarding the rights and benefits of people fleeing from Ukraine.

However, Poland’s social services were stretched before the war, and pressure is increasing on the country’s housing, health, and education systems. Other challenges are likely to arise as the conflict protracts and people’s needs and concerns evolve, particularly as inflation continues to rise (consumer price inflation was 18.4 percent in February 2023<sup>30</sup>) and various Russia-aligned stakeholders continue disinformation campaigns. Incendiary and misleading narratives, such as those regarding the inauthenticity of Ukrainian refugee claims or unfair access to services, have the potential to exacerbate concerns and erode community cohesion. Looking ahead, with the invasion ongoing, the priorities of organisations that currently support Ukrainian refugees might change, which might result in a drop in funding to support refugees and 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 to hand and building on strong support throughout the Polish third sector from the government and the public, there is an opening to develop more cohesive communities throughout Poland that integrate the Ukrainian populations and harness social and economic benefits for both communities.

<sup>25</sup> UNHCR. 2023. [Operational Data Portal](#). Accessed 22 March 2023.

<sup>26</sup> UNHCR. 2023. [UNHCR Website](#). Accessed 23 March 2023.

<sup>27</sup> Government of the 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](#).

<sup>28</sup> European Union. 2022. [Council Implementing Decision \(EU\) 2022/382](#). Access 24 March 2023.

<sup>29</sup> Reuters. [Poland to set up \\$1.75 billion fund to assist Ukrainian refugees](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>30</sup> National Bank of Poland. 2023. [National Bank of Poland’s statistics and financial reporting](#). Accessed 23 March 2023.

## Chapter 2. Vulnerabilities to Exploitation and Discrimination

### 2.1 Overview

Chapter 2 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 of specific groups of refugees and identifies some of the intersectional characteristics that can make people particularly vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination, and to experiencing challenges in accessing services. This might result in specific groups being marginalised and ultimately excluded from broader communities. These characteristics are summarised in Table 1. They were selected because of their impacts on refugees' experiences to date and because they are likely to affect refugees in the future, particularly if programmatic priorities change, financial support decreases, and/or disinformation efforts gain more traction.

**Table 1: Characteristics that can make refugees vulnerable in Poland**

Journey stage	Characteristics that can make refugees vulnerable
Legal status, welfare, and benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The elderly and/or people with low digital literacy struggle to access information on legal status, rights, and benefits which is primarily available online.</li> <li>• Non-Ukrainian citizens or TCNs coming from Ukraine follow different procedures to register for TP which are more complex and time-consuming than the process for Ukrainian nationals and can result in issues or delays accessing support and services.</li> <li>• Members of the Roma community are entitled to the same legal status and rights as other Ukrainian citizens but are more likely to face discrimination.</li> <li>• Separated children who cross the border without a legal guardian and unaccompanied children who cross the border without any guardian face additional challenges and vulnerabilities.</li> </ul>
Healthcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elderly people report the highest healthcare need yet often face significant barriers to access.</li> <li>• People with mental health conditions and/or experiencing trauma or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are unable to access support due to limited mental health service provision.</li> <li>• People with disabilities are required to obtain a Polish disability certificate which can be challenging and delays access to healthcare and benefits.</li> <li>• People with chronic health needs, such as HIV, report struggles to access medical care, particularly if they have limited or no Polish language skills.</li> <li>• Victims of sexual violence face challenges accessing sexual health support and abortion services in Poland.</li> </ul>

Journey stage	Characteristics that can make refugees vulnerable
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single mothers with children are more likely both to have lower incomes than dual-income households and to be discriminated against by landlords.</li> <li>• People on lower incomes struggle to access an oversaturated private rental market and are more vulnerable to exploitative landlords.</li> <li>• Elderly people with disabilities or mobility issues may require adapted housing which is limited and difficult to find.</li> <li>• Members of the Roma community are disproportionately likely to remain in collective accommodation centres and to face discrimination in accessing housing.</li> <li>• Residents in collective shelters are likely to be amongst the most vulnerable refugees and are affected by the recently amended Act on Assistance which imposes an obligation to cover part of the expenses related to their stay in collective centres.</li> </ul>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth aged 17 to 18 face obstacles finalising their Ukrainian high school graduation and/or entering Polish universities whilst contemplating a potential return to Ukraine.</li> <li>• Children of all ages attending online Ukrainian school face additional risks of isolation and failure to integrate.</li> <li>• Roma children who do not speak Ukrainian or Polish are underserved by education services.</li> </ul>
Employment and income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single parents, with a disproportionate burden on women, lack access to affordable or available childcare, making it challenging to enter employment.</li> <li>• Ukrainians, especially those who do not speak either Polish or English, are often employed in lower-skilled roles that do not match their professional background, qualifications, and ability.</li> <li>• People who were not economically active in Ukraine, particularly those who experienced family separation during displacement, may face additional challenges to finding work in a new country.</li> </ul>
Community, social, and political life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People with mental health issues, particularly trauma and PTSD, struggle to integrate or participate in community life.</li> <li>• People who are employed in long-hour jobs have limited time for integration and community activities.</li> <li>• LGBTQIA+ refugees face discrimination, particularly in areas designated as 'free from LGBT ideology' (<i>Strefy wolne od LGBT</i>).</li> <li>• Religiously observant people face challenges accessing services, as the Ukrainian Orthodox church is not officially recognised in Poland.</li> </ul>

## 2.2 Legal status, welfare, and benefits

There are two mechanisms under which TP can be granted for people displaced by the invasion of Ukraine. The first applies to Ukrainian citizens and their non-Ukrainian spouses. Under the Polish government's Act on Assistance to the Citizens of Ukraine<sup>31</sup> (which codified the European Union Temporary Protection Directive into Polish law), any Ukrainian citizens and their non-Ukrainian spouses who left Ukraine after 24 February 2022 are legally able to stay in Poland for up to 18 months. This may be extended via an application for a temporary residence permit for a one-off period of three years. The act also permitted the assignment of a *Powszechny Elektroniczny System Ewidencji Ludności* (PESEL—Universal Electronic System for Registration of the Population) number. Through this national identification number, Ukrainian citizens are eligible to access public

<sup>31</sup> European Commission. 2022. [Poland: Parliament adopts law on assistance to Ukrainian refugees](#).

services, welfare, and benefits on par with Polish citizens.<sup>32</sup> As of January 2023, over 1.5 million Ukrainians had received PESEL numbers.<sup>33</sup> The second mechanism applies to non-Ukrainian TCNs. Should they meet the requirements of the European Union Temporary Protection Directive in that they had permanent residency in Ukraine prior to the invasion or had refugee status in Ukraine and are unable to return to their country or region of origin in safe conditions, they are entitled to immediate TP.<sup>34</sup> TCNs need to apply to the head of the Office for Foreigners for certificates of TP. Non-Ukrainian TCN beneficiaries of TP are granted a slightly different set of rights and services, as regulated by the Act of 13 June 2003 on Granting Protection to Foreigners in comparison to those granted to Ukrainian citizens and their spouses.<sup>35</sup> For example, medical care will be provided by healthcare providers contracted by the Office for Foreigners, and accommodation and other assistance will be provided at centres for foreigners or in the form of financial benefits.<sup>36</sup>

The original TP status is valid for up to 18 months starting from 24 February 2022.<sup>37</sup> Refugees are required to register for a temporary residence permit (valid for three years) within this period, but no earlier than nine months after the date they enter Poland.<sup>38</sup> Groups identified as particularly vulnerable during the registration process may face additional challenges with this registration. The groups discussed below have been identified by the desk-based research and the research workshops as facing particular challenges at this stage of the refugee journey.

**Elderly people and/or those who are digitally illiterate:** Multiple sources are publicly available to provide information regarding legal status, welfare, and benefits rights for people fleeing from Ukraine to Poland. These include welcome organisations at the border, NGOs and INGOs, multilateral organisations,<sup>39</sup> and national<sup>40</sup> and local governments. Information is shared in Polish, Ukrainian, and English via channels including online, telephone (voice and apps), and written and video resources for accessibility.<sup>41</sup> However, the use of digital platforms as the primary means to share information may create challenges for individuals who are digitally illiterate or lack confidence, including the elderly—particularly if they are travelling alone. According to REACH’s multi-sectoral needs assessment, elderly people face additional barriers in adapting to the new situation and accessing services.<sup>42</sup> Statistics from the Open Data Portal recorded that, at the end of 2022, 7,482 Ukrainian men aged 60 or over and 31,757 Ukrainian women aged 61 or over resided in Poland.<sup>43</sup> They may require additional support or alternative non-digital communication channels to ensure they fully understand and access their legal status, rights, and benefits.

**Non-Ukrainian citizens and TCNs from Ukraine:** Poland uses separate forms of registration for Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian nationals fleeing Ukraine. While information sources are available to TCNs, such as those publicised by the IOM and the government of Poland,<sup>44</sup> differences in status and registration processes for non-

<sup>32</sup> Government of the 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.](#)

<sup>33</sup> ISB News, Zespół 300Gospodarki. 2023. [Wiemy, ilu uchodźców z Ukrainy dostało PESEL. Połowa kobiet pracuje.](#) Accessed 2 April 2023.

<sup>34</sup> European Union. 2022. [Council Implementing Decision \(EU\) 2022/382, 4 March 2022.](#)

<sup>35</sup> Act of 13 June 2003 on Granting Protection to Foreigners Within the Territory of the Republic of Poland ([USTAWA z dnia 13 czerwca 2003 r. o udzielaniu cudzoziemcom ochrony na terytorium Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej](#)).

<sup>36</sup> Government of the 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.](#)

<sup>37</sup> European Commission. 2022. [Poland: Parliament adopts law on assistance to Ukrainian refugees.](#)

<sup>38</sup> Government of the 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.](#)

<sup>39</sup> UNHCR. 2023. [Information for new arrivals from Ukraine.](#)

<sup>40</sup> Government of the Republic of Poland. 2023. [Ministry of the Interior and Administration, Information for refugees from Ukraine.](#)

<sup>41</sup> Government of the Republic of Poland. 2023. [Open Data Portal](#)

<sup>42</sup> UNHCR REACH. 2022. [Poland: Multi-sector needs assessment.](#)

<sup>43</sup> Government of the Republic of Poland. 2022. [Open Data Portal registered applications for the UKR status.](#)

<sup>44</sup> Government of the Republic of Poland. 2022. [Embassy Hotlines for third country nationals.](#)

Ukrainian citizens fleeing Ukraine create the possibility that some may be unclear on their legal status and rights. For example, TCNs from Ukraine must obtain a TP certificate from the Office of Foreigners within 15 days of arrival in Poland.<sup>45</sup> Participants in the research workshops shared examples of conflicting information sources confusing TCNs regarding their entitlements and causing them to need personalised, case-specific advice.<sup>46</sup> In addition, non-Ukrainians fleeing the invasion have reported discrimination. In July 2022, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants commented on ‘a double standard approach’ to Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian citizens arriving in Poland, adding that ‘those with specific vulnerabilities, including the ones with irregular migratory status face heightened difficulties in obtaining residence permits and proper shelter’.<sup>47</sup>

**Members of the Roma community:** It is difficult to estimate how many Roma from Ukraine have sought shelter in Poland. A project conducted by the Roma Association in Poland and the IOM estimated the number of Ukrainian Roma refugees at 15,000 to 30,000.<sup>48</sup> A report by the UNHCR found that the majority of Ukrainian Roma crossing the Polish border had the required documentation; where they did not, they were assisted in filling documentation gaps. However, there have been cases of discrimination at the border, such as border guards refusing to stamp passports,<sup>49</sup> leading to problems at reception centres (where there have been further reports of discrimination).<sup>50</sup> Historically, Roma have faced prejudice in Poland and Ukraine, and the UNHCR reported that very few dedicated resources are available to Roma refugees from Ukraine in Poland, whether offered by the central government, local governments, or NGOs. This lack of targeted support means that the specific issues which Roma populations face—many arising from prejudice or exclusion—are insufficiently addressed. In turn, this has led to challenges in accessing full legal status and entitlements including housing,<sup>51</sup> education, and employment.<sup>52</sup>

**Separated or unaccompanied children:** The invasion of Ukraine resulted in the separation of many families, with minors often left in the care of people other than immediate relatives. The International Centre for Migration Policy Development reports that many Ukrainian children who entered Poland in the first three months after the invasion 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 established for 23,000 Ukrainian refugee children by June 2022.<sup>53</sup> While the figures for unaccompanied children (those travelling without any caregiver) are less clear, this group is likely to face even greater vulnerabilities, including risks of trafficking or abuse. Unaccompanied children may also lack access to proper and appropriate identification, registration, documentation, and legal advice.<sup>54</sup> The government of Poland does have established procedures for unaccompanied children identified by the Border Guard, including immediate interventions or temporary foster care.

<sup>45</sup> European Union Agency for Asylum. 2022. [Poland](#).

<sup>46</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>47</sup> United Nations Office at Geneva. 2022. [Top rights expert questions double standard Ukraine’s war displaced](#).

<sup>48</sup> Roma Association in Poland. 2022. [The situation of the people of Roma origin](#).

<sup>49</sup> Mirga-Wójtowicz, Elżbieta, Talewicz, J., and Kolaczek, M. UNHCR. 2022. [Human rights, needs and discrimination – the situation of Roma refugees from Ukraine in Poland](#).

<sup>50</sup> Amnesty International. 2022. [Refugees from Ukraine in Poland](#); and Mirga-Wójtowicz, Elżbieta, and Fiałkowska, K. Boll Foundation. 2022. [Anti-gypsyism in the time of war](#).

<sup>51</sup> Mirga-Wójtowicz, Elżbieta, Talewicz, J., and Kolaczek, M. UNHCR. 2022. [Human rights, needs and discrimination – the situation of Roma refugees from Ukraine in Poland](#).

<sup>52</sup> Roma Association in Poland. 2022. [The situation of the people of Roma origin](#).

<sup>53</sup> The International Centre for Migration Policy Development. 2022. [Temporary protection in Poland – what solutions for vulnerable groups?](#)

<sup>54</sup> European Union. 2021. [Briefing – Vulnerability of unaccompanied or separated child migrants](#).

## 2.3 Healthcare

Ukrainian citizens who arrived in Poland after February 2022 are entitled to access publicly funded healthcare in the country on the same terms as Polish citizens. This includes access to general and emergency healthcare, prescriptions, infectious disease prevention measures, COVID-19 vaccinations for adults, and standard vaccinations for children. TCNs who fled Ukraine are also entitled to healthcare in Poland, through a different system and provided in designated medical facilities which signed agreements with the Office for Foreigners.<sup>55</sup> The groups discussed below have been identified by 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 healthcare requirements, with 46 percent of those over 60 surveyed by UNHCR reporting a healthcare need within the previous 30 days.<sup>56</sup> The ability to access needed healthcare can be limited by other factors; elderly refugees travelling alone, residents in collective shelter sites, and without competent Polish language skills are the most vulnerable.<sup>57</sup> In addition, more elderly people report mobility issues, further increasing the risks of failing to access healthcare.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, elderly individuals expressed increased anxiety and fear of falling ill due to uncertainties surrounding communication and the expenses associated with healthcare services.<sup>59</sup>

**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.<sup>60</sup> In November 2022 approximately 13 percent of Ukrainian refugees surveyed in Poland reported being internally displaced before coming to Poland,<sup>61</sup> and evidence from other conflicts indicates that those who have experienced multiple displacements are likely to have experienced more trauma. According to the UNHCR, mental health problems were reported in 14 percent of Ukrainian refugees, with those aged 60 and over the most affected (27 percent reported feeling so upset, anxious, or worried that it affected their functioning). While this study also found that 86 percent of people who needed professional support were able to receive it, the need for support was especially acute in those under age 18 (71 percent).<sup>62</sup> However, mental health services in Poland, especially child psychiatry, are already stretched,<sup>63</sup> and there are concerns about longer-term treatment and how to support the most vulnerable. 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, requiring specialised medical support.<sup>64</sup>

**People with disabilities:** Clear statistics on the number of Ukrainian refugees with disabilities living in Poland are not yet available, but the UNHCR reports that persons with disabilities normally constitute at least 15 percent of any displaced population and face a range of vulnerabilities including inadequate access to basic services and

<sup>55</sup> National Health Fund Poland. 2022. [Assistance for Ukrainian citizens guaranteed in a special act. What do healthcare providers need to know?](#). Accessed 15 March 2023.

<sup>56</sup> UNHCR REACH. 2022. [Poland: Multi-sector needs assessment](#)

<sup>57</sup> UNHCR REACH. 2022. [Poland: Multi-sector needs assessment](#)

<sup>58</sup> UNHCR REACH. 2022. [Poland: Multi-sector needs assessment](#)

<sup>59</sup> WHO, Główny Urząd Statystyczny. 2023. [Health of refugees from Ukraine in Poland in 2022](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>60</sup> ReliefWeb. 2022. [WHO promotes action on urgent mental health needs of Ukrainian refugees](#)

<sup>61</sup> UNHCR. 2022. [Refugees from Ukraine in Poland Regional Profiling Update November 2022](#)

<sup>62</sup> UNHCR REACH. 2022. [Poland: multi-sector needs assessment 2022 refugees from Ukraine](#)

<sup>63</sup> UNICEF 2021. [As many as 630,000 children in Poland require specialist psychological and psychiatric help](#)

<sup>64</sup> UNHCR. 2023. [Regional Refugee Response Plan January – December 2023](#)



information.<sup>65</sup> Disability certificates issued in Ukraine are not automatically recognised in Poland. Ukrainian refugees are eligible to apply for the Polish disability certificate, but this can be a slow process, exacerbated by the requirement to produce medical documents confirming the person's state of health or disability. This requirement is not waived for Ukrainian refugees<sup>66</sup> despite the fact that many people lost or were unable to bring documentation from Ukraine. Those who have relevant documentation are required to have it translated into Polish. Participants in the research workshops shared examples of individuals waiting for significant periods to secure a disability certificate.<sup>67</sup> Delays in obtaining the certificate can make people with disabilities more vulnerable. For example, disabled persons resident in collective centres are exempt from the amendment that requires contributions to accommodation costs, but proof of disability is required to confirm the exemption.<sup>68</sup> More widely, as per a WHO and Statistics Poland joint study, families of children with disabilities have considerable needs which are not met due to cost, lack of a disability certificate, transportation challenges, and oversubscribed services for adolescents.<sup>69</sup>

**People with chronic health needs:** Prior to the arrival of refugees from Ukraine, the Polish national healthcare system experienced delivery challenges including the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and a shortage of healthcare staff.<sup>70</sup> Participants in the research workshops reported that challenges around waiting times and being able to secure general practitioners' referrals to specialist services were experienced by both refugees and the host community.<sup>71</sup> Additional barriers for refugees, including high service costs, missing or non-Polish healthcare records, and language differences, were reported as delaying or preventing people with chronic health conditions from accessing essential healthcare assistance or medicines.<sup>72</sup> For example, studies report Ukraine's rate of HIV transmission as consistently higher than other European nations.<sup>73</sup> This has become a narrative used by malign information actors. While access to HIV treatment is free in Poland, and Ukrainian refugees have the same access to medication as Polish patients, prior medical documentation is required to access treatment. This can be a challenge for refugees who may have lost or left relevant documentation behind, delaying access. Other chronic health conditions—including cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, respiratory, musculoskeletal, and genitourinary diseases—were identified in a study by *The Lancet* as contributing to the disease burden and healthcare concerns of older refugees fleeing Ukraine.<sup>74</sup>

**Victims of sexual violence:** Women and children make up a disproportionate number of those displaced by the invasion of Ukraine, and they face a greater risk of violence and exploitation. The UNHCR has identified reports of gender-based violence including sexual violence toward women and girls in Ukraine. It urged host countries to strengthen their response services and specialised care such as emergency contraception, HIV prophylaxis, and abortion.<sup>75</sup> Within the EU, Poland is one of only two states in which performing or aiding abortion is criminalised except in two exceptional circumstances.<sup>76</sup> However, in practice—even in exceptional circumstances—abortions are rarely performed legally. A lack of long-term state investment in these services has placed the burden of

<sup>65</sup> UNHCR. 2022. [Ensuring the protection of persons with disabilities fleeing from Ukraine](#)

<sup>66</sup> The Commissioner for Human Rights, Poland. 2022. [Problems of refugees from Ukraine with obtaining disability certificates](#)

<sup>67</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>68</sup> Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration. 2023. [Amendment to the Act on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine signed by the President, 25 January 2023](#)

<sup>69</sup> WHO. 2022. [Health of refugees from Ukraine in Poland 2022: survey findings](#)

<sup>70</sup> Kardas, Przemysław, Babicki, M., Krawczyk, J., and Mastalerz-Migas, A. *The Lancet Regional Health Europe*. 2022. [War in Ukraine and the challenges it brings to the Polish healthcare system](#)

<sup>71</sup> Warsaw workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>72</sup> UNHCR REACH. 2022. [Poland: Multi-sector needs assessment](#)

<sup>73</sup> WHO. 2021. [HIV/AIDS surveillance in Europe](#)

<sup>74</sup> Piotrowicz, Karolina, et al. *The Lancet*. 2022. [Disease burden in older Ukrainian refugees of war: a synthetic reanalysis of public records data](#)

<sup>75</sup> UNHCR. 2022. [Regional Ukraine Refugee Response: Gender-Based Violence Sub-Working Group](#)

<sup>76</sup> Centre for Reproductive Rights. 2020. [European abortion laws, a comparative overview](#)

providing them on civil society. Participants in the research workshops added that this can be shocking to women arriving from Ukraine, where abortion is more accessible as a healthcare right, leaving women who have experienced sexual violence at risk.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, prescriptions in Poland are required for emergency contraception, adding another barrier. Reportedly, many refugees order medicines in Ukraine and return there to access sexual and reproductive services.<sup>78</sup>

## 2.4 Housing

According to the UNHCR, access to safe and dignified accommodation remains one of the most urgent needs for Ukrainian refugees in Poland.<sup>79</sup> The rapid arrival of refugees occurred in the context of significant housing challenges including high demand, insufficient supply, and rising rental and mortgage costs.<sup>80</sup> Accommodation for Ukrainian refugees includes emergency accommodation, collective sites, hosted accommodation, and the private rental sector. The government—alongside multilateral organisations and NGOs—established reception centres across the country to provide immediate emergency accommodation and access to basic services. In addition, collective sites across Poland host Ukrainian refugees on a longer-term basis. Some sites are run by local NGOs or religious organisations, but the majority were established by central and local government bodies. Until March 2023, accommodation in these sites was free. A payment was introduced, with exemptions for the most vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities.<sup>81</sup> Starting from 1 March 2023, Ukrainian refugees staying in collective accommodation for more than 120 days are required to contribute 50 percent of their costs—not more than PLN 40 (approximately \$9 USD or £7), and Ukrainian refugees staying in collective accommodation for over 180 days are required to contribute 75 percent—not more than PLN 40 (approximately \$14 USD or £11).<sup>82</sup>

Outside the emergency accommodation and collective sites, most Ukrainians in Poland live in either hosted (20 percent) or private rented accommodation (44 percent).<sup>83</sup> The length of the conflict, rising costs, and a saturated housing market combine to put pressure on all these options. Uncertainty among Ukrainians regarding their length of stay in Poland creates an additional challenge for securing longer-term accommodation, as they may be reluctant to sign longer leases. This hesitance can lead to landlords' discriminating against Ukrainian tenants. The groups discussed below have been identified by the desk-based research and the research workshops as facing particular challenges at this stage of the refugee journey.

**Single mothers with children:** Women and children make up the largest demographic group among Ukrainian refugees in Poland, accounting for 86 percent of all Ukrainians registered for TP.<sup>84</sup> According to protection profiling in Poland, since the invasion of February 2022, the majority of respondents (80 percent) have been separated from immediate family members.<sup>85</sup> Mothers with children face a number of barriers to accessing housing. First, widespread family separation and a lack of social networks for them in Poland makes childcare a challenge, limiting single mothers' ability to find employment and thus afford private rental accommodation. Even

<sup>77</sup> Warsaw workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>78</sup> UNHCR. 2023. [FEDERA Presentation health coordination meeting 3 February 2023](#)

<sup>79</sup> UNHCR. 2023. [Regional Refugee Response Plan January – December 2023](#)

<sup>80</sup> Telewizja Polska. 2019. [Poland lacks over 2 million flats: report](#)

<sup>81</sup> 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](#)

<sup>82</sup> 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](#)

<sup>83</sup> UNHCR. 2023. [Regional Refugee Response Plan January – December 2023](#)

<sup>84</sup> UNHCR. 2022. [Ukraine Refugee Situation – Operational Portal Poland](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>85</sup> UNHCR. 2022. [Refugees from Ukraine in Poland Regional Profiling Update October 2022](#)



when single mothers can work, single-salary households can face challenges in securing private rental accommodation, particularly in the larger, more expensive cities. This makes them more dependent on alternative options, including collective sites. Second, even when mothers with children can afford private rental accommodation, there can be discrimination or prejudice against renting to single income earners with children.<sup>86</sup> This means mothers with children can find it hard to secure a private rental agreement (or are asked to provide additional guarantees through a public notary). Third, as a result of these barriers, Ukrainian families—including single mother-and-children groups—are often forced to rent accommodation that is smaller or of lower quality than what they need. Additionally, as reported in the multi-sectoral needs assessment findings, a significant proportion of refugees reside in accommodation without written contracts, which further increases their vulnerability.<sup>87</sup>

**People on lower incomes:** Ukrainian refugees in Poland face socio-economic vulnerabilities, with 55 percent of respondents to a multi-sectoral needs assessment survey conducted by UNHCR REACH reporting relying on social benefits to meet their basic needs.<sup>88</sup> Nonetheless 46 percent of Ukrainian refugees interviewed between April and September 2022 for a multi-sectoral needs assessment stated that they still had difficulty getting enough money to meet their basic needs in the past 30 days.<sup>89</sup> This challenge is exacerbated by the macroeconomic situation in Poland, with inflation reaching record highs in 2022 and consumer prices in December 2022 16.6 percent higher than in December 2021.<sup>90</sup> The lower an individual's or household's income, the greater the percentage spent on rent, which in a high-cost and inflationary market leaves people on low incomes even more vulnerable to sudden price rises. This also makes them vulnerable to exploitative landlords who can use complex short rental agreements (including for tenants uncertain of their intended length of stay) to demand high deposits and punitive fees for early departure. NGOs have reported organising courses on negotiating and understanding rental contracts to help address this risk.<sup>91</sup>

**Elderly people with disability or mobility issues:** Poland does not automatically recognise Ukrainian disability certificates,<sup>92</sup> and the process of seeking a Polish certificate can be time-consuming and complex. Elderly refugees are already more likely to face barriers to accessing services due to language barriers, no employment or low income, and difficulties adapting to a new situation. Elderly people with disability or mobility issues face additional challenges in accessing appropriate housing, including adapted and affordable housing outside of collective sites.

**Members of the Roma community:** The UNHCR found that, in the initial months after the invasion of Ukraine, fewer Roma than non-Roma refugees were offered hosted accommodation.<sup>93</sup> As a result, Ukrainian Roma refugees remain disproportionately represented in collective sites and are less likely to access other forms of accommodation. There have also reports of anti-Roma discrimination in collective sites, including hostile behaviour and verbal attacks from non-Roma staff.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>87</sup> UNHCR REACH. 2022. [Multi-sector needs assessment shelter Poland](#)

<sup>88</sup> UNHCR, REACH. 2023. [Poland: Multi-sectoral Needs Assessment 2022](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>89</sup> UNHCR REACH. 2022. [Multi-sector needs assessment protection and cash Poland](#)

<sup>90</sup> Statistics Poland. 2022. [Consumer price indices in December 2022](#)

<sup>91</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>92</sup> As discussed above, in chapter 3.3.

<sup>93</sup> Mirga-Wójtowicz, Elżbieta, Talewicz, J., and Kolaczek, M. UNHCR. 2022. [Human rights, needs and discrimination – the situation of Roma refugees from Ukraine in Poland](#)

<sup>94</sup> Mirga Mirga-Wójtowicz, Elżbieta, Talewicz, J., and Kolaczek Kolaczek, M. UNHCR. 2022. [Human rights, needs and discrimination – the situation of Roma refugees from Ukraine in Poland](#)

**Residents in collective shelters:** As of 1 March 2023, an amendment to the Act on Assistance requires Ukrainian refugees who have been resident in Poland for over 120 days and stay in collective shelters to cover 50 percent of their accommodation costs, rising to 75 percent after 180 days in Poland.<sup>95</sup> While this requirement excludes certain vulnerable groups who are unable to work due to disability, age, pregnancy, or the need to care for minor children, others might be even more vulnerable.<sup>96</sup> There is evidence that residents in collective shelters may already be among the more vulnerable groups, reporting lower incomes and savings,<sup>97</sup> increased financial pressure,<sup>98</sup> and higher rates of health conditions than Ukrainians in private or hosted accommodation.<sup>99</sup> They are also more likely to experience multiple displacements, increasing the risk of mental health issues. Within collective centres, certain groups may be particularly vulnerable, including women (at risk of sexual exploitation), Roma individuals (facing discrimination and prejudice in shared sites),<sup>100</sup> the elderly, and solo refugees (experiencing greater isolation and barriers to accessing services).

## 2.5 Education

All school-age children residing in Poland must be enrolled in education. School-age children fleeing Ukraine have the right to continue their education in a Polish school or an online Ukrainian school. Parents or guardians must apply for enrolment in a Polish school. Before the arrival of refugees from Ukraine, kindergartens and schools, especially in large cities, experienced serious staff shortages, and pressure on places has become more severe since February 2022.<sup>101</sup> Where no places are available at a given school, the local authority is obliged to refer the student to another school in the same area. The 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. The ministry has also recommended school-led initiatives such as hosting Polish language classes and hiring Ukrainian-speaking teaching assistants.<sup>102</sup> Challenges remain in integrating Ukrainian students into Polish schools, around issues such as language proficiency, responding to the impacts of displacement and trauma, and the potential for isolation or bullying.<sup>103</sup> The Ministry of Education has also developed informational leaflets for Ukrainians on how to apply or transfer to the Polish university system.<sup>104</sup> The groups discussed below have been identified by the desk-based research and the research workshops as facing particular challenges at this stage of the refugee journey.

**Children aged 17 to 18:** Students close to or at the point of finishing high school can fall between the Ukrainian and Polish education systems. To complete the Ukrainian high school diploma, students need to sit in-person exams in Ukraine which is in many cases impossible. This is a real challenge for students who continued online Ukrainian education on arrival in Poland. Older teenagers are also at greater risk of dropping out of full-time education, may find it harder to learn Polish, and report higher incidences of mental health issues.<sup>105</sup> One

<sup>95</sup> Relief Web. 2023. [Poland: Amendments to Ukrainian refugee hosting laws showcase the need for continued humanitarian support](#)

<sup>96</sup> Relief Web. 2023. [Poland: Amendments to Ukrainian refugee hosting laws showcase the need for continued humanitarian support](#)

<sup>97</sup> IOM. 2022. [Ukraine Response 2022 - Poland: Needs Assessment Analysis Dashboard 17 June-26 September](#)

<sup>98</sup> Norwegian Refugee Council. 2023. [One year on: seven out of ten refugees from Ukraine risk falling into poverty in neighbouring countries](#)

<sup>99</sup> UNHCR REACH. 2022. [Multi-sector needs assessment shelter Poland](#)

<sup>100</sup> Mirga-Wójtowicz, Elżbieta, Talewicz, J., and J. Kolaczek, M. UNHCR. 2022. [Human rights, needs and discrimination – the situation of Roma refugees from Ukraine in Poland](#)

<sup>101</sup> 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](#)

<sup>102</sup> 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](#)

<sup>103</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>104</sup> UNESCO. 2022. [Poland's education responses to the influx of Ukrainian students](#)

<sup>105</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

participant in the workshops shared examples of young people approaching the age of 18 who expressed 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.<sup>106</sup> Young people can also experience conflicting expectations in the transition to adulthood, when others can treat them differently—as either children or as adults.

**Children attending online Ukrainian school:** As of March 2023, UNHCR reported that 187,405 Ukrainian children in Poland were enrolled in school, with 122,410 of these enrolled in primary schools.<sup>107</sup> Although all children of school age in Poland are obliged to attend school, Ukrainian students are entitled to continue their education through online Ukrainian schools rather than joining a Polish school. Those attending online-only schools have fewer opportunities for integration, language learning, and social bonding. In addition, it is difficult to monitor how many children not enrolled in Polish schools are in fact attending online Ukrainian schools; the UNHCR estimated that up to 16 percent of Ukrainian children in Poland may not attend school at all.<sup>108</sup> Young people who do not attend either in-person or online school are especially vulnerable to exploitation and engaging in risky behaviours (such as criminality and addiction).<sup>109</sup> This can affect community cohesion by upsetting local communities and contributing to negative stereotyping of Ukrainian refugees.

**Roma children:** Ukraine's Roma population is diverse, with distinct cultures and languages across communities.<sup>110</sup> Some Roma children, particularly those from western and southern Ukraine, are more likely to speak Romani than Ukrainian at home.<sup>111</sup> Ukrainian students who do not speak good Polish experience challenges in accessing education in Poland, particularly at important milestone moments such as entering high school or sitting exams. While there are government initiatives to try to remedy this, 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 good Ukrainian. Given that some Roma children speak little Ukrainian or Polish, they risk additional exclusion.

## 2.6 Employment and income

Under the EU Temporary Protection Directive<sup>112</sup> and the Polish Act on Assistance,<sup>113</sup> Ukrainian refugees are granted the right to work upon arrival on the same terms as Polish citizens. The government of Poland developed guidance and support functions for Ukrainian refugees seeking employment. These include Ukrainian language resources and helplines available via the public employment services website<sup>114</sup> and Ukrainian language access to the Central Database of Job Offers.<sup>115</sup> Ukrainian refugees can also register as unemployed, thereby accessing the public welfare assistance available to Polish citizens. This includes vocational training, co-financing for self-employment, and childcare assistance. The groups discussed below have been identified by the desk-based research and the research workshops as facing particular challenges at this stage of the refugee journey.

<sup>106</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>107</sup> UNHCR. 2022. [Ukraine Refugee Situation - Operational Data Portal](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>108</sup> UNHCR, REACH. 2023. [Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment Poland](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>109</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>110</sup> Minority Rights Group International. 2020. [Ukraine – Roma](#). Accessed 26 March 2023.

<sup>111</sup> United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. 2010. [Written comments of the European Roma Rights Centre and the International Charitable Organisation Roma Women Fund “Chiricli”](#)

<sup>112</sup> European Union. 2022. [Council Implementing Decision \(EU\) 2022/382, 4 March 2022](#)

<sup>113</sup> European Commission. 2022. [Poland: parliament adopts law on assistance to Ukrainian refugees](#)

<sup>114</sup> Government of the Republic of Poland. 2022. [ePraca portal](#)

<sup>115</sup> [Central Database of Job Offers](#). Accessed 15 March 2023.

**Mothers with children:** Approximately two-thirds of Ukrainian adults—the majority of them mothers—arrived in Poland with children.<sup>116</sup> Women with children face challenges combining employment and child care, with child care issues noted as the main reason for unemployment in the UNHCR multi-sectoral needs assessment.<sup>117</sup> High demand for nursery and kindergarten places in Poland was an issue before the arrival of Ukrainian refugees.<sup>118</sup> Ukrainians arriving with few or no social-communal networks struggle to access either informal or formal child care, and this is a barrier to work.<sup>119</sup> Conversely, one key informant shared that local authority representatives understand the reason for the lack of Ukrainian children’s attendance of nurseries and kindergartens is distrust of state child care facilities and a custom of sending children to school at a later age. The informant recommended awareness-raising activities about the quality and reliability of pre-school education in Poland. Due to limited access to childcare, which functionally limits the number of practical employment opportunities, single-parent households are also more vulnerable to poverty. Despite access to humanitarian assistance, 7 percent of respondents to an IOM study reported that adults in their households had at some point restricted consumption of food so their children could eat.<sup>120</sup> Workshop participants also noted that limited flexible working options exacerbate the challenges faced by Ukrainians in providing for their families, and leave women with children more vulnerable to informal work, with associated risks of low or underpayment, poor benefits, and fewer labour rights.<sup>121</sup>

**People in low-skilled jobs:** According to the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Ukrainian refugees have taken up employment more quickly than other refugee groups in Europe, estimating that 25 percent to 40 percent of Ukrainian refugees in Poland are in employment.<sup>122</sup> However, initial evidence indicates that much of this employment is concentrated in low-skilled sectors and many Ukrainian refugees work in jobs at a lower level than their professional background and experience.<sup>123</sup> Workshop participants commented that working in jobs perceived to be well below their skill level and professional background can create additional anxiety and mental strain for Ukrainian refugees.<sup>124</sup> Participants also shared examples of individuals such as healthcare professionals struggling to have their professional qualifications recognised in Poland.<sup>125</sup> The UNHCR January 2023 Regional Response Plan reported that obstacles to accessing decent work heightens vulnerabilities within the Ukrainian refugee community in Poland.<sup>126</sup> A lack of language skills contributes significantly to Ukrainian refugees working in jobs that are not a match for their skills, or their failure to enter the labour market at all.<sup>127</sup> In addition, time and cost barriers to the recognition of Ukrainian qualifications in Poland can prevent more Ukrainian refugees from finding employment in their chosen or skilled profession.

**People who were not economically active before arrival in Poland:** A survey by the Multiculturalism and Migration Observatory found that approximately 68 percent of adult refugees were economically active before departure from Ukraine.<sup>128</sup> For those who were not (such as carers), seeking employment in a new country can be particularly daunting. Given the widespread family separation during displacement, people who were

<sup>116</sup> Deloitte. 2022. [Uchodźcy z Ukrainy w Polsce](#)

<sup>117</sup> UNHCR REACH. 2023. [Poland: Multi-sectoral Needs Assessment 2022](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>118</sup> 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](#)

<sup>119</sup> Deloitte. 2022. [Refugees from Ukraine in Poland: challenges and potential for integration](#)

<sup>120</sup> IOM. 2022. [Ukraine Response 2022 – Poland Needs Assessment](#)

<sup>121</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>122</sup> OECD. 2023. [What we know about the skills and early labour market outcomes of refugees from Ukraine](#)

<sup>123</sup> OECD. 2023. [What we know about the skills and early labour market outcomes of refugees from Ukraine](#)

<sup>124</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>125</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>126</sup> UNHCR. 2023. [Regional Refugee Response Plan January – December 2023](#)

<sup>127</sup> OECD. 2023. [What we know about the skills and early labour market outcomes of refugees from Ukraine](#)

<sup>128</sup> Pędziwiatr, Konrad, Brzozowski, J., and Nahorniuk, O. 2022. [Multiculturalism and Migration Observatory. Refugees from Ukraine in Kraków](#)

previously economically inactive may now be the sole or primary income earners in a foreign country and unknown labour market.

## 2.7 Community, social, and political life

Despite the presence of a significant number of migrants (and now refugees), the government of Poland has not yet published an integration strategy. The government's response to Ukrainian refugees to date has focused largely on direct humanitarian assistance. However, more recent discussions between the government and UN agencies have focused on wider integration issues.<sup>129</sup> The groups discussed below have been identified by the desk-based research and the research workshops as facing particular challenges at this stage of the refugee journey.

**People with mental health issues, particularly trauma and PTSD:** Given the impact of trauma, many Ukrainian refugees may struggle to participate in social and community life, not only immediately after leaving Ukraine but also in the longer term as the effects of trauma may not be apparent. The potential impacts of trauma on individuals' lives can become especially acute if they do not receive mental health support. One participant in the research workshops shared an example of struggling in their 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’.<sup>130</sup>

In addition, with up to 80 percent of Ukrainian refugees surveyed by UNHCR REACH reporting separation during their refugee journey,<sup>131</sup> familial, social, and communal networks are severely disrupted, making integration into a new society even more challenging.

**People working long hours:** Ukrainian refugees in employment are likely to work in low-skilled sectors, often working irregular or long hours; this makes integration into community life challenging. The challenge can be exacerbated by other barriers such as lack of language skills or childcare or other caring responsibilities. Participants in the workshops added that the loss of peer groups, combined with 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 attend Polish language courses regularly.<sup>132</sup>

**LGBTQIA+ refugees:** LGBTQIA+ rights have become an increasingly politicised issue in recent years. Anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric is used for political purposes<sup>133</sup> and, since January 2020, more than 100 Polish municipalities

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<sup>129</sup> UNHCR. 2023. [Regional Refugee Response Plan January – December 2023](#)

<sup>130</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>131</sup> UNHCR REACH. 2022. [Refugees from Ukraine in Poland: Profiling Update, September 2022](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>132</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>133</sup> Reid, Graeme. Human Rights Watch. 2021. [Poland breaches EU obligations over LGBT and women's rights](#).

have declared themselves ‘free from LGBT ideology’.<sup>134</sup> This creates an unwelcoming environment for LGBTQIA+ refugees, particularly outside of major cities. And major cities such as Warsaw, which have a reputation for greater acceptance, are also those with the most housing pressure.<sup>135</sup> Some activists provide resources such as safe housing and financial aid for medications to LGBTQIA+ refugees, but they face a lack of assistance from the government and rely on grants from international organisations.<sup>136</sup>

**Religiously observant people:** According to the Institute of Catholic Church Statistics, 98 percent of Catholic and Greek Catholic parishes in Poland reported that they had provided assistance to Ukrainian refugees in Poland, including funds, donations, accommodation, child care, food, transport, and integration with a total value of approximately €45 million.<sup>137</sup> However, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is not officially recognised in Poland, meaning Ukrainians must attend services of denominations such as Russian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, or Greek Catholic. Participants in the workshops stated that the inability to attend their own churches was a barrier to community life for many Ukrainian refugees.<sup>138</sup>

**Members of the Roma community:** In its monitoring of 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.<sup>139</sup> Ukrainian Roma face multiple types of discrimination—for being Ukrainian, for being Roma, for being refugees—and risk poorer integration outcomes as a result. The UNHCR reported that discrimination against Roma means that Ukrainian Roma refugees face problems with service access and support that non-Roma refugees are less likely to encounter.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Ash, Lucy. BBC News. 2020. [Inside Poland's LGBT-free zones](#). 21 September 2020.

<sup>135</sup> Su, Yvonne, Valiquette, T., Greatrick, A., and Robinson, C. The New Humanitarian. 2022. [How LGBTQI+ to LGBTQI+ support is helping Ukrainian refugees find safety in the EU](#).

<sup>136</sup> Su, Yvonne, Valiquette, T., Greatrick, A., and Robinson, C. The New Humanitarian. 2022. [How LGBTQI+ to LGBTQI+ support is helping Ukrainian refugees find safety in the EU](#).

<sup>137</sup> Luiza Organek, ks. Wojciech Sadłoń SAC. European Commission. 2022. [Assistance to refugees from Ukraine by Catholic parishes and religious orders in Poland](#). 14 April 2022.

<sup>138</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>139</sup> Amnesty International. 2022. [Poland: “We came here, they wouldn’t let us in.” Roma from Ukraine treated as unwanted refugees](#)

<sup>140</sup> Mirga-Wójtowicz, Elżbieta, Talewicz, J., and J. Kolaczek, M. UNHCR. 2022. [Human rights, needs and discrimination – the situation of Roma refugees from Ukraine in Poland](#)

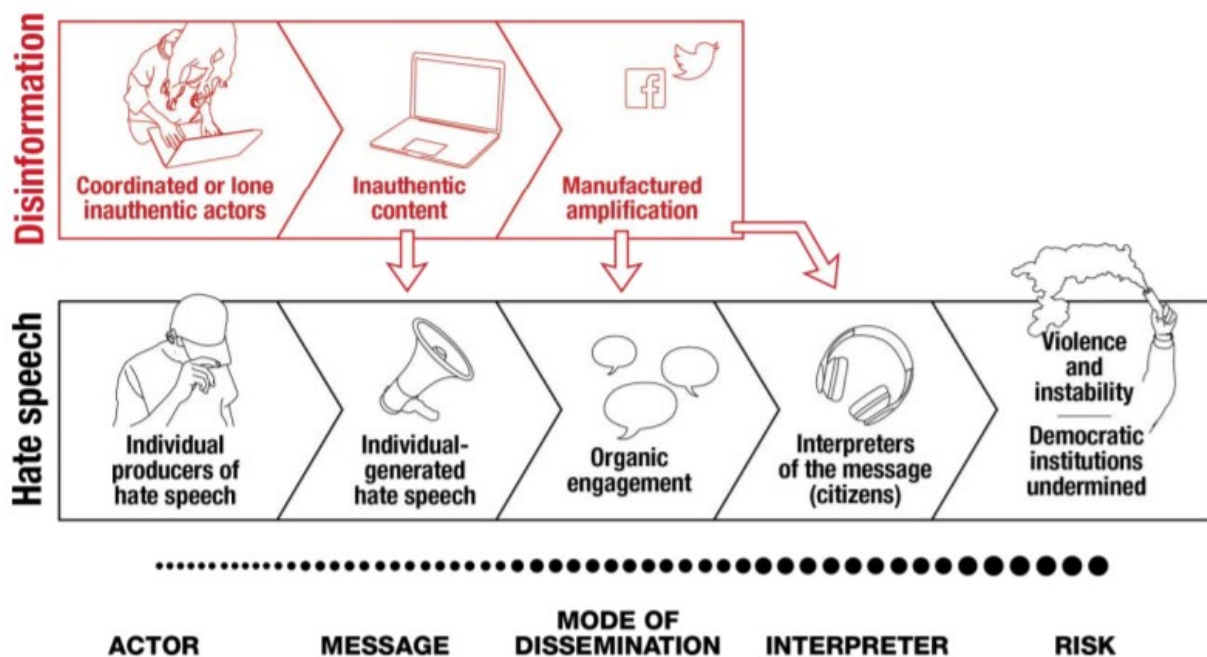


# Chapter 3. Misleading or Incendiary Discourses About Ukrainian Refugees

## 3.1 Overview

Chapter 3 discusses key misleading or incendiary discourses about refugees in Poland. The analysis is based on the IFES Chain of Harm framework,<sup>141</sup> 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 allows 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 allows 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 Poland.

### Actors spreading misleading or abusive messages

At the beginning of the 2022 escalation of the war, public discourse in Poland regarding the influx of Ukrainian refugees was positive, but anti-Ukrainian narratives soon began to appear online.<sup>142</sup> Far right, ultranationalist,

<sup>141</sup> IFES. 2019. *Disinformation Campaigns and Hate Speech: Exploring the Relationship and Programming Interventions*. Accessed 31 March 2023.

<sup>142</sup> Tymińska, Ada. Helsińska Fundacja Praw Człowieka 2022. *Granice nienawiści. Mowa nienawiści w kontekście kryzysów humanitarnych na granicy polskiej (2021/2022)*, p. 30.

and extremist groups and networks, some linked to Russian actors, have been the most vocal in spreading misinformation and incendiary narratives regarding refugees.<sup>143</sup> Russian propaganda actors also promote these narratives in Poland, for example through fake social media accounts and profiles.<sup>144</sup>

The UK Government Communications Service identified a variety of reasons why actors could spread misleading or incendiary content.<sup>145</sup> The motivations described below are examples.

- **Genuine belief in the messages**, which might resonate with strongly held personal attitudes. In some instances, actors may recognise that the messages are false or misleading but believe the sentiment is illustrative of ‘the kind of thing that goes on’—perhaps referring to prior negative conceptions or stereotypes about Ukrainians.
- **Grievances**: As inflation rises, for example, some people’s standards of living deteriorate. Others might have lost their jobs, although unemployment on the whole has not risen in the past year. Ukrainian refugees might be easy scapegoats for such problems.
- **Lack of consequences for promoting misleading messages**: Actors may take advantage of the anonymity of online spaces to gain respect within certain online communities.
- **Personal or institutional gain** achieved by discrediting certain individuals (e.g., politicians) or organisations (e.g., government institutions, businesses, NGOs, multilateral organisations, etc.). This may also be a way to **mobilise voters** in response to an imagined threat and build support in response to anti-refugee rhetoric.
- **Polarisation**, aiming to crowd out differing opinions. 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’.<sup>146</sup>
- **Financial gain**, either through increased traffic to websites or by selling products. Discourses such as those that Ukrainians are driving up the costs (for rents in particular) might also be propagated by a broader group of actors who would benefit, such as landlords who raise rents unnecessarily.<sup>147</sup>
- **Geopolitical gain**, where hostile actors aim to destabilise the finances and security of other countries. This particularly links to Russian state propaganda activities in Poland regarding Ukrainian refugees.<sup>148</sup> 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.<sup>149</sup>

## Types of messages and approaches

Table 2 summarises the discourses about refugees that were identified in the workshops and through research from third parties, triangulated using CrowdTangle. The five discourses that are likely to have the highest potential to affect community cohesion in the medium term, considering the prevalence of the narratives and the likelihood

<sup>143</sup> International Republican Institute. 2023. [Hostile Narrative Brief War In Ukraine](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

<sup>144</sup> International Republican Institute. 2023. [Hostile Narrative Brief War In Ukraine](#). Accessed 29 March 2023; Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights. 2023. [Raport „Granice nienawiści”](#). Accessed 31 March 2023.

<sup>145</sup> Government Communication Service. 2021. [Resist 2: Counter-disinformation toolkit](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>146</sup> International Republican Institute. 2023. [Hostile Narrative Brief War In Ukraine](#). Accessed 29 March 2023; Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights. 2023. [Raport „Granice nienawiści”](#), p. 90. Accessed 31 March 2023.

<sup>147</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>148</sup> Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights. 2023. [Raport „Granice nienawiści”. anice nienawiści”](#). Accessed 31 March 2023.

<sup>149</sup> Tymińska, Ada. Helsińska Fundacja Praw Człowieka.2022. [Granice nienawiści. Mowa nienawiści w kontekście kryzysów humanitarnych na granicy polskiej \(2021/2022\)](#)



of their potential impact on community cohesion, are boldfaced. They are analysed in more detail in the following analysis.

**Table 2: Misleading or incendiary discourses about refugees in Poland**

Journey stage	Misleading or Incendiary Discourses about Ukrainian Refugees
Legal status, welfare, and benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>They are economic migrants who could plan to stay in the host countries permanently.</b></li> <li>• Refugees from western Ukraine or less affected regions are not genuine refugees; the war hasn't really affected them; they don't deserve support.</li> <li>• They abuse the benefits system (e.g., cross the border just to get the money).</li> <li>• There is corruption within support systems for Ukrainian refugees.</li> </ul>
Healthcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ukrainians create a burden on the healthcare system, taking locals' places.</b></li> <li>• They are a health or disease risk.</li> <li>• They misuse services (unnecessary ambulance calls, emergency room visits, doctors' visits).</li> </ul>
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refugees have more or unfair access to housing.</li> <li>• Ukrainians create a burden on the housing system and are taking locals' places,</li> </ul>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ukrainians create a burden on the education system.</li> </ul>
Employment and income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Ukrainians are rich, drive around in fancy cars, and spend their time in malls and cafés while locals work; they're in the host country on holiday; they don't need assistance.</li> <li>• <b>Economic challenges and the energy crisis are fuelled by hosting refugees.</b></li> <li>• Refugees are supported more financially and get better benefits than the local population.</li> <li>• Ukrainians are supported more than other refugees.</li> <li>• They don't need help as the language and culture in Poland and Ukraine are similar.</li> </ul>
Community, social, and political life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Refugees are ungrateful; have high expectations and demands for support and shelter; and abuse hospitality—they leave messy apartments and are disrespectful; refugees are selective about the types of support they receive (e.g., they don't want to live in small cities or only want certain types of products).</b></li> <li>• They should be in Ukraine defending their country, not here.</li> <li>• Women come to look for husbands and citizenship.</li> <li>• They are not really traumatised; they go to cafés and live a nice, normal life.</li> <li>• They portray local citizens as not welcoming Ukrainian refugees and refugees who not receive help on arrival or do not support Ukraine any more.</li> <li>• <b>They threaten a country's national identity, culture, and social fabric ('Ukrainisation of Poland').</b></li> <li>• Historic tensions or figures (e.g., the Volynia massacre).</li> <li>• Ukrainian refugees in country create diplomatic tensions between Poland and the EU or other EU countries, as the EU provides insufficient support.</li> <li>• Poland is trying to regain some of Ukraine's territory (e.g., historic Polish claims on Lviv).</li> </ul>

## Modes of dissemination

Discourses are spread through:

- Online (social media, websites, email, and messaging apps):** The majority of discussions about refugees to date have been positive. However, a multitude of right-leaning groups, political parties, and extremist groups operating on social media (including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) share misleading and incendiary messages about refugees.<sup>150</sup> Anonymous social media accounts and fake accounts created by the Russian propaganda machine (trolls) are used to spread such discourses, as are websites that share ‘fake news’.<sup>151</sup> IRI’s research notes that the two domains that spread disinformation in relation to refugees are the Polish version of Sputnik (the Russian state-owned news agency and radio broadcast service) and, with a much broader reach, dorzeczy.pl, the website of the conservative-liberal weekly publication.<sup>152</sup> 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.<sup>153</sup> Email is also used for anti-refugee messaging. For example, April 2022 saw a massive 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 included threatening e-mails sent to Polish politicians and email spam to the Polish media, in addition to mass postings on Twitter.<sup>154</sup>
- Traditional media:** Some public broadcasters have an anti-EU slant and, since 2015, have aired stories regarding asylum seekers and migrants that typically present them negatively.<sup>155</sup> These narratives are not specifically anti-Ukrainian or extremist, but the anti-migrant slant may impact attitudes toward all foreigners in Poland, including Ukrainians.<sup>156</sup>
- Events and public announcements:** Politicians, particularly from right-wing conservative parties, have made public statements that align with some of these discourses on the news and in public discussions.
- Word of mouth:** Some discourses spread through ordinary conversations between individuals, including narratives that first came across online, and particularly when discourses relate to increasing financial pressures or other ways in which refugees may impact people’s quality of life.<sup>157</sup>

## Host community reactions (interpreters)

Right-wing anti-immigrant nationalist sentiments were expressed in some segments of Polish society prior to the Russian invasion,<sup>158</sup> and individuals holding such views are more likely to share anti-Ukrainian refugee rhetoric—

<sup>150</sup> European Digital Media Observatory. 2022. [European Digital Media Observatory. 2022. ‘Ukrainian refugees and disinformation: situation in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania’](#). Accessed 31 March 2023; International Republican Institute. 2023. [Hostile Narrative Brief War In Ukraine](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

<sup>151</sup> European Digital Media Observatory. 2022. [European Digital Media Observatory. 2022. ‘Ukrainian refugees and disinformation: situation in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania’](#). Accessed 31 March 2023.

<sup>152</sup> International Republican Institute. 2023. [Hostile Narrative Brief War In Ukraine](#), p. 91. Accessed 29 March 2023.

<sup>153</sup> Tymińska, Ada. Helsińska Fundacja Praw Człowieka. 2022. [Granice nienawiści. Mowa nienawiści w kontekście kryzysów humanitarnych na granicy polskiej \(2021/2022\)](#), p. 46.

<sup>154</sup> EUvsDisInfo. 2022. [The Bucha Massacre: How To Deflect Attention In Poland](#). Accessed 1 April 2023.

<sup>155</sup> Mapping Media Freedom. 2019. [Three Critical Reports Conclude Poland’s Public Broadcaster is Biased](#)

<sup>156</sup> Tymińska, Ada. Helsińska Fundacja Praw Człowieka. 2022. [Granice nienawiści. Mowa nienawiści w kontekście kryzysów humanitarnych na granicy polskiej \(2021/2022\)](#).

<sup>157</sup> Sadura, Przemysław, and Sierakowski, S. 2022. [Polacy Za Ukrainą. Ale Przeciw Ukraińcom Raport Z Badań Socjologicznych](#), p. 30.

<sup>158</sup> Tymińska, Ada. Helsińska Fundacja Praw Człowieka. 2022. [Granice nienawiści. Mowa nienawiści w kontekście kryzysów humanitarnych na granicy polskiej \(2021/2022\)](#).

in particular, as fatigue with the war grows. The main audiences for anti-refugee rhetoric are far-right and nationalist supporters ‘which are a small, but not insignificant proportion of the population’.<sup>159</sup>

The European Digital Media Observatory found that disinformation about refugees was directed at three audiences:<sup>160</sup>

1. Racist-minded individuals who already had negative attitudes toward refugees;
2. Supporters of conspiracy theories focusing on deliberate Ukrainian population transfers to Poland with aim to ‘eventually replace Poles’; and
3. Average concerned citizens concerned about rising prices, longer queues for healthcare, and education.

The latter group can be quite broad, as many people are under significant financial strain due to rising inflation and face real challenges in relation to a strained healthcare system (see Chapter 4). Therefore, some messages that refer to matters affecting day-to-day life may increasingly resonate with members of host communities. The financially worse-off segments of the Polish population, particularly in regions with higher unemployment, may see Ukrainian refugees as a threat to their economic wellbeing and jobs.<sup>161</sup> People looking to rent apartments may be more receptive to discourses regarding Ukrainians’ role in rising housing prices.<sup>162</sup> Poles who do have not interacted much with Ukrainian refugees are also more likely to believe generalisations and misinformation about the refugee community.<sup>163</sup>

## Risks

Incendiary and misleading discourses about refugees present risks on various levels. First are risks to Ukrainian refugees, particularly in relation to discrimination and increased challenges in accessing services. Such risks may be particularly acute for more vulnerable refugee groups, such as those on lower incomes, women with children, and people with disabilities. Discourses regarding Ukrainians abusing the healthcare system, or unduly straining it, could impact Ukrainians’ access if some people who work in the sector internalise such beliefs. As it relates to a sector with which most or all of Polish society interacts, this discourse can create tensions between the host community and Ukrainians.

Highly skilled professionals may also be affected by discourses labelling them as economic migrants and accusing them of accessing benefits they are not entitled to. Ukrainian professionals may experience discrimination against in the Polish labour market given that, prior to the war, Ukrainians in Poland worked largely in low-skilled jobs<sup>164</sup> and were not seen as competing with professionals.

Should the economic situation in Poland worsen, the discourses about refugees driving prices up, deepening economic challenges, or taking locals’ jobs could become much more prevalent, fuelling resentment toward Ukrainians. This might include using Ukrainian refugees as scapegoats for economic problems such as inflation,

<sup>159</sup> International Republican Institute. 2023. [Hostile Narrative Brief War In Ukraine](#), page 91. Accessed 29 March 2023.

<sup>160</sup> European Digital Media Observatory. 2022. [European Digital Media Observatory. 2022. ‘Ukrainian refugees and disinformation: situation in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania’](#). Accessed 31 March 2023.

<sup>161</sup> Hargrave, Karen, Homel, K., and Dražanová, L. 2023. [Public narratives and attitudes towards refugees and other migrants: Poland country profile](#)

<sup>162</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>163</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>164</sup> Keryk, Myroslava. 2021. [Praca w Polsce: naruszenie praw pracowniczych imigrantów z Ukrainy zatrudnionych w budownictwie i sektorze usług](#)

the rising cost of living, and housing shortages and high costs.<sup>165</sup> In this scenario, Ukrainians could face greater discrimination in the housing market, which typically has a greater effect on more vulnerable groups such as mothers with children, Roma communities, and people with special needs.<sup>166</sup>

Finally, such discourses present risks to community cohesion more broadly. Increased distrust and polarisation among the Polish and Ukrainian communities could in some cases manifest in physical and verbal abuse, for example around protests on the anniversary of the Volhynia massacre.<sup>167</sup> Tensions between polarised parts of the host society can lead to protests; clashes between opposing politicians on news channels; and fiery, aggressive comments and discussions on social media channels between groups with opposing values. The spread of negative narratives related to Ukrainian refugees is likely to impede integration efforts by Polish NGOs, foundations, and agencies. In addition, narratives such as ‘Ukrainians are threatening the Polish national identity’ can exacerbate feelings of isolation amongst Ukrainians in the host country, making them feel unwelcome.<sup>168</sup>

### 3.2 Top five discourses

The top five discourses identified during the desk-based research and workshops are analysed below. The analyses cover each stage of the Chain of Harm and the underlying challenges that are particularly distinct for this narrative.

#### Discourse 1: ‘They are not refugees but economic migrants planning to stay in the host countries permanently’.

**Message:** The narrative that Ukrainians are economic migrants rather than refugees revolves around several related messages. One is that Ukrainians go to Poland to get financial support which they then use in Ukraine to buy flats and other goods. Claims are made that refugees do not need assistance to survive but that they come to Poland to benefit from support available to refugees and lead a wealthier life at home. Another message is that Ukrainian refugees are generally from affluent backgrounds and do not deserve support.<sup>169</sup> France24 stated, ‘From Warsaw to Bucharest, social media have been flooded with images of luxury cars with Ukrainian license plates and unsourced, anonymous claims that wealthy-looking Ukrainians have been spotted standing in line for government aid’.<sup>170</sup> The discourse depicts many Ukrainian refugees as cynical and manipulative, based on an assumption that only low-skilled refugees need financial assistance.<sup>171</sup> This narrative also promotes the idea that, to be a refugee, a Ukrainian ‘should not’ possess higher

Figure 2: Facebook post by the NO to the Ukrainisation of Poland group



<sup>165</sup> Hargrave, Karen, Homel, K., and Dražanová, L. 2023. *Public narratives and attitudes towards refugees and other migrants: Poland country profile*

<sup>166</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>167</sup> Tymińska, Ada. Helsińska Fundacja Praw Człowieka. 2022. *Granice nienawiści. Mowa nienawiści w kontekście kryzysów humanitarnych na granicy polskiej (2021/2022)*, page 73.

<sup>168</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>169</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>170</sup> France24. 2022. *Disinformation shifting views on Ukrainian refugees*. Accessed 26 March 2023.

<sup>171</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

professional skills. Another related message is that Ukrainians are taking Poles' jobs.<sup>172</sup> Groups such as the 'NO to the Ukrainisation of Poland' Facebook group claim that Ukrainians are paid more than Poles for the same jobs. The Facebook post shown in Figure 2 asks, 'How is it possible that Polish companies are ready to pay Ukrainians more than Poles? Increasingly more Polish companies want to pay Ukrainians more than Poles'.<sup>173</sup>

### Considerations for Countering Anti-Refugee Messaging:

Incendiary messages should be countered by those based in reality. The focus should be on providing fact-based information that is easily accessible online so audiences can access it with as much ease as the far-right narrative.

Counternarratives to address this discourse could focus on evidence of the benefits that the Ukrainian migrant workforce bring to the Polish economy—it benefits the tax base and it diversity to companies, which drives efficiency and innovation.<sup>174</sup> There has been no negative effect on unemployment rates.<sup>175</sup> A counternarrative could also shed light on the fact that the refugees did not want to relocate to Poland; they were forced to do to save their lives. This counternarrative could highlight the challenges that Ukrainian migrants face in coming to Poland, no matter their economic situation. These might include their separation from their families and fear for the safety of those remaining in Ukraine, thereby stressing the family values particularly espoused by right of centre segments of society.

As much as possible, counternarratives should target specific audiences and the fora with which they engage, and they should be tailored based on these audiences' attitudes, perceptions, values, and norms.

This approach should be combined with a messaging strategy that seeks to assure as much as to convince. This means including messaging such as 'There's enough to go around' or 'We're in this together'. It is also important to use evocative language to capture attention, increase recall of the messages shared,<sup>176</sup> and build on the target audience's values<sup>177</sup>—for example, aligning with patriotic ideals and showing how migrants contribute to the Polish economy, strengthening Poland while in alongside Polish workers. Correcting facts alone is unlikely to be effective when attempting to change attitudes about sensitive issues tied to people's values, social norms, and beliefs.

The counternarrative should not be tied to the state of politics in Poland so as not to let far-right voters believe this may be a political campaign of the opposing camp.<sup>178</sup>

<sup>172</sup> Domagała-Szymonek, Katarzyna. Pulshr.pl. 2023. [Coraz więcej polskich firm chce płacić Ukraińcom więcej niż Polakom](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>173</sup> NIE dla ukrainizacji Polski. 2023. [Facebook page](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>174</sup> Deloitte (2022) [Refugees from Ukraine in Poland: Challenges and potential for Integration](#), Accessed 26 March 2023, p. 8.

<sup>175</sup> Statistics Poland (2023) [Unemployment rate 1990-2023](#), Accessed 26 March 2023 and Eurostat (2022), [Euro area unemployment at 6.6%](#), Accessed on: 24 March 2023.

<sup>176</sup> Brady, W., Gantman, A., & Van Bavel, J. (2020). [Attentional capture helps explain why moral and emotional content go viral](#). *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, pp. 149, 746-756.

<sup>177</sup> Feinberg, M., & Willer, R. (2015). [From Gulf to Bridge: When Do Moral Arguments Facilitate Political Influence?](#) *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 41(12), pp. 1665–1681.

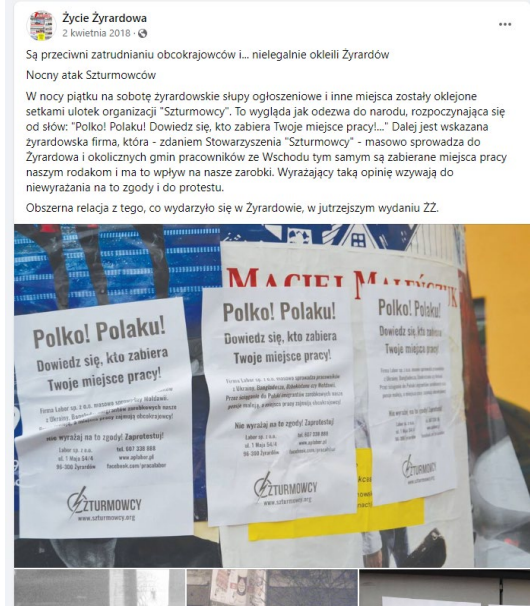
<sup>178</sup> KPRM (2022), [#PomagamUkrainie. Potrzebujesz pomocy?](#) KPRM (2022), [#PomagamUkrainie. Potrzebujesz pomocy?](#)



**Mode of dissemination:** These messages are spread on the social media channels of far-right groups and the websites of far-right parties.<sup>179</sup> The discourse is amplified by word of mouth amongst extremist groups, and it can be heard in daily conversations amongst people who are not connected to a particular party or ideology.

Sometimes a traditional form of information dissemination is used, as was the case in 2018 in Zyrardow prior to the Russian invasion. So-called Stormtroopers, a nationalist faction of the extreme right, papered the city with hundreds of posters (see Figure 3). The posters read, ‘Polish woman! Pole! 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 motivates those who believe in these ideas to spread such narratives.<sup>180</sup>

Figure 3: ‘Stormtroopers’ leaflets in Zyrardow



### Considerations for Countering Anti-Refugee Messaging:

Social media campaigns could target the groups most likely to be swayed by economic migrant narratives, which engage 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 make incendiary comments about refugees.

Media organisations could help identify refugees to call on for quotes in the media or to appear on TV and news shows as commentators to increase the representation of refugees.

**Interpreter:** The discourse attracts a lot of attention as it concerns Poles’ economic welfare. Poles who might struggle financially or be concerned about their employment may see Ukrainian migrants as a threat to their economic wellbeing and job retention.<sup>181</sup> This complaint can also extend to struggling business owners. For example, a market stall seller in Warsaw believes the government is not doing enough for businesses while it helps refugees: “‘That money is mine,” she says, referring to the child benefit the Polish state is paying to Ukrainian families with children in the same amounts it issues to Polish families’.<sup>182</sup>

In some cases, Polish trade unions echo narratives around migrants of various backgrounds taking Poles’ jobs. However, unions have also taken ‘steps to organise and represent Poland’s growing foreign

Figure 4: Social media user’s reply to a senior politician’s post



<sup>179</sup> International Republican Institute. 2023. *Hostile Narrative Brief War In Ukraine*. Accessed 29 March 2023.

<sup>180</sup> Życie Żyrardowa. 2018. *Facebook page*. Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>181</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>182</sup> Ciobanu, Claudia. 2022. *Refugee Resentment On Rise As Poland’s Poorest Squeezed By Cost-Of-Living Crisis*

worker population'.<sup>183</sup> The narrative promotes the nationalistic values of some groups in Poland.<sup>184</sup> Slogans such as '*Polska dla Polaków*' ('Poland for Poles') promote the idea that the country, and its resources, should be reserved for Polish citizens. For example, Figure 4 depicts a member of the public replying to a post by a prominent politician which explains that train stations provide information points for refugees from Ukraine. The reply reads: 'Poles will give you hell for the privileges granted to Ukrainians, Traitors to Poland'.

### Considerations for Countering Anti-Refugee Messaging:

Communication and education can be provided to help host communities understand when they are being manipulated through disinformation. An example of this type of intervention is [videos on building resilience to anti-refugee narratives](#) aimed at the Polish public that were created through a partnership between Google's Jigsaw division and Info Interventions.

**Underlying challenges:** This discourse exploits multiple facts, including that Ukrainian refugees need jobs in Poland to support themselves and their families, which some see as 'economic migration'. In the past, Ukrainians had come to Poland for economic reasons; some people do not distinguish between these economic migrants and the new arrivals (especially because some refugees do have money). A small group of Ukrainians may have used the invasion as an opportunity to come to Poland for work. However, even in parts of Ukraine where there is no fighting, many economic activities do not function because of the war. In addition, Ukrainians in Poland at times send remittances to Ukraine to help people there. In the future, including when the war is over, some Ukrainians are likely to come to Poland as economic migrants because of the damage to the Ukrainian economy. In addition, with Polish inflation rising and economic assistance from the EU uncertain, Poles continue to fear they may lose their jobs.<sup>185</sup>

## Discourse 2: 'Ukrainians are creating a burden on the health system and are taking locals' places'.

**Message:** With their public healthcare system overstretched and underfunded, Poles fear that Ukrainians will overuse healthcare services and that waiting times for services will become even longer.<sup>186</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic created a backlog that caused severe delays before the war began.<sup>187</sup> Participants in the research workshop shared that there have been stories on social media about Polish families not getting the healthcare they needed because doctors were treating Ukrainians with, the stories claimed, severe consequences for Poles.<sup>188</sup> This discourse has also been observed amongst negative comments to government or multilateral

<sup>183</sup> Hargrave, Karen, Homel, K., and Dražanová, L. 2023. [Public narratives and attitudes towards refugees and other migrants: Poland country profile](#).

<sup>184</sup> Zaborowski, Leszek Jakub. 2020. Uniwersytet Warszawski Wydział Socjologii, Przeciw systemowi w imię. [Przeciw systemowi w imię „Wielkiej Polski”?](#). Accessed 1 April 2023.

<sup>185</sup> Staniszewski, Robert Miron. 2023. [Społeczna percepcja uchodźców z Ukrainy, migrantów oraz działań podejmowanych przez polskie państwo. Raport porównawczy z badań opinii publicznej, które zostały przeprowadzone na próbach ogólnopolskich osób w wieku 16-65 lat oraz próbie regionalnej \(obszar przygraniczny z Białorusią\) w latach 2022 – 2023](#).

<sup>186</sup> WHO. 2019. [Poland: health system review 2019](#), Health Systems in Transition, Vol. 21 No. 1, European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies. Accessed 26 March 2023; Staniszewski, Robert Miron. 2023. [Social perception of refugees from Ukraine, migrants and actions taken by Polish State](#).

<sup>187</sup> WHO 2019. [Poland: health system review 2019](#), Health Systems in Transition, Vol. 21 No. 1, European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies. Accessed 26 March 2023.

<sup>188</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023. See details in Section 4.3.

organisation communications about services provided to Ukrainians,<sup>189</sup> and messages such as the one below, which multiple fact checkers were unable to substantiate.<sup>190</sup>

‘Polish children are thrown out of oncology clinics. Today my neighbour called me; they threw her 4-year-old son out of the oncology clinic because Ukrainian children needed a place. She asked me to arrange treatment for her son because she knows I have doctors in my family’.<sup>191</sup>

- *Twitter post by a Polish citizen*

Drawing on the discourse related to the portrayal of Ukrainians as economic migrants, this narrative may depict refugees as well-off people who feel entitled to overuse national health services due to their refugee status.<sup>192</sup> Another health-related narrative is that Ukrainian migrants carry diseases and will infect the Polish population.<sup>193</sup> To counter this narrative, proactive communication by the government could stress that COVID-19 and flu cases increase seasonally, so the rise of cases in spring 2022 should not be attributed to the arrival of migrants.<sup>194</sup>

**Mode of dissemination:** These messages are spread over social media and through word of mouth. They often stem from a lack of understanding of how help to refugees is distributed. Figure 5 shows comments about the provision of assistance to Ukrainians, stating that Ukrainians get more help than Poles: ‘Poles were treated as second-class citizens’ and ‘I think someone got confused between humanitarian aid and resettlement’. Such statements spread the opinion that Ukrainians are prioritised over Poles.<sup>195</sup>

**Interpreters:** This discourse can resonate with different segments of the host society, particularly those with healthcare concerns.<sup>196</sup>

**Underlying challenges:** Poland’s healthcare expenditure is lower than the EU average, and the system suffers from coverage gaps.<sup>197</sup> A reported sub-optimal allocation of resources results in long waiting times and challenges to access, including for Polish citizens.<sup>198</sup> A key focus of concern among NGOs, experts, and local authorities is that a stronger central government response is needed to address pre-existing challenges in health (and housing) and that local leaders, such as mayors of cities that host large

**Figure 5: Social media comment about support to refugees**

Przykładowo ukraińska rodzina z matką i dwójką dzieci : 40 zł dziennie pomoc na osobę za dzień plus 80 zł na dzieci czyli 3600 zł miesięcznie, dodatkowo 500 plus na dwoje dzieci 1000 zł miesięcznie, plus zasiłek rodzinny około 200 zł miesiąc razem :4800 zł miesięcznie ukraińska rodzina z dwójką dzieci. Dodatkowo ONZ wypłaca 600 zł miesięcznie razem 5400 zł!!!  
Pytam więc dlaczego mają mieć za darmo przedszkola,szkoły,mieszkania, rachunki, bilety komunikacji, bilety do kin, zoo, itd.???

Tymczasem Polski emeryt ma 1200 zł miesięcznie i zastanawia się czy zapłacić za prąd, gaz, rachunki, leki!!!  
Całe życie ten emeryt pracował żeby na starość nie skorzystać z przyjemności życia, nie wspomnę o podróżach!!  
Skandal i hańba!  
Polacy zostali potraktowani jako obywatele II kategorii.. To się w głowie nie mieści dlaczego zostały podjęte takie decyzje....  
Chyba ktoś się pomylił z pomocą humanitarną a przesiedleniem!

<sup>189</sup> See examples in Chapter 4.

<sup>190</sup> Walter, Jan D., and Klug, T. 2023. *Fact Check: How propaganda denigrates Ukrainian refugees*. Accessed 31 March 2023.

<sup>191</sup> <https://archive.ph/sJFYy#selection-1143.0-1143.278>

<sup>192</sup> Kacprzak, Izabela. Rzeczpospolita. 2023. *Badanie: zmienia się nastawienie Polaków do uchodźców z Polski*. Accessed 22 March 2023. Bankier.PL. 2023. *Uchodźcy przestają być mile widziani. Polacy sadzą, że są ‘uprzywilejowani’*. Accessed 22 March 2023; Walter, J., D. and Klug, T. (2023). *Fact check: How propaganda denigrates Ukrainian refugees*. Accessed 22 March 2023.

<sup>193</sup> Redmerska, Katarzyna. Medionet.pl. 2022. *Lekarze ostrzegają: napływ uchodźców z ogarniętej wojny Ukrainy może sprawić, że pojawia się przypadki chorób, o których praktycznie zapomnieliśmy*. Accessed 27 March 2023.

<sup>194</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>195</sup> [Facebook post](#). 2022. Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>196</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>197</sup> European Health Observatory (2022). *Poland: Health System Summary*. Accessed 18 July 2023.

<sup>198</sup> Prusaczyk Artur, et al. Health. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health. 2023. *Care Organization in Poland in Light of the Refugee Crisis Related to the Military Conflict in Ukraine*.



numbers of refugees have called for more systematic responses to the crisis, including more EU funding directly to local authorities.<sup>199</sup>

### Considerations for Countering Anti-Refugee Messaging:

Increasing the availability of telehealth options—that is, phone or online health services<sup>200</sup>—could alleviate pressures on the Polish healthcare system. Ukrainians often reach out to doctors in Ukraine via phone or online appointments to avoid long delays in Poland, so this would be a familiar way to access services. Telehealth could be promoted among Poles as well.<sup>201</sup>

Expediting recognition of the medical qualifications of Ukrainian refugees could expand a cadre of medical staff who could help address healthcare needs in Poland.

## Discourse 3: ‘Economic challenges are fuelled by hosting refugees’.

**Message:** This discourse involves a number of messages. The first links inflation to the arrival of Ukrainian refugees in Poland. The ‘driving up prices’ narrative is used broadly across the economy, especially with regard to housing prices. The discourse is closely tied to the narrative that refugees are economic migrants and that they are taking Poles’ jobs. Anti-Ukrainian Facebook groups blame refugees for rising prices and blame the government for helping the refugees. The narrative shown in Figure 6 proclaims that ‘[The Law and Justice Party]

**Figure 6: Facebook post criticizing support to Ukrainian refugees**



is so preoccupied with Ukraine that they do not govern with Poland in mind. This cannot be! It is not like that in any other country! There are no other issues, only Ukraine. Our agriculture and other sectors are collapsing, forests are being cut down at a massive rate, mines are being closed, we are dependent on supplies from the United States. And at the same time Poland is supposed to produce artillery shells for Ukraine?!'. The post is from the ‘A Ukrainian Is NOT My Brother’ group, which has more than 50,000 followers. In four hours, the post received nearly 200 likes.<sup>202</sup>

### Considerations for Countering Anti-Refugee Messaging:

Another important point that a counternarrative campaign might address is that home prices in Poland have been rising for several years.<sup>203</sup> The problem of rising prices has been exacerbated by the Russian invasion. In this sense, programmes and initiatives that educate the host community could highlight that ‘we are all Russia’s victims’<sup>204</sup> and that the arrival of Ukrainian migrants is not the main driver of this trend.

There is a need for a strategy to use more vacant housing, including through better legal regulation to make it possible. Both the host community and migrants prefer to rent in cities due to better access to services, infrastructure, and other opportunities. When housing prices rise in cities, it may be worth considering less costly options in smaller towns with well-organised infrastructure and available housing. It is recommended that

<sup>199</sup> Hargrave, Karen, Homel, K., and Dražanová, L. 2023. *Public narratives and attitudes towards refugees and other migrants: Poland country profile*

<sup>200</sup> See, for example, Damian.pl. 2022. *Zmiany dotyczące pomocy dla osób z Ukrainy*

<sup>201</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>202</sup> Ukrainiec NIE jest moim bratem. 2023. *Facebook group*. Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>203</sup> Sekowski, O., and Turek, B. Infor. 2022. *Koszty utrzymania mieszkania w Polsce wzrosły przez rok o 23 proc*

<sup>204</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

the government develop a more efficient communications strategy and policy to promote housing opportunities outside of larger cities.<sup>205</sup>

**Mode of dissemination:** Dissemination of narratives pertaining to refugees raising prices generally, and in the housing market in particular, is often by word of mouth.<sup>206</sup> Workshop participants also noted that the topic is often discussed in non-political groups on social media, such as in discussions related to housing. Some media channels also propagate the message, for example by running articles such as ‘Study: economic factors are the primary reason for the Ukrainian migration’ in February 2023.<sup>207</sup>

**Interpreter:** This discourse has the potential to resonate across the population, as most people experience inflation-related challenges.<sup>208</sup> Regarding housing, people looking to rent apartments are impacted.<sup>209</sup>

**Underlying challenges:** Overdemand and high prices for housing impact both Ukrainians and Poles, as do related issues. For instance, continued high demand for housing allows landlords to act in an exploitative manner (e.g., raising deposits, increasing evictions, offering uncontracted or unsuitable properties, etc.), making everyone in rental accommodation more vulnerable. Landlords can also ask for higher and longer-term deposits which make entry into the housing market more difficult.<sup>210</sup>

### Considerations for Countering Anti-Refugee Messaging:

Additional support services should be instituted to help Ukrainian refugees navigate complex system for renting flats in Poland.<sup>211</sup> Support services for Ukrainians who are looking to rent housing should be made more accessible to diverse groups, especially those who are not digitally literate.<sup>212</sup>

## Discourse 4: ‘They are ungrateful and have high expectations or demands for the support and shelter they are receiving, and they abuse hospitality’.

**Message:** This narrative revolves around two assumptions and stereotypes: (1) Ukrainian refugees are rejecting offers of help, including support that an average or poor Polish family or a refugee from a different region would welcome, and (2) Ukrainian refugees are rich and do not need things that Polish people would appreciate.<sup>213</sup> Workshop participants shared that this rhetoric is often based on individual stories, such as the following:

- A Ukrainian refugee declined the offer of a Polish woman’s flat, which she considered of a high standard.
- Ukrainian families rejected children’s sports clothes that Polish children would have accepted because the items were ‘unbranded’ (this links to a narrative about Ukrainian refugees being rich).
- Ukrainian families left the property of their Polish hosts messy (this also relates to some Polish hosts expecting their Ukrainian guests to routinely perform cleaning chores during their stay).

<sup>205</sup> 69% of Ukrainians live in just 12 cities in Poland. Union of Polish Metropolises. 2022. [Urban hospitality. Estimation of the number of Ukrainian nationals in the UMP cities.](#)

<sup>206</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>207</sup> TV3. 2023. [Badanie: czynniki ekonomiczne główną przyczyną migracji Ukraińców.](#) Accessed 2 April 2023.

<sup>208</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>209</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>210</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>211</sup> Portal Prawny dla Osob uciekających z Ukrainy. 2022. [Opcje dla obywateli państw trzecich \(innych niż Ukraina\) przebywających w Polsce na 15-dniowym zezwoleniu.](#)

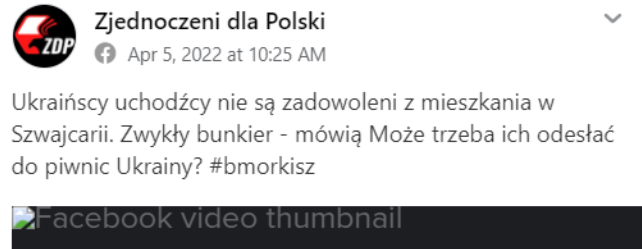
<sup>212</sup> KPRM. 2022. [#PomagamUkrainie. Potrzebujesz pomocy?](#)

<sup>213</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

- Ukrainians rejected job offers, disappointing the employer (this narrative does not touch on the fact that jobs offered to Ukrainians often do not match their expertise and are well below their skill sets).<sup>214</sup>

DW has noted that this discourse sometimes uses footage that predates Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine,<sup>215</sup> for example, in claims that refugee families are evicted from their apartments for not paying rent. Another example is the 5 April 2022 post in Figure 7 from the 'Zjednoczeni dla Polski' Facebook group, which states, 'Ukrainian refugees are not satisfied with the luxurious apartments in Switzerland? Simple abode? Maybe it is better to send them back to the Ukrainian basements, then'.

Figure 7: Post by Zjednoczeni dla Polski Facebook group



### Considerations for Countering Anti-Refugee Messaging:

Encouraging people to share positive stories about Ukrainian refugees, and highlighting that Ukrainians are fighting against Russia for Europe as a whole, could help balance the narrative. Messages about Ukrainians should not focus on pity and compassion but on alliance and mutual appreciation.<sup>216</sup>

**Mode of dissemination:** This narrative is disseminated through word of mouth and community exchanges. It also appears on social media channels, including Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok.<sup>217</sup> As seen in the Facebook post above, the portrayal of Ukrainian refugees as ungrateful and demanding appears often in far-right comments online.<sup>218</sup>

**Interpreter:** This discourse can spread by word of mouth when individual negative experiences or perceptions are generalised; workshop participants noted that those who have little experience interacting with Ukrainian refugees are likely to believe it.<sup>219</sup>

**Underlying challenges:** The problem stems from the difference between what people assume Ukrainian refugees need and the reality of the situation. Host communities may lack understanding of refugees' varying situations and needs. A key challenge is in how stories spread. At times, an example shared by an individual about one Ukrainian refugee is generalised to the entire Ukrainian population.<sup>220</sup>

### Considerations for Countering Anti-Refugee Messaging:

Events and activities to help Ukrainians and Poles meet and get to know one another could also help Polish communities better understand the refugee experience. More educational activities and materials in form of books, events, and theatre performances to explain the diversity of Ukrainian refugee experiences should be promoted.<sup>221</sup>

<sup>214</sup> Rzhevkina, Anna. Notes from Poland. 2022. [Ukrainian refugees fill gaps in Polish labour market but risk getting stuck in low-skilled jobs](#).

<sup>215</sup> See also, as an example, Walter, Jan D., and Klug, T. DW. 2023. [Fact Check: How propaganda denigrates Ukrainian refugees](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>216</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>217</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>218</sup> Tymińska, Ada. Helsińska Fundacja Praw Człowieka. 2022. [Granice nienawiści. Mowa nienawiści w kontekście kryzysów humanitarnych na granicy polskiej \(2021/2022\)](#).

<sup>219</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>220</sup> Rzhevkina, Anna. Notes from Poland. 2022. [Ukrainian refugees fill gaps in Polish labour market but risk getting stuck in low-skilled jobs](#). Accessed 19 March 2023.

<sup>221</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

## Discourse 5: ‘They threaten a country’s national identity, culture and social fabric (“Ukrainisation of Poland”)

**Message:** This discourse revolves around the ‘Ukrainisation of Poland’, which is said to lead to the disintegration of the fabric of Polish national and cultural identity.<sup>222</sup> A range of messages include the alleged dominance of Ukrainian symbols in public spaces and Ukrainian language and the deterioration and potential dissolution of Polish culture. Ukraine Monitor illustrated the message in the post below.<sup>223</sup>

‘Ukrainization of Poland in stages: influx of “temporary” refugees -> granting them the status of economic immigrants -> (...) Ukrainian party in the Sejm -> fine-tuning the Polish raison d’état for Ukraine and Ukrainians -> Ukr. national symbolism and Ukrainian language with the official status. Final stage: Poland is constantly torn by internal conflict, critics of Ukrainian immigration silenced by blackmail in the form of “Russian trolls” and administratively and judicially persecuted, the disintegration of state structures, and a second Kosovo on the Vistula’.

Some narratives speculate about the possibility of parts of Ukraine and Poland becoming united into ‘Ukropolin’.<sup>224</sup> ‘Ukropolin’ would involve large, planned population resettlements and come ‘at the expense of Polish national identity’.<sup>225</sup>

This narrative also plays on historical grievances and characterises Ukrainians as anti-Polish nationalists. Predating the Russian invasion, this was the first prominent incendiary discourse against Ukrainian refugees on social media.<sup>226</sup> The narrative’s key symbols are the World War II era nationalist Ukrainian Insurgent Army and its leader, Stepan Bandera; the main focus is the Volhynia massacre and the ‘ethnic cleansing’ of Poles by Ukrainian nationalists, as stated by Polish President Andrzej Duda.<sup>227</sup> The topic of the massacre was taboo in Poland during the Cold War; it attracted greater public attention with the 70th anniversary of the massacre in 2013, when Polish political parties took different views of how to approach and respond to it. With the Law and Justice party’s electoral victory in 2015, a conservative interpretation took precedence, including demanding that Ukraine takes full responsibility for the massacre.

<sup>222</sup> Dzierzanowski, Marcin. Wprost Info. 2019. [Jak Kreml gra rzeźnia wołyńska: ‘Obejrzyjmy Ogniem i Mieczem’](#). Accessed 20 March 2023.

<sup>223</sup> Ukraine Monitor. n.d. [“Ukrainianization” in pro-Russian propaganda in Romania, Poland, Serbia and Hungary](#). Accessed 31 March 2023.

<sup>224</sup> Ukraine Monitor. n.d. [“Ukrainianization” in pro-Russian propaganda in Romania, Poland, Serbia and Hungary](#). Accessed 31 March 2023.

<sup>225</sup> Ukraine Monitor n.d. [“Ukrainianization” in pro-Russian propaganda in Romania, Poland, Serbia and Hungary](#), p. 56. Accessed 31 March 2023.

<sup>226</sup> Tymińska, Ada. Helsińska Fundacja Praw Człowieka. 2022. [Granice nienawiści. Mowa nienawiści w kontekście kryzysów humanitarnych na granicy polskiej \(2021/2022\)](#)

<sup>227</sup> President.PL. 2018. [Polish President on Volhynia Massacre anniversary observances](#).

An example of the narrative of Ukrainisation and historical references is a post by the group ‘NO to the Ukrainisation of Poland’ from 20 February 2023 (Figure 8). The post reads, ‘Poland has seen a proliferation of Ukrainian restaurants whose decor and logos allude to UPA [Ukrainian Insurgent Army]-related symbolism.

Figure 8: Post by the NO to the Ukrainisation of Poland group



Poles, who did not like such practices, were labelled by the Ukrainophiles as “*ruskie onuks*”, “*shuras*” [pejorative terms<sup>228</sup>] and “haters”—actually nothing new in these types of discussions. There were even those who educated Poles that the red and black colours appeared in Ukrainian ornamentation long before the UPA, so there is no problem at all. (...). Once again, it appears that Poles have no right in their own country to react to provocative behaviour by visitors from the East. Ukrainians, on the other hand, can demand various things by invoking their sensitivity—Poles are not allowed to do so.”<sup>229</sup>

Finally, it is important to note that incendiary discourses on refugees with Ukrainian citizenship versus those from other countries differ markedly. The latter are similar to discourses regarding migrants attempting to enter Belarus,<sup>230</sup> with the ‘threat’ to Polish identity tied to a fear of Islam as well as overt racism and xenophobia.<sup>231</sup> One manifestation of this discourse is the claim that non-whites, including TCNs entering Poland from Ukraine, cannot be real students. The tweet shown in Figure 9 presents screenshots of posts alleging crimes and bad behaviour of ‘aggressive migrants’ and states sarcastically, ‘Interesting [school] activities these “students: in Przemysl [a city in southeastern Poland] are engaging in’.

Figure 9: Tweet about ‘aggressive migrants’



### Considerations for Countering Anti-Refugee Messaging:

Narratives depicting a more balanced account of history could be promoted in the news and through movies and TV shows.<sup>232</sup>

The fact that 2 million Ukrainians now reside in Poland is an opportunity for closer and more frequent exchanges.<sup>233</sup>

<sup>228</sup> The term *Ruskie Onuce* is derived from the “Onuce” cloth that Russian soldiers wore to keep their feet warm in winter. It is a pejorative term, suggesting that Poles who oppose “Ukrainian Insurgent Army” imagery are akin to Russian stooges.

<sup>229</sup> NIE dla ukrainizacji Polski. 2023. [Facebook page](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>230</sup> Tyimińska, Ada. Helsińska Fundacja Praw Człowieka. 2022. [Granice nienawiści. Mowa nienawiści w kontekście kryzysów humanitarnych na granicy polskiej \(2021/2022\)](#)

<sup>231</sup> Tyimińska, Ada. 2022. [Granice nienawiści. Mowa nienawiści w kontekście kryzysów humanitarnych na granicy polskiej \(2021/2022\)](#), p. 47. Helsińska Fundacja Praw Człowieka.

<sup>232</sup> Dauksza, Julia, and Gielewska, A. [Frontstory.PL. 2022. Ukrainizacja w kolorze Braun](#). Accessed 19 March 2023.

<sup>233</sup> Mick, Christoph. [The Conversation. 2022. Ukraine and Poland: why the countries fell out in the past, and are now closely allied](#). Accessed 21 March 2023.



**Mode of dissemination:** This discourse is seen across a spectrum of nationalistic websites and social media groups, especially on Facebook. It also appears on the websites of far-right political parties and in their campaigns and organisation of anti-Ukrainization protests.<sup>234</sup> Social media groups push narratives on the topic, such as the group 'NO to the Ukrainisation of Poland'.<sup>235</sup> Protests and demonstrations staged by far-right groups can also increase tensions between Ukrainians and Poles.<sup>236</sup>

**Interpreter:** This discourse is ever-present on social media channels in Poland. It resonates with individuals who hold nationalistic views and aligns with the rise of the far right in the country.<sup>237</sup> In such discourses, historical narratives are simplified, and their themes are weaponised by hardliners to sow division. These narratives are used particularly by groups with conservative and nationalist profiles; historical references are used without consideration of the passage of time or the wider historical context; they reduce the description of individuals to their national affiliation.<sup>238</sup>

### Considerations for Countering Anti-Refugee Messaging:

Increase opportunities for Poles and Ukrainians to interact daily. These may include after-school activities for Ukrainian and Polish children, cultural platforms and other activities through which local and Ukrainian populations can get to know one another, and workplace activities (with translation provided as necessary).

**Underlying challenges:** Ukraine has not formally addressed and apologised for the Volhynia massacre (see Section 4.7), and the history of those involved in the massacre is complicated for Ukraine. Workshop participants also noted that Poland lacks a culture of debate or consideration of different interpretations of historic events in the way that history is often taught.<sup>239</sup> In addition, Poland is a largely homogenous country. Until the Russian invasion only small (albeit increasing) numbers of non-ethnic Poles and foreigners lived in the country which has provided fewer opportunities for Poles to get to know other cultures.<sup>240</sup>

### Considerations for Countering Anti-refugee Messaging:

Accuracy nudges—reminders that 'most people want to share accurate information' 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.<sup>241</sup>

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

<sup>234</sup> Podgórski, Wojciech. Wyborcza.pl. 2022. [Braun zwołał antyukraiński marsz w Warszawie. A ludzie: Nie można tych bzdur słuchać](#). Accessed 29 March 2023; Rp.pl. 2023. Antyukraiński hejt w internecie niesie się szeroko. Rozpowszechnia; [go m.in. Janusz Korwin-Mikke](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

<sup>235</sup> NIE dla ukrainizacji Polski. [Facebook group](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

<sup>236</sup> Dzierzanowski, Marcin. Wprost Info, 2019. [Jak Kreml gra rzeźnia wołyńska: 'Obejrzyjmy Ogniem i Mieczem'](#). Accessed 20 March 2023.

<sup>237</sup> Duffin, Michael. Combating Terrorism Center at West Point. 2022. [Poland's Evolving Violent Far-Right Landscape](#). Accessed 1 April 2023.

<sup>238</sup> Tymińska, Ada. 2022. [Granice nienawiści. Mowa nienawiści w kontekście kryzysów humanitarnych na granicy polskiej \(2021/2022\)](#). Helsińska Fundacja Praw Człowieka.

<sup>239</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>240</sup> Hargrave, K, Homel, K and Dražanová, L. 2023. [Public narratives and attitudes towards refugees and other migrants: Poland country profile](#).

<sup>241</sup> Pennycook, Gordon. McPhetres, J., Zhang, Y., Lu, J. G., and Rand, D. G. 2020. Fighting COVID-19 misinformation on social media: Experimental evidence for a scalable accuracy-nudge intervention. *Psychological Science*, 31, pp. 770–780.

## Chapter 4. Potential Tensions

### 4.1 Overview

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

The five tensions that are likely to have the highest potential to affect community cohesion in the medium term, considering the likelihood of occurring and potential impact, are boldfaced in Table 3. While the overall risks are generally low, the categorisation of the five top risks is made in relation to the overall risks to community cohesion in Poland. This means that those tensions might still be unlikely to materialise but that they are likely to be higher risks than other tensions. For example, tensions around the generally lower benefits received by TCNs who are not eligible for TP are unlikely to threaten community cohesion significantly given their small number in Poland; on the other hand, economic concerns are widely felt by the host and refugee populations.

**Table 3: Potential sources of tensions between Ukrainian refugees and host communities**

Journey stage	Potential sources of tensions between Ukrainian refugees and host communities
Legal status, welfare, and benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Differences in provision of welcome and support to refugee or migrant groups not from Ukraine.</li> </ul>
Healthcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Additional pressures on the health system which already experiences challenges (including long waiting times).</b></li> <li>• Pressures on social services.</li> <li>• Differences in how services are used, resulting in perceived abuse (unnecessary ambulance calls, emergency room visits, doctors' visits).</li> </ul>
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Additional pressures on and rising cost of housing (also in the context of lack of social housing).</b></li> <li>• More support for Ukrainian refugees than other refugee groups, such as more housing options.</li> <li>• Overcrowding of refugees in apartments and state-run dormitories create pressures on surrounding communities.</li> <li>• Ukrainian refugees (Roma in particular) seen as undesirable tenants.</li> <li>• Uncertainty regarding length of stay for Ukrainian refugees in host country, leading to lack of commitment to longer-term contracts.</li> </ul>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional pressures on schools.</li> <li>• Additional pressures on kindergartens and available spaces for children.</li> <li>• <b>Uncertainty regarding length of stay for Ukrainian refugees in host country, leading to poor school attendance and high dropout rates.</b></li> <li>• Integration issues in schools and lack of specialised programmes, resulting in poor social experiences (such as Ukrainian children experiencing bullying).</li> </ul>



Journey stage	Potential sources of tensions between Ukrainian refugees and host communities
Employment and income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>High inflation pressures on host and refugee communities.</b></li> <li>• Tensions over distribution of scarce resources between disadvantaged local populations and Ukrainians, including poverty among local populations.</li> <li>• Reduced financial assistance could lead to more refugees experiencing poverty and the need for the state (or other organisations) to support the vulnerable.</li> <li>• Rising inequalities.</li> <li>• High and rising unemployment strains the host community and Ukrainian refugees and could lead to scapegoating of refugees.</li> <li>• Underemployment of refugees, including difficulties with recognition of qualifications.</li> <li>• Ukrainian refugees receive more support (such as financial support and labour market access) than other refugee groups, including TCNs from Ukraine.</li> <li>• Uncertainty regarding length of stay for Ukrainian refugees in the host country, leading to low job retention among refugees.</li> </ul>
Community, social, and political life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Historic grievances over the Volhynia massacre.</b></li> <li>• Negative views of Ukrainians provoked by political discourses and parties.</li> <li>• Lack of integration of Ukrainian refugees into host society.</li> <li>• Language barriers or not learning the local language (lack of opportunity or difficulty of language).</li> <li>• Differences between Ukrainians' experiences (including origins in Ukraine, pre- and post-war arrivals, level of integration in Poland, etc.).</li> <li>• Lack of understanding of Ukrainian trauma and its consequences.</li> <li>• Fear of insecurity and war; refugees seen as making the situation worse.</li> <li>• Locals' fatigue with supporting refugees.</li> <li>• Expectation of more gratitude from refugees.</li> <li>• Individual incidents that harm people (e.g., a car crash) framing Ukrainians as a danger to host society.</li> <li>• Prior conceptions of Ukrainians as economic migrants (pre-February 2022).</li> <li>• Stereotypes of Ukrainians as low-skilled.</li> <li>• Xenophobia and discrimination.</li> </ul>

## 4.2 Legal status, welfare, and benefits

**Differences in provision of welcome and support to refugee or migrant groups not from Ukraine:** Specific procedures and protections were established for Ukrainian refugees, and the process to access them, including housing support, financial assistance, and access to the labour market, was faster and easier than for other groups of refugees and asylum seekers (see Section 3.2). For example, while Ukrainians who qualify for TP are automatically granted the right to work, others seeking asylum cannot access the labour market for the first six months while a decision on their application is pending.<sup>242</sup> The support structures for Ukrainian refugees are significantly more organised than those for asylum seekers who entered Europe during and after 2015. Despite the relatively low number of other refugees and asylum seekers in Poland, workshop participants noted that groups that did not receive the same protections as Ukrainian refugees could perceive this as unfair to them.<sup>243</sup>

<sup>242</sup> UNHCR Poland. n.d. [Accessing International Protection](#). Accessed 2 April 2023.

<sup>243</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

## 4.3 Healthcare

**Ukrainians add to pressures on the health system which already experiences challenges, including long waits:** The Polish healthcare system has faced long-term challenges. These include levels of investment (in 2015, health expenditure was 6.3 percent of Polish GDP compared to the EU average of 9.9 percent) and informality (out-of-pocket spending is comparatively high at 22 percent).<sup>244</sup> The system has a shortage of doctors and midwives; Poland entered the COVID-19 pandemic with the fewest doctors per capita in the EU.<sup>245</sup> Sub-optimal allocation of resources resulted in long waiting times and challenges to access, including for Polish citizens.<sup>246</sup> The arrival of Ukrainians increased the number of people seeking healthcare, including to address specific issues (e.g., war-related injuries and psychosocial issues) that require scarce specialist support. 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 Poland's healthcare system.<sup>247</sup> Workshop participants said that the narrative that Ukrainians are taking the places of Poles for healthcare is relatively widespread. This relates to both the general healthcare system and special services for Ukrainians (e.g., rehabilitation services that Poles cannot use).<sup>248</sup> One participant shared that their organisation took down a social media post on a service being started for Ukrainian refugees which received 500 negative comments within an hour that the organisation confirmed were from people, not bots. These included messages such as 'My wife didn't get the help she needed because Ukrainians were prioritised'. Workshop participants noted that messages supporting vaccination campaigns or health service campaigns received similar backlash.<sup>249</sup>

The Twitter post from the Ministry of Health shown in Figure 10 reads, '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'.<sup>250</sup>

Figure 10: Twitter post from the Ministry of Health



The many negative responses to this post included:

<sup>244</sup> Prusaczyk, Artur, et al. Health. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2023. [Care Organization in Poland in Light of the Refugee Crisis Related to the Military Conflict in Ukraine](#)

<sup>245</sup> OECD. 2020. *Health at a Glance: Europe 2020*. Accessed 27 March 2023.

<sup>246</sup> Prusaczyk Artur, et al. Health. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2023. [Care Organization in Poland in Light of the Refugee Crisis Related to the Military Conflict in Ukraine](#)

<sup>247</sup> Union of Polish Metropolises. 2022. [Neighbourly help. Residents of the 12 Largest Polish Cities on Helping Refugees from Ukraine](#). Accessed 26 March 2023.

<sup>248</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>249</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>250</sup> Tweet from the Ministry of Health in Poland. 2022. [Campaign to promote the vaccination of Ukrainian children in Poland](#). Accessed 27 March 2023.

‘Already the *Ukry* [derogatory term for Ukrainians] are running to get whatever vaccination there is. ... Another waste of public funds’.

Another 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’.

**Differences in how services are used, resulting in perceived abuse of the services:** Workshop participants identified tensions regarding the ways Ukrainians access healthcare, including the fact that they are more likely to seek health services for issues that Polish citizens consider minor, and that they might not understand how to access the general healthcare system. Participants also commented that Ukrainian refugees were also more likely to call for ambulances and request medication.<sup>251</sup> The lack of interpretation services increases the possibility of misunderstandings and widens the differences in health-seeking behaviour.<sup>252</sup> Participants also noted that friction can arise between Polish doctors who experience strains due to the additional tasks of communicating with patients who do not speak Polish.

Healthcare pressures and service provision can also lead to discontent on the part of Ukrainians. One workshop participant shared that her husband needed numerous medical appointments to continue his cancer treatment because his documentation was deemed to be insufficient.<sup>253</sup>

## 4.4 Housing

**Ukrainians add to an already challenging housing market in Poland:** Poland’s housing market was stretched before the invasion of Ukraine, having experienced two recent booms (see Section 2.4). The inflow of Ukrainians created a sharp increase in demand for housing, and rents rose by 16 percent in Krakow and 14 percent in Warsaw in March and April 2022.<sup>254</sup> Workshop participants noted that high demand for housing emboldens some landlords to engage in exploitative practices, such as insisting on informal rent agreements and significantly increasing rents and evictions (particularly when no official contract is signed).<sup>255</sup> Landlords can also ask for larger and longer-term deposits, impeding entry to the housing market, especially for new arrivals in Poland and people who already face challenges in accessing housing. Workshop participants also noted the reduction in affordable rental options for Poles, particularly in urban areas, which could be blamed on Ukrainians.<sup>256</sup> Indeed, there is a statistical link between the timing of the house price increases and the inflow of Ukrainian refugees,<sup>257</sup> no matter that the significant housing issues pre-date February 2022.

**More housing support and options for Ukrainian refugees than other refugee groups:** Refugees from other countries have not received the same degree of support for housing as Ukrainian refugees—such as the

<sup>251</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>252</sup> Prusaczyk, Artur, et al. Health. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2023. [Care Organization in Poland in Light of the Refugee Crisis Related to the Military Conflict in Ukraine](#)

<sup>253</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>254</sup> Trojanek, Radoslaw, and Gluszak, M. *Finance Research Letters*. 2023. [Short-run impact of the Ukrainian refugee crisis on the housing market in Poland](#),

<sup>255</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023. See section 2.4 and Discourse 3 in section 3.2 for more detail.

<sup>256</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>257</sup> Trojanek, Radoslaw, and Gluszak, M. *Finance Research Letters*. 2023. [Short-run impact of the Ukrainian refugee crisis on the housing market in Poland](#).

government-supported hosting systems which assisted refugees upon arrival. Workshop participants noted that non-Ukrainian refugees feel discriminated against in the context of access to accommodation.<sup>258</sup>

**Overcrowding of refugees in apartments and state-run dormitories, and pressures on surrounding communities:** Concerns about overcrowding in Poland are not limited to the refugee population. According to data from Eurostat, the statistical office of the EU, in 2020 almost 40 percent of the Polish population lived in overcrowded dwellings—almost double the EU average.<sup>259</sup> Rising economic pressures, including on the rental market, may price some refugees out of the housing market, causing them to move to social accommodation. Responses to the UNHCR REACH survey illustrate that social housing—government-provided collective centres—is disproportionately used by refugees with lower income or resource levels.<sup>260</sup> Workshop participants also noted that long-term stays in hosted accommodation can be psychologically trying for both refugees and hosts.<sup>261</sup> Psychological stress can be compounded for refugees in hosted accommodation, particularly those with lower incomes, due to uncertainty about the future.

**Ukrainian refugees, and Roma in particular, are seen as undesirable tenants:** Polish law forbids housing discrimination.<sup>262</sup> However, workshop participants noted that Ukrainian refugees are sometimes considered undesirable tenants; one recalled an advertisement for accommodation for ‘Poles only’.<sup>263</sup> Roma in particular experience discrimination,<sup>264</sup> anecdotal evidence is also reported in the Polish media.<sup>265</sup> Mothers with children are particularly at risk: Landlords are likely to discriminate against them due in part to tighter restrictions around the eviction of tenant groups that include mothers and children, according to workshop participants. Participants also noted that many landlords assume children will damage their properties.<sup>266</sup> This could increase refugees’ vulnerabilities and resentment, impacting their ability to form strong and productive relationships with host communities and, in turn, community cohesion.

**Uncertainty regarding length of stay for Ukrainian refugees in the host country, leading to lack of commitment to contracts:** Ukrainian refugees may be at a structural disadvantage in the housing market. Return intentions are complex: In September 2022, UNHCR issued a regional report finding that 13 percent of Ukrainian refugees surveyed firmly intended to return home and 43 percent had not made up their minds.<sup>267</sup> A regional survey commissioned by the Centre for Economic Strategy, which encompassed Poland, concluded that 46 percent to 76 percent of Ukrainian refugees will return to Ukraine after the war.<sup>268</sup> The uncertainty about return intentions translates to unwillingness to sign long-term rental contracts which makes it harder for Ukrainians to find accommodation, particularly in an overcrowded rental market.<sup>269</sup> This has been noted in the press; for example, Euronews quoted a Warsaw estate agent who said, ‘Landlords prefer a year-long lease, and no one

<sup>258</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>259</sup> Eurostat. 2022. *Living conditions in Europe – Housing*. Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>260</sup> UNHCR, REACH. 2023. *Poland: Multi-sectoral Needs Assessment 2022*. Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>261</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>262</sup> European Commission. 2012. *Discrimination Against Foreigners in Accessing Housing Services. Between Theory and Practice*. Accessed 25 March 2023.

<sup>263</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>264</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023; UNHCR. 2022. *Poland: Human rights, needs and discrimination - The situation of Roma refugees from Ukraine in Poland - September 2022*. Accessed 25 March 2023.

<sup>265</sup> Kromer, Oktawia. 2022. “*Jak z Ukrainy, to dziękuję*”. *Warszawiaczy nie chcą wynajmować mieszkań uchodźcom*. Accessed 25 March 2023.

<sup>266</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>267</sup> UNHCR. 2022. *Lives on Hold: Intentions and Perspectives of Refugees from Ukraine #2 (September 2022)*. Accessed 25 March 2023.

<sup>268</sup> Vyshlinsky, Hlib, Mykhailyshyna, D., Samoiluk, M., and Tomolina, M. 2023. *Ukrainian Refugees: Who are they, where did they come from and how to return them?* Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>269</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

knows how long the war will continue. This means Ukrainians are not the preferred tenants'.<sup>270</sup> Ultimately, the unstable housing arrangement reduces the ease with which refugees can settle and form the relationships with Polish communities which are key to mitigating tensions related to community cohesion. Challenges in securing suitable longer-term accommodation could also put refugees in precarious situations, increasing vulnerabilities and push factors for engaging in riskier accommodation arrangements and behaviours.

## 4.5 Education

**Pressure on schools:** According to UNHCR data, more than 187,000 Ukrainian refugee children were enrolled in Polish schools as of 13 January 2023, including more than 122,000 in primary education.<sup>271</sup> Among 7- to 15-year-old Ukrainians, 39 percent of those surveyed by REACH followed the Ukrainian curriculum (either together with the Polish curriculum or independently).<sup>272</sup> In 2019, Polish investment in education (4.5 percent of GDP) was lower than the OECD average (4.9 percent),<sup>273</sup> but Ukrainian students do not face serious issues with regard to space in school. However, Ukrainians in smaller towns and rural areas may encounter challenges due to teachers' and schools' inexperience integrating foreign pupils.<sup>274</sup>

**Pressure on kindergartens:** Education at the early childhood level is more challenging. The lack of kindergarten spaces predates Russia's 2022 invasion.<sup>275</sup> Participants in the research workshop noted that lack of childcare limits parents' employment options<sup>276</sup> and also affects children's development.<sup>67</sup> Conversely, one key informant explained that local authorities understand that Ukrainian children's low attendance in nurseries and kindergartens is due to their parents' distrust of state childcare facilities and a custom of sending children to school at a later age.

**Uncertainty regarding length of stay for Ukrainian refugees in Poland, reducing school attendance and increasing dropout rates:** Surveys indicate that, regionally, at least 50 percent of Ukrainian refugees plan to return to Ukraine once the war ends.<sup>277</sup> Uncertainty around length of stay (intention to leave soon, choice of Ukrainian schools, uncertainty about TP applications) was a reason why 25 percent of respondents to the UNHCR REACH survey did not enrol their children in school.<sup>278</sup>

Workshop participants also noted the perception that refugees are in Poland only temporarily as a reason they did not enrol their children in Polish schools. Doing so would require a significant investment from their children—learning Polish, adapting to a new curriculum, and in the meantime potentially falling behind in subject-matter knowledge.<sup>279</sup>

<sup>270</sup> Jackson, James. Euronews. 2022. [Refugees, rates and record inflation: How Poland's housing market is under unprecedented pressure](#). Accessed 25 March 2023.

<sup>271</sup> UNHCR. 2022. [Ukraine Refugee Situation - Operational Data Portal](#). Accessed 25 March 2023.

<sup>272</sup> UNHCR, REACH. 2023. [Poland: Multi-sectoral Needs Assessment 2022](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>273</sup> OECD. 2022. [Education at a Glance](#), p. 5. Accessed 25 March 2023.

<sup>274</sup> Mikulska, Anna. 2022. ["Musimy sobie poradzić". Jak szkoły w małych miejscowościach przyjmują uczniów z Ukrainy](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>275</sup> 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](#).

<sup>276</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>277</sup> Vyshlinsky, Hlib, Mykhailiushyna, D., Samoiliuk, M., and Tomolina, M. 2023. [Ukrainian Refugees: Who are they, where did they come from and how to return them?](#) Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>278</sup> UNHCR REACH. 2023. [Poland: Multi-sectoral Needs Assessment 2022](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>279</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.



A challenge for older students is that the entrance exams for Polish high schools are considered difficult even by Polish students.<sup>280</sup> Lack of enrolment in in-person schooling can lead to social isolation and can limit work opportunities for the mothers of younger children. These issues have the potential to raise tensions between the host and refugee populations as children dropping out of school may be perceived more broadly as a waste of educational resources, and out-of-school youth could be perceived as delinquency risks.

**Integration issues in schools:** Ukrainian children entering the Polish school system require support including linguistic and psychosocial support and assistance managing social issues associated with bullying. Workshop participants noted that Ukrainian children who are not supported could be perceived as disruptive.<sup>281</sup> The UNHCR REACH survey identifies language as an issue that can pose a barrier to integration in schools.<sup>282</sup> Participants also noted that online schooling can reduce social integration in Polish society.<sup>283</sup> An additional potential source of tensions mentioned in the workshop was the impression that support to Ukrainian students is at the expense of Polish students, with resulting perception of worsening educational outcomes for Poles.

## 4.6 Employment and income

**High inflation pressures** are acutely felt by both the host and refugee communities. In 2022, inflation in Poland rose steeply to 13.2 percent,<sup>284</sup> up from 5.1 percent in 2021.<sup>285</sup> Average inflation in the previous 20 years was 2.3 percent.<sup>286</sup> High inflation is likely to continue; the EU predicts 11.7 percent inflation in 2023.<sup>287</sup> Ukrainian refugees have the potential to improve Polish GDP<sup>288</sup> at the macroeconomic level<sup>289</sup> and in certain sectors.<sup>290</sup> The economic benefits that Ukrainians bring, however, might be (1) longer-term; (2) not 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) concentrated among the more affluent, such as property or luxury business owners. High inflation and the high cost of living can generate resentment. Workshop participants noted that Ukrainian refugees may be targeted as scapegoats, particularly by the less well-off and especially if the financial situation worsens.<sup>291</sup>

A similar sentiment has been reported in the media.<sup>292</sup> One workshop participant also noted that Ukrainians are sometimes in the difficult position of being perceived as ungrateful if they ask for higher wages, and at the same time seen as pulling down others' wages in the context of high inflation if they accepted low wages that would generally not satisfy Poles.<sup>293</sup>

**Tensions over the distribution of scarce resources between disadvantaged local populations and Ukrainians:** Price increases generally have a disproportionate effect on the poorest populations; as a result,

<sup>280</sup> Heinrich Boll Stiftung. 2023. [In Poland, refugees confront tough choices as the school year starts](#). Accessed 27 March 2023.

<sup>281</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>282</sup> UNHCR, REACH. 2023. [Poland: Multi-sectoral Needs Assessment 2022](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>283</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>284</sup> European Commission. 2023. [Economic forecast for Poland](#). Accessed 25 March 2023.

<sup>285</sup> World Bank. 2023. [Poland](#), World Bank Open Data Set. Accessed 25 March 2023.

<sup>286</sup> World Bank. 2023. [Poland](#), World Bank Open Data Set. Accessed 25 March 2023; the figure represents the average calculation from average inflation between 2001 and 2021.

<sup>287</sup> European Commission. 2023. [Economic forecast for Poland](#). Accessed 25 March 2023.

<sup>288</sup> Deloitte. 2022. [Refugees from Ukraine in Poland: Challenges and potential for integration](#). Accessed 26 March 2023.

<sup>289</sup> Krasuski, Konrad, Śladkowska, B., and Laca, P. Bloomberg. 2022. [War Refugees Bring Poland Economic Benefit along with Costs](#). Accessed 25 March 2023.

<sup>290</sup> Erling, Barbara, and Minder, R. Financial Times. 2023. [Affluent Ukrainian refugees boost Polish luxury businesses](#), Financial Times. Accessed 25 March 2023.

<sup>291</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>292</sup> Ciobanu, Claudia. Balkan Insight. 2022. [Refugee resentment on the rise as Poland's poorest squeezed by cost-of-living crisis](#). Accessed 25 March 2023.

<sup>293</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.



some pockets of resentment have been noted over the allocation of government support between refugees and vulnerable Poles,<sup>294</sup> including the poor (the poverty rate in Poland in 2019 was 14.8 percent<sup>295</sup>). Tensions can arise around the ways in which limited government support such as social protection measures and cash transfers is distributed. In one study, over 70 percent of Polish citizens in major cities thought hosting Ukrainians would have a negative impact on state finances.<sup>296</sup> Participants in all country workshops conducted for this project noted the risks of discourses arguing that ‘we should support our poor, not the Ukrainians’ gaining traction if the economic situation worsens.<sup>297</sup>

**If financial assistance to refugees is further reduced,** they may experience poverty, and state or other organisations might need to provide further assistance. In March 2023, the Polish government announced that it would reduce some types of assistance to refugees.<sup>298</sup> 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.<sup>299</sup> While this may reduce burdens on the government budget, it may also increase need on the part of refugees and contribute to rising inequalities for those who struggle financially. The resulting need for additional assistance from other organisations and could fuel negative narratives about refugees.

**Rising unemployment:** Before February 2022, 1.4 million Ukrainian labour migrants in Poland filled labour gaps.<sup>300</sup> Deloitte estimates that Ukrainian migrants contributed to generating 13 percent of Poland’s GDP between 2013 and 2018.<sup>301</sup> Poland continues to experience labour shortages and demographic challenges such as an ageing population.<sup>302</sup> Unemployment has not increased since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. According to the Polish Statistics Office, unemployment was 5.9 percent in February 2022 and 5.5 percent in February 2023 (decreasing to 5.1 percent between September and November 2022).<sup>303</sup> Based on the International Labour Organisation (ILO) definition of unemployment, Eurostat put Poland’s unemployment at 2.9 percent in both December 2021 and December 2022.<sup>304</sup> Current fears of rising unemployment are linked to economic concerns and territorial disparities, with highest unemployment in Warmińsko-Mazurskie province.<sup>305</sup>

Workshop participants noted that, as the economic situation has become more strained, Ukrainian refugees might become scapegoats for Poles’ unemployment, as they may be willing to work for lower pay and longer hours.<sup>306</sup> Other participants noted that certain jobs (e.g., care workers) are seen as exclusively filled by Ukrainians and that Poles can no longer get them.<sup>307</sup>

<sup>294</sup> Ciobanu, Claudia. Balkan Insight. 2022. [Refugee resentment on the rise as Poland’s poorest squeezed by cost-of-living crisis](#). Accessed 25 March 2023.

<sup>295</sup> World Bank. 2022. [Multidimensional poverty headcount ratio - European Union](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>296</sup> Hargrave, Karen, Homel, K., and Dražanová, L. 2023. [Public narratives and attitudes towards refugees and other migrants: Poland country profile](#). Figure 12. Accessed 27 March 2023.

<sup>297</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>298</sup> Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration. 2023. [Amendment to the Act on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine signed by the President, 25 January 2023](#)

<sup>299</sup> Caps apply; see Section 3.4 for details.

<sup>300</sup> Deloitte. 2022. [Refugees from Ukraine in Poland: Challenges and potential for Integration](#), p. 8. Accessed 26 March 2023.

<sup>301</sup> Deloitte. 2022. [Refugees from Ukraine in Poland: Challenges and potential for Integration](#), p. 8. Accessed 26 March 2023.

<sup>302</sup> Oxford Economics. 2022. [Research Briefing | Poland: Refugees will lift economy’s potential, but challenges remain](#). Accessed 26 March 2023.

<sup>303</sup> Statistics Poland. 2023. [Unemployment rate 1990-2023](#). Accessed 26 March 2023.

<sup>304</sup> Eurostat. 2022. [Euro area unemployment at 6.6%](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>305</sup> European Commission. 2023. [Labour market information: Poland](#). Accessed 26 March 2023.

<sup>306</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>307</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

**Underemployment of refugees:** By June 2022, 185,000 Ukrainian refugees were working in Poland, including 135,000 women.<sup>308</sup> However, refugees may be underemployed for a variety of reasons.<sup>309</sup> Lack of housing opportunities close to urban centres, for instance, may limit employment prospects, as may lack of childcare. Some more highly skilled roles require knowledge of Polish, and acceptance of qualifications can be an expensive and a time-consuming process which might prevent qualified professionals from working in their fields.<sup>310</sup> Workshop participants also noted that traumatised refugees may not be in the right state of mind to undertake complex work which requires 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).

**Due to uncertainty regarding length of stay of Ukrainian refugees in the host country,** employers may worry that refugees will not keep their jobs in the long term and may therefore prioritise others if they have a choice.<sup>311</sup> Uncertainty about the length of stay in Poland can also motivate refugees to take jobs below their qualifications and experience.

**More support for Ukrainian refugees than other refugee groups, including TCNs from Ukraine, including for labour access:** In addition to the government, NGO, and citizen support detailed above, a 2023 report by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) noted that the private sector played an important role in the Polish response to the Ukraine refugee crisis, including making or facilitating donations of funds, assistance, space, and staff time, and offering jobs and employment support. This assistance was a notable contrast to a lack of private sector support for previous refugee arrivals.<sup>312</sup> The Polish Economic Institute estimates that, in the first three months of the war, the Polish government and private citizens spent €5.45 billion, or close to 1 percent of Poland's GDP, supporting Ukrainian refugees.<sup>313</sup> Seekers of asylum and international protection who do not fall under the TP directive, as discussed in Section 4.2, have access to the labour market only after six months if no decision on their TP applications is reached by that time.<sup>314</sup> Such differential treatment has the potential to foster discontent.

## 4.7 Community, social, and political life

**Historic grievances over the Volhynia massacre:** At least 40,000 Polish people were massacred during the Volhynia massacre in German-occupied Poland by Ukrainian nationalists in 1943 alone,<sup>315</sup> with estimates of up to 60,000 killed between 1943 and 1945.<sup>316</sup> Despite encouragement of the massacre by political actors including the Nazi and Soviet governments, and efforts by individual Ukrainians to rescue Poles, historical grievances remain.<sup>317</sup> Marches take place in remembrance of those killed in the massacre<sup>318</sup> and the president of Poland

<sup>308</sup> European Commission. 2022. [Poland: 185 000 refugees from Ukraine start work under simplified procedure](#). Accessed 25 March 2023.

<sup>309</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>310</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>311</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>312</sup> Hargrave, Karen, Homel, K., and Dražanová, L. 2023. [Public narratives and attitudes towards refugees and other migrants: Poland country profile](#).

<sup>313</sup> Polish Economic Institute. 2022. [How Polish society has been helping refugees from Ukraine](#). Warsaw: Polish Economic Institute. Accessed 27 March 2023.

<sup>314</sup> UNHCR Poland n.d. [Accessing International Protection](#). Accessed 2 April 2023.

<sup>315</sup> Snyder, Timothy. Journal of Cold War Studies. 1999. [To Resolve the Ukrainian Problem Once and for All: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ukrainians in Poland, 1943–1947](#), 1 (2): pp. 86–120. Accessed 26 March 2023.

<sup>316</sup> Tymińska, Ada. 2022. [Granice nienawiści. Mowa nienawiści w kontekście kryzysów humanitarnych na granicy polskiej \(2021/2022\)](#). Helsińska Fundacja Praw Człowieka.

<sup>317</sup> Snyder, Timothy. Journal of Cold War Studies. 1999. [To Resolve the Ukrainian Problem Once and for All: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ukrainians in Poland, 1943–1947](#), 1 (2): pp. 86–120. Accessed 26 March 2023.

<sup>318</sup> Polasiak, Krzysztof. Radio Poznań. 2022. [Cichy marsz pamięci ofiar rzezi wołyńskiej przeszedł przez centrum Poznania](#). Accessed 27 March 2023.

attends commemorations of each anniversary in Warsaw.<sup>319</sup> Ukraine has not formally acknowledged or apologised for the massacre, however. On the 79th anniversary 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 Two'.<sup>320</sup> He added, '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. Indeed, in 2021, 78 Ukrainian lawmakers proposed to Parliament to name Stepan Bandera<sup>321</sup> and Roman Shukhevych, who fought for Ukrainian independence in 1930s and 1940s, but also took part in Volhynia, as 'Heroes of Ukraine'.<sup>322</sup> In the UK House of Lords, Lord Glasman said:

‘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’.<sup>323</sup>

Workshop participants noted that the massacre features prominently in some media and TV series, particularly those watched by older Poles.

There is general agreement that the history of the Volhynia massacre has not directly affected support for Ukrainian refugees. However, workshop participants pointed out that historical grievances have the potential to exacerbate tensions, particularly around anniversaries of the massacre.<sup>324</sup>

One Ukrainian workshop participant's son was asked his views on the Volhynia massacre when applying for his national identity number in Poland.<sup>325</sup>

**Negative views of Ukrainians provoked by political discourses and parties:** Some ultranationalist and right-wing parties promote negative stereotypes and lies regarding refugees, including those from Ukraine (see Chapter 3).<sup>326</sup> While these narratives are at the fringes, their potential spread can impact multiple aspects of refugee life in Poland, such as increased opportunities for verbal and physical abuse and discrimination in the workplace.

**Lack of integration into the host society:** Quite revealingly, the key experts who attended the project's research workshops shared that they realised that the Polish and Ukrainian communities do not generally interact

<sup>319</sup> Prezydent.pl. 2019. [Upamiętnienie ofiar rzezi wołyńskiej](#). Accessed 27 March 2023.

<sup>320</sup> Reuters. 2022. [Poland asks Ukraine to confront dark past despite common front against Moscow](#). Accessed 26 March 2023.

<sup>321</sup> Bandera was previously awarded this title in 2010 and 2011. Euronews. 2021. [Controversy as Ukraine mulls giving hero status to alleged war criminals](#). Euronews. Accessed 26 March 2023.

<sup>322</sup> Euronews. 2021. [Controversy as Ukraine mulls giving hero status to alleged war criminals](#). Euronews. Accessed 26 March 2023.

<sup>323</sup> UK Parliament Hansard. 2023. [International Holocaust Memorial Day, Volume 826: debated on Thursday 19 January 2023](#). Accessed 26 March 2023.

<sup>324</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>325</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>326</sup> Stowarzyszenie Nigdy Więcej. 2023. [Jak Policzyć Nienawiść? Hejterzy O Ukraińcach](#). Accessed 31 March 2023; European Digital Media Observatory. 2022. [Ukrainian refugees and disinformation: situation in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania](#). Accessed 31 March 2023.

significantly in their spare time.<sup>327</sup> They listed reasons including lack of time for social activities, trauma, and other circumstances that make it difficult for adults to form new friendships outside of their work or with the parents of their children's friends.<sup>328</sup>

**Language barriers:** A study by the EWL Migration Platform, the Foundation for Supporting Migrants on the Labour Market, and the University of Warsaw found that close to 75 percent of Ukrainians do not speak Polish or speak it poorly and that 38 percent of respondents believed their language skills would cause challenges for living abroad.<sup>329</sup> Language courses are available in Poland but are reported to be oversubscribed.<sup>330</sup> Research workshop participants also noted the difficulty for working parents of juggling work, childcare, and the mental stress or trauma to make time for regular language classes.<sup>331</sup>

**Differences between Ukrainians' experiences:** Workshop participants commented on discourses about Ukrainians from the western regions of Ukraine not being seen as genuine refugees—for example, that they had rented their flats to internally displaced people from the east of Ukraine and came to Poland to claim financial support.<sup>332</sup>

**Integration issues associated with lack of understanding of Ukrainian trauma and consequences:** Many refugees experience mental health issues, trauma, and PTSD (see Section 2.7). For example, 14 percent of

**Figure 11: “Anti-war” Facebook post**



Ukrainian refugees surveyed by the UNHCR reported feeling so upset, anxious, or worried that it affected their functioning.<sup>333</sup> The effects of trauma can be debilitating and last for years,<sup>334</sup> and people deal with trauma differently. Lack of understanding of trauma can cause friction between local populations who might perceive some behaviour as ‘lazy’ or ‘ungrateful’ while it may actually be due to strong trauma. Traumatized people, in turn, may see insistence on finding work immediately or participating in ‘fun’ community activities as irritating and diminishing their experience.

**Fear of insecurity and war:** Participants in the workshop identified fear of increased insecurity and war as a potential source of tension.<sup>335</sup> Media coverage in Poland noted these concerns in early 2022;<sup>336</sup> they were also captured in academic studies.<sup>337</sup> Political parties can use fear of conflict to generate anti-refugee discourses. The narrative is particularly prevalent in Slovakia but also appears in

<sup>327</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>328</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>329</sup> European Commission. 2022. [Special report: refugees from Ukraine in Poland](#). Accessed 26 March 2023.

<sup>330</sup> Reliefweb. 2022. [Living in Limbo: Displaced Ukrainians in Poland](#). Accessed 26 March 2023.

<sup>331</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>332</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>333</sup> UNHCR REACH. 2023. [Poland: Multi-sectoral Needs Assessment 2022](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>334</sup> Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica. 2002. [How well do refugees adapt after resettlement in Western countries?](#) Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>335</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>336</sup> Adler, Katya. BBC. 2022. [Ukraine war: Fears Russian aggression could spill into Poland](#). Accessed 26 March 2023.

<sup>337</sup> Kossowska, Małgorzata, et al. 2023. [The role of fear, closeness, and norms in shaping help towards war refugees](#). Scientific Reports 13, 1465. Accessed 26 March 2023.

Poland. The Polish Anti-War Movement (supported by Russian state propaganda) disseminated the Facebook message seen in Figure 11, which reads: ‘Let’s not go to this war! This is not our war!’.<sup>338</sup>

**Fatigue with support for refugees:** While strong support for refugees has continued for more than a year, workshop participants suggested that fatigue of hosting Ukrainians could start to set in.<sup>339</sup> This corresponds with some news articles describing resentment toward refugees,<sup>340</sup> and research on disinformation.<sup>341</sup>

**Expectation of more gratitude from refugees:** As discussed in Chapter 3, tensions can arise over perceptions that Ukrainians reject offers of help that an average Polish family would welcome, suggesting possible misunderstandings of refugees’ needs or situations. Workshop participants believed that Poles might be more likely to widely share negative experiences with Ukrainian refugees compared to positive ones, contributing to a negative impression of refugees amongst some groups of people.<sup>342</sup>

**Individual incidents that injure people (e.g., a car crash) framing Ukrainians as a danger to the host society:** Workshop participants raised the risks that the media or some populations might generalise individual incidents involving Ukrainians to portray all Ukrainians in a negative light.<sup>343</sup> Participants in Warsaw expressed particular frustration about the media including the nationality of a Ukrainian who commits a crime in the headline (for example, ‘A Ukrainian stole a car’).<sup>344</sup> Backlash against Ukrainians supposedly committing crimes has already been noted on social media, where anonymous Internet users have disseminated rumours that an offender was Ukrainian, including when the authorities had not determined whether foreigners were involved in an incident.<sup>345</sup>

**Stereotypes of Ukrainians as ‘low-skilled’, linked with conceptions of them as economic migrants (before February 2022),** were raised by workshop participants.<sup>346</sup> Historically, Poland has hosted a significant minority of Ukrainians, generally in low-paid and low-skilled positions. This population was estimated at around 1.35 million in February 2022, before the escalation of the war, predominantly economically active men.<sup>347</sup> Ukrainians have served a specific role in the Polish labour market, filling gaps in areas where supply was low.<sup>348</sup> While this contribution has been positive for GDP growth, it also contributes to a stereotype of Ukrainians as low-skilled workers. Ukrainians in the research workshop noted that it felt demeaning to read advertisements for ‘Ukrainian cleaning ladies’, implying that Ukrainians are only capable of such work.<sup>349</sup> One participant recalled a Pole who knew of her multiple qualifications, including a Ph.D., telling her:

‘If I ever have children, I’ll hire you to be their nanny’.<sup>350</sup>

<sup>338</sup> Polski Ruch Antywojenny. 2023. [Facebook group](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>339</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>340</sup> Balkan Insight. 2022. [Refugee resentment on the rise as Poland’s poorest squeezed by cost-of-living crisis](#). Accessed 26 March 2023.

<sup>341</sup> International Republican Institute. 2023. [Hostile Narrative Brief War In Ukraine](#), p. 88. Accessed 29 March 2023; Hargrave, Karen, Homel, K., and Dražanová, L. 2023. [Public narratives and attitudes towards refugees and other migrants: Poland country profile](#). Accessed 2 April 2023.

<sup>342</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>343</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>344</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>345</sup> Stefczyk.info. 2022. [“Ukrainiec zabił Polaka” na warszawskim Nowym Świecie? Sprawdziliśmy](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>346</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>347</sup> Duszczyc, Maciej, and Kaczmarczyk, P. *Intereconomics Review of European Economic Policy*. 2022. [The war in Ukraine and migration to Poland: outlook and challenges](#)

<sup>348</sup> Deloitte. 2022. [Refugees from Ukraine in Poland: Challenges and potential for integration](#), p. 8. Accessed 26 March 2023.

<sup>349</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>350</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

**Xenophobia and discrimination:** An ODI report notes that ‘since 2015, the dominant narratives around refugees [in Poland] has been one of “us” versus “them” but that refugees from Ukraine are considered part of ‘us’.<sup>351</sup> The same report observes that attitudes toward refugees have generally improved, perhaps in part because people associate the term ‘refugee’ with Ukrainians. Still, workshop participants commented that discrimination appears in subtle ways—for example, disparaging the accents of Ukrainians who work in the service industry, saying ‘they can’t understand them’; complaining that all care workers in certain places are Ukrainian; or commenting on refugees trying to access the rental market.<sup>352</sup> Xenophobic acts can include physical and psychological violence which has 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’.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>351</sup> Hargrave, Karen, Homel, K., and Dražanová, L. 2023. [Public narratives and attitudes towards refugees and other migrants: Poland country profile](#). Accessed 27 March 2023.

<sup>352</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>353</sup> Monitoring Centre on Racist and Xenophobic Behaviour (*Ośrodek Monitorowania Zachowań Rasistowskich i Ksenofobicznych*), [Facebook page](#). 2023. Accessed 28 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 develop strong relationships and trust, other recommendations are more operational. Our research demonstrates that many of the concerns of host communities—and, with them, incendiary and misleading narratives shared by malicious actors and some segments of the population—are rooted in longstanding issues such as strained healthcare and housing systems 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. Some additional sources of funding might become available to address them which could improve the situation for both Ukrainians and host communities.

### 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.<sup>354</sup> 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 overview of the historic, economic, security, socio-cultural, and environmental contexts; (2) a causal analysis of conflict factors, including proximate causes, 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 an outline of the interactions between causes of conflict and actors.<sup>355</sup> To be effective, conflict and context analyses must examine various points of view, including those of women and marginalised groups. Analyses can be performed at various levels (intervention or project level or entire sectors); they should outline current political, economic, and social factors as well as historical contexts and conditions which may contribute to conflict. In Poland specifically, factors to take into account include (1) the medium-term macroeconomic context, including volatility in housing prices and inflation rates; (2) the relative strength of public services, including the education system, and the contrasting weakness of the health system; (3) analysis of who stands to gain or lose due to from various changes; and (4) historical and cultural ties and grievances, including tensions between Poland and Ukraine and relationships with Russia.

**Share positive stories through social media:** Social media is used to disseminate incendiary and misleading discourses about Ukrainian refugees, as discussed in Chapter 3.<sup>356</sup> This use of social media corresponds with

<sup>354</sup> Saferworld. n.d. [Conflict Analysis, Chapter 2](#). Accessed 28 March 2023; United Nations. 2016. [UN Conflict Analysis Practice Note](#). Accessed 28 March 2023; World Bank. n.d. [Conflict Analysis](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>355</sup> United Nations. 2016. [UN Conflict Analysis Practice Note](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>356</sup> See also, as an example: Walter, Jan D. and Klug, T. 2023. [Fact Check: How propaganda denigrates Ukrainian refugees](#), DW. Accessed 28 March 2023.

wider literature showing that it can be an effective conduit for misinformation and disinformation.<sup>357</sup> In part to counter this tendency, sharing positive stories on social media would support the creation of a counter-movement to bring communities together. 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;<sup>358</sup> there is also evidence that social cohesion, or ‘glue’, can form around social media messages and stories.<sup>359</sup> Positive stories and messages can and should be developed around both the contributions of Ukrainians to the Polish economy and society and Poles’ hospitality toward Ukrainians. Positive messages should reflect the findings of a strong context analysis. One workshop participant 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 Poles were suffering while Ukrainians received treatment.<sup>360</sup> Building stories on a solid understanding of local sensitivities and testing messages to ensure their framing is optimal can help minimise similar situations and backlash.

**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 and support resilience to disinformation and build networks.<sup>361</sup> Reactive efforts to debunk could include counter or alternative narratives, crisis communications, and policy responses.<sup>362</sup> These should be tailored and targeted to specific audience groups and their interests, values, language, norms, and beliefs.<sup>363</sup> While providing accurate information is important—for example, by engaging dedicated fact-checkers—disseminating facts is usually not sufficient to change attitudes and behaviours around sensitive issues.<sup>364</sup> An ODI report on understanding public attitudes toward refugees and migrants suggests that communications should highlight that the situation is manageable and emphasise shared values.<sup>365</sup> Fact-checking, while particularly important in the context of policy debates and strategy, should be accompanied by other strategies when seeking to resonate with diverse groups, including (1) framing messaging to align with the target audiences’ moral values, which has been proven to shift attitudes on highly sensitive and often politicised topics;<sup>366</sup> (2) appealing to emotions, which are strong drivers of decisions and behaviours and which make content more likely to be accessed and remembered;<sup>367</sup> and (3) shifting social norms or using normative messaging regarding expectations of behaviour, or the frequency of a behaviour, to promote different behaviours.<sup>368</sup>

When accurate information is used to counter specific falsehoods, it should be repeated multiple times within targeted fora. Repeated statements are shown to be easier to process and therefore are perceived as more

<sup>357</sup> Bunse, Simone. 2021. [Social media: A tool for peace or conflict?](#) Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>358</sup> Cecchi-Dimeglio, Paola. MIT Sloan Management Review. 2020. [Why sharing good news matters.](#) Accessed 26 March 2023.

<sup>359</sup> Duffy, Andrew, and Ling, R. Journalism Studies. 2020. [The Gift of News: Phatic News Sharing on Social Media for Social Cohesion.](#) Accessed 26 March 2023.

<sup>360</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>361</sup> Government Communication Service. 2021. [Resist 2: Counter-disinformation toolkit.](#) Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>362</sup> Government Communication Service. 2021. [Resist 2: Counter-disinformation toolkit.](#) Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>363</sup> See, for example, Freedom from Torture. [Changing the Conversation on Asylum: A Messaging Guide](#) on how different messages about refugees were tested for their effectiveness among different groups.

<sup>364</sup> Dempster, H., and Hargrave, K. 2017. [Understanding public attitudes towards refugees and migrants.](#) London: ODI

<sup>365</sup> Dempster, H., and Hargrave, K. 2017. [Understanding public attitudes towards refugees and migrants.](#) London: ODI

<sup>366</sup> Feinberg, Matthew, and Willer, R. 2015. [From Gulf to Bridge: When Do Moral Arguments Facilitate Political Influence?](#) *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 41(12), 1665–1681.

<sup>367</sup> Brady, W. J., Gantman, A., and Van Bavel, J. 2020. [Attentional capture helps explain why moral and emotional content go viral.](#) *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 149, 746–756. 3.

<sup>368</sup> Petit, Vincent, and Zalk, T.N. UNICEF and PENN SoNG. 2019. [Everybody Wants to Belong: A Practical Guide to Tackling and Leveraging Social Norms in Behaviour Change Programming.](#)

truthful, even by those with prior knowledge of the facts.<sup>369</sup> Thus, repeating facts is crucial because they counter falsehoods to which audiences have been exposed multiple times. Research indicates that both misinformation and disinformation can be promoted through specific hubs: media outlets that both local and foreign actors use to influence public opinion.<sup>370</sup> After dissemination, they can be taken up by individuals who do not actively question the information they receive since there is a global bias toward believing that ‘fake news’ is something that affects other people.<sup>371</sup> Finally, it is crucial that the target audience considers the messenger credible, and as much care should be taken in selecting the messenger as the message.<sup>372</sup>

**Organise joint activities that enable refugees and host populations to get to know each other:** Daily pressures related to work, family life, and broader challenges (see Section 4.7) may prevent Polish and refugee communities from engaging socially. All types of stakeholders—governments, municipalities, NGOs, and citizens’ groups—could organise activities to bring the host and refugee communities together and build informal networks. These have been noted to reduce prejudice.<sup>373</sup> A workshop participant from the Czech Republic described community film screenings with ‘chat to your neighbour’ intervals to help attendees get to know each other, with the movie providing a basis for conversation.<sup>374</sup> Some NGOs in Slovakia noted that activities designed to bring Ukrainian and host community youth together were poorly attended. However, one NGO’s activities usually attract equal numbers of local and refugee children. The NGO does not advertise them as opportunities to meet Ukrainians. Rather, it focuses on games or activities that the children enjoy. The NGO advertises to Ukrainian and Slovak youth separately, using posters in both languages.<sup>375</sup>

**Offer additional free or affordable after-school activities:** Support for free or highly subsidised after-school activities has multiple benefits. First, the activities can help bridge the gap between the school day and the workday, enabling mothers to work without seeking childcare and/or incurring additional costs. Second, they create opportunities for Ukrainian and Polish students to meet, get to know each other, and build trust and mutual understanding. Pupils at a school in Gdansk took the initiative to encourage inclusivity among school peers, declaring that they would welcome fellow pupils from the Ukraine with open arms.<sup>376</sup> Third, after-school activities could include language classes, which Ukrainian students need. They can also facilitate organic language learning by bringing Ukrainian and Polish children together in joint activities. Fourth, after-school activities can be beneficial for young people’s mental and physical health.<sup>377</sup> Participants in project workshops in all five countries noted that teenagers are particularly vulnerable to social isolation and poor mental health; some pointed out the 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, enable more rapid spread of messages and disinformation and facilitate the creation of echo chambers that can reinforce confirmation bias.<sup>378</sup> Research has shown that false

<sup>369</sup> Fazio, L. K., Brashier, N. M., Payne, B. K., and Marsh, E. J. 2015. [Knowledge does not protect against illusory truth](#). *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 144(5), 993–1002.

<sup>370</sup> Citizens’ Association Why Not. 2019. [Disinformation in the online sphere: The case of BiH](#). Accessed 26 March 2023.

<sup>371</sup> Ipsos. 2018. [Fake news, filter bubbles, post-truth and trust](#). Accessed 26 March 2023.

<sup>372</sup> RAN C&N Academy. 2019. [Effective Narratives: Updating the GAMMMA+ model](#). 19 December 2019.

<sup>373</sup> Pettigrew Thomas F., and Tropp, L. R. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 2006. [A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>374</sup> Prague research workshop, 1–2 February 2023.

<sup>375</sup> Bratislava research workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

<sup>376</sup> Gdansk.pl. 2022. [Ztama z Ukraina - polska młodzież wspiera kolegów i koleżanki z Ukrainy. Uczniowie nakręcili FILM](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>377</sup> Nabors, et al. 2022. [A University and Community-Based Partnership: After-School Mentoring Activities to Support Positive Mental Health for Children Who Are Refugees](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>378</sup> OECD. 2022. [Disinformation and Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine: Threats and governance responses](#). Accessed 31 March 2023.

information can spread more quickly than facts, potentially due to the novelty and emotional reactions that false stories can evoke.<sup>379</sup> 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’.<sup>380</sup> ChatGPT appears to use built-in mechanisms to recognise false assumptions, as demonstrated in the example below. Search engines 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 registration or 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 extended to other refugees fleeing war and persecution who are eligible under the 1951 Refugee Convention.

**Implement phasing 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, over time, 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. In Poland, some groups have questioned the degree to which Ukrainians are in need. Adopting needs-based targeting criteria is likely to be an effective method to mitigate such tensions. Phasing programmes can help manage potential tensions associated with communities’ resentment of refugees who

<sup>379</sup> Vosoughi, Soroush, Roy, D., and Aral, S. Science. 2018. [The spread of true and false news online](#). Accessed 31 March 2023.

<sup>380</sup> General guidelines for how to do so were also provided:

1. Avoid sensationalism: Avoid using inflammatory language or sensational headlines that can stigmatize refugees or perpetuate stereotypes.
  2. Use person-centered language: When reporting on refugees, refer to them as individuals rather than as a monolithic group. Use person-centered language that acknowledges their humanity and individual experiences.
  3. Provide context: Provide context for why refugees are fleeing their home countries and the challenges they face in their host countries. This can help readers understand the complexities of the issue and challenge any misconceptions or misconceptions.
  4. Interview refugees and stakeholders: Seek out perspectives from refugees themselves as well as experts and stakeholders in the field. This can help humanize the issue and provide more nuanced and accurate reporting.
  5. Highlight stories of resilience and hope: Highlight stories of refugees who have overcome challenges and made positive contributions to their host communities. This can help counter negative stereotypes and give a more balanced perspective of refugees’ experiences.
- ‘Remember that every person has inherent dignity and deserves to be treated with respect and compassion’.

receive support while poor host populations continue to struggle.<sup>381</sup> They help 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.<sup>382</sup> A range of tools was developed to do just this in response to COVID-19.<sup>383</sup> However, a well-documented key weakness in linking humanitarian cash and social protection is coordination.<sup>384</sup> In Poland, people who are not covered under the compulsory health insurance system can be eligible for social assistance contributions for health insurance.<sup>385</sup> Social assistance is also available for shelter in hardship cases.<sup>386</sup> Humanitarian support that expands the system horizontally to include host country citizens and Ukrainian refugees helps alleviate concerns about inequity by making all individuals subject to the same type of means testing and issuing 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.

**Utilise inclusive beneficiary accountability and feedback mechanisms:** Beneficiary accountability and feedback mechanisms developed and implemented by INGOs, the United Nations system, and other stakeholders should focus on inclusivity to ensure that complaints from either the host community or refugees are registered, for instance within education systems. Such mechanisms could be linked to wider efforts to monitor tensions regularly at the community level.<sup>387</sup>

## 5.4 Healthcare

Overarching recommendations to mitigate tensions related to healthcare revolve around addressing operational challenges related to an overstretched healthcare system which pre-dated the Ukrainian refugees' arrival in Poland. This additional pressure on the healthcare system was one of the top five potential tensions identified through the research, and harmful narratives are already spreading regarding refugees' impact on the system. It may be possible to mitigate such tensions by channelling part of the funding for Ukrainian refugees to broader existing efforts to reform or improve the Polish healthcare system.<sup>388</sup> In the short term, this report makes the recommendations below.

<sup>381</sup> Analysed in more detail in Sections 3.2 and 4.6.

<sup>382</sup> CALP Network. 2020. [State of the World's Cash 2020](#). Accessed 17 April 2023.

<sup>383</sup> SPACE. 2020. [Social Protection and Humanitarian Cash and Food Responses to COVID-19: Needs, Coverage, and Gaps](#). Accessed 17 April 2023.

<sup>384</sup> SPACE. 2020. [Social Protection and Humanitarian Cash and Food Responses to COVID-19: Needs, Coverage, and Gaps](#). Accessed 17 April 2023.

<sup>385</sup> Ministerstwo Zdrowia. [Uzyskaj decyzję uprawniającą do bezpłatnych świadczeń opieki zdrowotnej](#). Accessed 10 July 2023.

<sup>386</sup> European Commission. [Poland – Social assistance benefits](#). Accessed 10 July 2023.

<sup>387</sup> International Alert. 2020. [Donbas: Taking stock of Peacebuilding](#). Accessed 30 March 2023; Safer World. 2019. [Dip Beyond Box Ticking](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

<sup>388</sup> Various agencies and institutions, including the WHO and OECD, have stated that a long-term strategy and vision are required for Poland to improve its health system. The Polish government has committed to investing more in the system but is not certain if this level of financing will be sufficient. Health system improvements must encompass the governance structure, investment in prevention, staffing, and staff retention. A significant amount of work has been done in this space (by the Polish government, also supported by the OECD and the WHO) that could be built on. Prusaczyk, Artur, et al. Health. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health. 2023. [Care Organization in Poland in Light of the Refugee Crisis Related to the Military Conflict in Ukraine](#); OECD 2021. Poland: [Country Health Profile 2021](#). Accessed 28 March 2023; and WHO. 2022. [Poland: Health Systems Summary](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.



**Streamline staffing processes to involve skilled Ukrainians in the health sector:** A major gap in the Polish healthcare system concerns staffing. There is a critical shortage of doctors, nurses, and other trained medical professionals (see Section 4.2). Additional programmes that identify qualified and skilled Ukrainians and place them in the Polish health system could be beneficial. These would likely consist of outreach efforts to identify qualified Ukrainians, processes to speed recognition of skills and qualifications, tailored language training courses, and placements in Polish hospitals and clinics.

**Increase the number of interpreters:** Evidence shows that poor health outcomes, including low vaccination rates, are driven in part by the lack of interpreters in healthcare settings.<sup>389</sup> Indeed, the presence of interpreters is a best practice for the 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 Polish doctors who are already stretched by making it easier for them to communicate with their patients.

## 5.5 Housing

At an overarching level, recommendations to mitigate tensions related to housing focus on addressing the operational challenges of a lack of affordable housing which could benefit both Ukrainians and Poles. Prior to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Poland already faced a housing shortfall, a small rental market, and the decreasing availability of social housing.<sup>390</sup> Indeed, according to the primary research carried out for this report, additional pressure on housing due to the influx of refugees was one of the top five potential tensions between refugees and Polish communities. In addition to addressing operational challenges related to housing, this report recommends the programmatic approaches described below.

**Provide viable opportunities for people to live, work, and go to school outside of major cities:** Choosing to live in large or smaller cities or in rural areas often poses dilemmas for refugees. Larger cities have more employment opportunities and options for education and often have greater proximity to healthcare facilities. Smaller cities have more affordable housing options. Some refugees have reported limited work opportunities in many smaller cities.<sup>391</sup> One workshop participant cited a pilot project offering relocation to smaller villages or towns, which include both housing and employment offers and funding available to renovate old homes.<sup>392</sup> This kind of scheme could be expanded to ease housing pressures in cities. This kind of scheme could be expanded 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 assisted 900 Ukrainian associates and their families to relocate to Romania, arranged for the employees to continue working for PepsiCo after

<sup>389</sup> Ganczak, Maria, et al. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health. 2022. [Health System Barriers to Child Mandatory and Optional Vaccination among Ukrainian Migrants in Poland in the Context of MMR and HPV Vaccines-A Qualitative Study](#)

<sup>390</sup> The Polish government has established a housing financing system aimed at affordable rental housing, including a limited set of policies around rent control and subsidies; and funding modalities such as preferential loans and provision of land by municipalities exist. However, the growth of affordable housing in Poland is negatively affected by political uncertainty and market volatility—and both of these factors are currently increasing. In order to address these factors, funding can be targeted specifically to enhance pre-existing social housing initiatives. Poland might also find it useful to conduct an exchange with similar countries to identify best practices around rent control, subsidies, and tenant rights. The international community's support would also be useful to fund existing efforts by the Polish government to provide housing benefits. OECD. 2020. [Social housing: A key part of past and future housing policy](#), Employment, Labour, and Social Affairs policy briefs. Accessed 26 March 2023; Czischke, D. van Bortel, G. Journal of Housing and the Built Environment. 2018. [An exploration of concepts and policies on 'affordable housing' in England, Italy, Poland and The Netherlands](#). Accessed 26 March 2023.

<sup>391</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>392</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.



relocation, recruited other Ukrainian refugees, arranged housing, and established the PepsiCo learning centre—a Ukrainian school for refugee children, employing Ukrainian teachers.<sup>393</sup>

**Support social intermediaries in rental processes:** A social rental agency model could be piloted, with a non-profit intermediary negotiating between property owners and people in need of housing.<sup>394</sup> The intermediary would guarantee rent payments and minimum tenancy standards to owners, who would discount rents and guarantee stable, affordable, quality accommodation to tenants. The intermediary could help mitigate challenges and issues associated with discrimination against Ukrainian tenants and support the management of concerns and issues related to the refugees' short-term housing needs. Habitat for Humanity founded the Social Rental Agency in Poland which provides such housing and employment services.<sup>395</sup> The approach could be further 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 might 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 are scarce or educational institutions become overcrowded, overburdened, or unable to address the needs of refugees. In Poland, a top potential tension identified by the research was low attendance and high dropout rates, likely due partly to Ukrainian refugees' uncertain length of stay in the country. Joint classes for local and refugee children can help build relationships between different communities and therefore increase trust and cohesion. Additional investment in kindergartens and early childhood education may be useful, as it would support parents to find jobs, work standard hours, and encourage contact between Polish and Ukrainian children and their parents. This would lay a foundation for longer-term positive perceptions. To enable this, this report recommends the following short-term approaches:

**Provide Polish language support for Ukrainian children:** Refugees have identified the need for dedicated Polish language support for children. In the UNHCR REACH multi-sector needs assessment, 38 percent of Ukrainian respondents stated that their children needed Polish language classes; this response rose to 43 percent for residents of collective centres.<sup>396</sup> Polish language classes were the most significant need identified by Ukrainians looking to engage with the Polish education system. Language classes have not been identified as a key need for students enrolled in the Ukrainian online system, but the 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 in Poland, with 56 percent of respondents to one study indicating that they could benefit from mental health support and 10 percent stating that mental health issues were preventing their daily functioning.<sup>397</sup> The study cited lack of childcare as a barrier to accessing mental health services. Integrating more mental health services into the school system could provide mental health support to children and help identify parents who need support (and it could be possible to provide this support to parents at school).

<sup>393</sup> PepsiCo (2022) [The story behind PepsiCo's school for displaced Ukrainian children](#), Accessed 27 March 2023.

<sup>394</sup> Habitat for Humanity. n.d. [Introducing Social Rental Agencies in Poland](#), Accessed 27 March 2023.

<sup>395</sup> Habitat for Humanity. n.d. [Introducing Social Rental Agencies in Poland](#), Accessed 27 March 2023.

<sup>396</sup> UNHCR REACH. 2023. [Poland: Multi-sectoral Needs Assessment 2022](#), Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>397</sup> WHO. 2022. [New research reveals how war-related distress affects mental health of Ukrainian refugees in Poland](#), Accessed 26 March 2023.

As the 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 could help mitigate conflict, provide support for psychosocial issues, and tailor pedagogical methods to language learners. There are some indications, primarily from a project conducted by International Alert in Lebanon that focuses on Syrian refugees, that training social services workers (teachers, health workers, etc.) can generate positive community cohesion benefits.<sup>398</sup> Trainings include analysing the context with social services workers, developing and implementing tailored capacity development programmes, accompanying service providers in their work, and raising awareness around the impacts of psychosocial issues and health requirements of refugees.<sup>399</sup> 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.<sup>400</sup>

**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 (see Section 5.4), although it carries risks of social isolation. Making spaces available in schools, libraries, or community centres could facilitate social interaction and bonding among Ukrainian and local students. This approach could also enable parents to work more easily. Individual and pilot programmes of this sort 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 the country ‘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’ and ‘to provide a safe space to connect with the local community’.<sup>401</sup> These would benefit expansion to reach a broader population.

## 5.7 Employment and income

Pressure related to high inflation was one of the top five potential tensions identified. A range of other potential tensions associated with employment and income are possible, including around the distribution of scarce resources between disadvantaged Poles and Ukrainians and fears of rising unemployment, linked to economic concerns—especially in specific regions of Poland. Recommendations for this phase are broad-ranging. They include higher-level macroeconomic approaches and further engagement with multilateral organisations for specific macroeconomic support on imports and exports<sup>402</sup> and approaches to ensure and communicate equity

<sup>398</sup> International Alert. 2020. [Model on integrating conflict sensitivity and social stability into services provision](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>399</sup> International Alert. 2020. [Model on integrating conflict sensitivity and social stability into services provision](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>400</sup> International Alert. 2020. [Model on integrating conflict sensitivity and social stability into services provision](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>401</sup> UNICEF. 2023. [UNICEF launches six Spilno Hubs in five months to support Ukrainian refugees and integration of local communities](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>402</sup> The World Bank has committed to supporting Poland on issues such as the integration of forcibly displaced populations, but it will be highly selective in its support. Currently, only two World Bank projects are active in Poland, both predating 2022. One is on flood management, and the other is on greening residential heating. It is possible that broader efforts focused less on selective issues and more on broader macroeconomic support, including managing inflation and developing import-export opportunities, may be appropriate. World Bank. 2023. [The World Bank in Poland](#). Accessed 29 March 2023; World Bank. 2023. [Projects](#). Accessed 26 March 2023.

in the distribution of resources among Ukrainian and local populations that are in need and to boost labour market participation and entrepreneurship. These programmatic recommendations are explored in more detail below.

**Introduce employment creation programmes with flexible work structures:** Efforts have been made to establish employment creation programmes to support peacebuilding and conflict mitigation initiatives.<sup>403</sup> Although an assessment notes that evidence on the effects of employment creation on peace is inconclusive, it suggests that more focused implementation of good programming practices may increase the effectiveness of employment creation programmes in the context of peacebuilding.<sup>404</sup> Such programmes could address fields 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.<sup>405</sup> One programme in the Czech Republic, for example, integrated language courses into employment placement programmes.<sup>406</sup> 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.<sup>407</sup>

**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 day care centres by Ukrainian refugees which would support both businesses and day care needs, and (3) encouraging businesses to provide day care, 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 this process. One option is for facilitators to meet with groups of refugees to discuss common issues and solutions or to 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, in Romania, the WHO recruited and deployed cultural mediators who raise awareness of health systems among refugee communities.<sup>408</sup> This work builds on the recognised profession of cultural mediation, which has a base in the country. The programme could offer lessons and possibilities for greater effectiveness for other countries and sectors, including employment.

**Increase job advertising in Ukrainian, or offer language and job counselling support programmes to enable refugees to respond to advertisements and interview for jobs:** Support to Ukrainian refugees to access job advertisements could help them enter the labour market. However, advertising and recruitment should be tailored. Information should be available in Ukrainian, 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

<sup>403</sup> Cramer, Christopher, Goodhand, J., and Morris, R. 2016. [Rapid Evidence Assessment for Conflict Prevention](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>404</sup> Cramer, Christopher, Goodhand, J., and Morris, R. 2016. [Rapid Evidence Assessment for Conflict Prevention](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>405</sup> International Alert. 2019. [Consolidating peace through inclusive access to livelihoods in Nepal](#). Accessed 28 March 2023; International Alert. n.d. [Practice note 2: Integrating conflict analysis into peace-conducive economic development programming](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>406</sup> Deutsche Welle. 2023. [Well integrated: Ukrainian refugees in the Czech Republic](#)

<sup>407</sup> Meraki Labs. 2022. [Gender Analysis of Programming in Jordan for Caritas](#).

<sup>408</sup> WHO. 2023. [The crucial role of cultural mediators in Romania's Ukrainian refugee response](#)

work, but only 2,200 employers were on the platform.<sup>409</sup> Tailoring the platform and outreach to different segments (e.g., employers) could support the effectiveness of job advertisement programmes.<sup>410</sup> Counselling and coaching support programmes for Ukrainians looking to respond to job advertisements could also be useful. In Romania, one workshop participant shared the example of an employer in the private sector hosting workshops with Ukrainian refugees to help find job opportunities and prepare for interviews, which can be daunting in an unfamiliar language.<sup>411</sup>

**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 funding innovation labs rather than investing directly in small businesses.<sup>412</sup> 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 'bazaars' to support the export of products and exchange of information.<sup>413</sup> 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.<sup>414</sup>

**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.<sup>415</sup> These benefits in turn can boost the economy.<sup>416</sup> Workshop participants commented that the arrival of Ukrainian refugees, and particularly professionals, can help catalyse such benefits for Polish businesses, which has historically had a more homogenous workforce.<sup>417</sup> To take full advantage of a more diverse workforce or candidate pool, it would be useful to train businesses to work in diverse environments and to identify and address potential bias in recruitment. 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 Polish staff.

**Streamline procedures to recognise qualifications:** Ukrainians have skills that could be useful in the host country labour market; in particular, those with health qualifications would be greatly valued. Ukrainians with other

<sup>409</sup> Romania Insider. 2023. [Jobs for Ukraine: 9,000 users active on recruitment platform launched in Romania for Ukrainian refugees](#)

<sup>410</sup> Romania Insider. 2023. [Jobs for Ukraine: 9,000 users active on recruitment platform launched in Romania for Ukrainian refugees](#)

<sup>411</sup> Bucharest research workshop, 15–16 February 2023. UNHCR REACH survey respondents also identified the lack of employment options or knowledge of employment options, as well as language barriers, as two of the top reasons for livelihood challenges. UNHCR REACH. 2022. [Romania: Multi-sector needs assessment \(December 2022\)](#)

<sup>412</sup> For example, Newman, Arielle Badger, and Christensen, L. J. 2021. [Doing it Right, but Getting it Wrong](#); Bizri, Rima M. 2017. [Refugee Entrepreneurship: A Social Capital Perspective](#); Meister, Alexander Dominik, and Mauer, R. 2019. [Understanding refugee entrepreneurship incubation – an embeddedness perspective](#); and Fong, Rowena, et al. 2007. [Pathways to self-sufficiency: Successful entrepreneurship for refugees](#)

<sup>413</sup> European Commission. 2018. [Policy Guide on Entrepreneurship for Migrants and Refugees](#). Accessed 2 April 2023.

<sup>414</sup> CzechInvest, 2022. Accessed 5 April 2023; Sylvers, Eric, and Papachristou, L. 2022. [From Pizzerias to Tech Startups, Ukrainian Refugees Trickle Into Europe's Labor Market](#)

<sup>415</sup> For example, Brodock, Kate, and Massam, G. 2016. [How and Why to Hire a Diverse Workforce: What You Need to Know](#); Rosenzweig, Philip. 1998. [Managing the New Global Workforce: Fostering Diversity, Forging Consistency](#); Ely, Robin J., and Thomas, D. A. 2020. [Getting Serious About Diversity: Enough Already with the Business Case](#); Moon, Kuk-Kyoung, and Christensen, R. K. 2020. [Realizing the performance benefits of workforce diversity in the US federal government: The moderating role of diversity climate](#)

<sup>416</sup> For example, Brunow, Stephan, and Brenzel, H. 2012. [The effect of a culturally diverse labour supply on regional income in the EU](#); Shaban, Abdul, and Khan, S. 2022. [Cultural diversity, human capital, and regional economic growth in India](#)

<sup>417</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

high-level qualifications could contribute to the labour market, thus supporting both economic growth in Poland and the wellbeing of refugees. Many Ukrainians work in jobs below their qualification level, including due to the complexities of recognising qualifications. Some programmes to support the recognition of qualifications, with the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees are being piloted in Romania.<sup>418</sup> Additional resources to streamline procedures to enable refugees and other immigrants with in-demand skills to enter the host country labour market more quickly would be beneficial.

**Provide education about decent labour conditions, including agency contract risks:** International Alert's studies on business and conflict in East Africa and Nepal<sup>419</sup> point out the importance of appropriate use of outcome-based contracts<sup>420</sup> 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 that considers 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.<sup>421</sup> Educating 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. This is particularly true regarding fissures related to the Volhynia massacre, which the research identified as a top tension. The approaches discussed below, in addition to the cross-cutting measures suggested at the start of this chapter, could be particularly useful.

**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.<sup>422</sup> Dialogues may be organised around sources of tension such as the history of Volhynia, or more broadly about fear of insecurity and war, the refugee experience, and Ukrainian history and culture. The goal would be to develop mutual understanding and mitigate emerging issues. Community dialogue programmes have been used across geographies including the Balkans, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia.<sup>423</sup> 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

<sup>418</sup> Council of Europe. 2022. [European Qualifications Passport for Refugees \(EQPR\) supports Ukrainian refugees' access to job market in Europe](#).

<sup>419</sup> International Alert. 2020. [Business and peace Dossier: It takes two to tango](#). Accessed 29 March 2023; International Alert. 2019. [Consolidating peace through inclusive access to livelihoods in Nepal](#). Accessed 28 March 2023; International Alert. 2022. [Mobilising the Private Sector for Peace: The role of private sector actors in peace and conflict dynamics in Kenya and Somalia A peace and conflict analysis](#). Accessed 29 March 2023; and International Alert. n.d. [Practice note 2: Integrating conflict analysis into peace-conducive economic development programming](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>420</sup> Where an individual is paid a certain amount for a job done, but the wages per hour or day may be very low (often below minimum wage), if the contracts are drawn up in an exploitative manner, and the refugee is not aware how long a task is likely to take.

<sup>421</sup> Chisinau research workshop, 1 March 2023; Prague research workshop, 1–2 February 2023; Bratislava workshop, 7–8 March 2023.

<sup>422</sup> Cramer, Christopher, Goodhand, J., and Morris, R. 2016. [Rapid Evidence Assessment for Conflict Prevention](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>423</sup> Bolton, Laura. 2020. [Lessons from conflict resolution interventions](#). Accessed 29 March 2023; Cramer, Christopher, Goodhand, J., and Morris, R. 2016. [Rapid Evidence Assessment for Conflict Prevention](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.



reliance on volunteers.<sup>424</sup> The literature indicates a slight but positive relationship between community dialogues and the mitigation of local tensions.<sup>425</sup> Dialogues can be accompanied by community efforts to develop and engage in longer-term activities that encourage interaction between Ukrainians and Poles.

**Address tensions through radio and TV programming:** Radio and TV dramas have been used as peacebuilding tools for decades and in many contexts. In general, there is evidence that such dramas can affect attitudes and counteract negative messages,<sup>426</sup> 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.<sup>427</sup> Stabilisation funding might 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.

**Work with the media to avoid spreading incendiary messages:** Quality journalism that does not contribute to the spread of incendiary discourses should be supported. This includes 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.<sup>428</sup> 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.<sup>429</sup> In 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.<sup>430</sup> One participant in the workshop recommended a review of the Polish and Ukrainian school history curricula to ensure a balanced view of how it is taught,<sup>431</sup> particularly in the context of recent changes to Poland’s social studies curriculum.<sup>432</sup> Apart from the curricula themselves, history and/or social sciences education can be used to improve critical thinking and source analysis. A 2021 publication by the OECD that examined digital literacy amongst young people found that only

<sup>424</sup> Bolton, Laura. 2020. [Lessons from conflict resolution interventions](#). Accessed 29 March 2023; Cramer, Christopher, Goodhand, J., and Morris, R. 2016. [Rapid Evidence Assessment for Conflict Prevention](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>425</sup> Bolton, Laura. 2020. [Lessons from conflict resolution interventions](#). Accessed 29 March 2023; Cramer, C. Goodhand, J. and Morris, R. (2016). [Rapid Evidence Assessment for Conflict Prevention](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>426</sup> Cramer, Christopher, Goodhand, J., and Morris, R. 2016. [Rapid Evidence Assessment for Conflict Prevention](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>427</sup> Cramer, Christopher, Goodhand, J., and Morris, R. 2016. [Rapid Evidence Assessment for Conflict Prevention](#). Accessed 28 March 2023.

<sup>428</sup> Pennycook, Gordon, Cannon, T. D., and Rand, D. G. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*. 2018. [Prior exposure increases perceived accuracy of fake news](#)

<sup>429</sup> UNESCO. 2020. [A future we can all live with: how education can address and eradicate racism](#); and Brookings Institute. 2022. [Learning to live together: how education can help fight systemic racism](#)

<sup>430</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>431</sup> Warsaw research workshop, 9 February 2023.

<sup>432</sup> Reporting Democracy. 2022. [Propaganda posing as pedagogy: Poland’s controversial new history textbook](#)



54 percent of students reported receiving training at school to identify bias in information sources.<sup>433</sup> However, the European Commission has recognised the role of education, particularly in source literacy, to combat misinformation.<sup>434</sup>

**Increase opportunities for Ukrainians and Poles to meet and help each other learn languages:** ‘Conversation cafes’ are amongst many approaches to support Poles and refugees to interact.

Table 4 consolidates the lists of incendiary and misleading discourses, underlying challenges, characteristics that can make Ukrainian refugees vulnerable, and tensions at each stage of their journey.

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<sup>433</sup> OECD. 2021. [Twenty-first century readers: developing literacy skills in a digital world](#).

<sup>434</sup> European Commission. 2022. [Commission steps up action to tackle disinformation and promote digital literacy among young people](#).

**Table 4: Summary of key discourses, underlying challenges, characteristics that can make refugees vulnerable, and potential tensions between refugees and host communities**

Journey stage	Discourses about Ukrainian refugees	Underlying challenges	Characteristics that can make Ukrainian refugees vulnerable at the stage of the journey	Potential tensions
Entry, legal status, and registration for services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>They are economic migrants who could plan to stay in the host countries permanently</b></li> <li>• Refugees from western Ukraine and less affected regions are not genuine refugees; the war hasn't really affected them; they don't deserve support</li> <li>• They abuse the benefits system (e.g., cross the border just to get the money)</li> <li>• There is corruption within the support given to Ukrainians</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Historic perception of what a refugee looks like</li> <li>• Rising inflation and uncertainty around EU assistance</li> <li>• Different processes for Ukrainian refugees and TCNs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The elderly and/or people with low digital literacy</li> <li>• TCNs coming from Ukraine</li> <li>• Roma community who are more likely to face discrimination</li> <li>• Unaccompanied children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Differences in welcome and support to refugee or migrant groups not from Ukraine</li> </ul>
Healthcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ukrainians are burdening the health system, taking locals' places</b></li> <li>• They are health and disease risks</li> <li>• They misuse services (unnecessary ambulance calls, emergency room visits, doctors' visits)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overstretched healthcare system</li> <li>• Overstretched social services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elderly people</li> <li>• People with mental health conditions and/or experiencing trauma or PTSD</li> <li>• People with disabilities or chronic health needs</li> <li>• Victims of sexual violence accessing sexual health support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Additional pressures on the health system which already experiences challenges (including long waiting times)</b></li> <li>• Pressures on social services</li> <li>• Differences in how services are used, resulting in perceived abuse (unnecessary ambulance calls, emergency room visits, doctors' visits)</li> </ul>

Journey stage	Discourses about Ukrainian refugees	Underlying challenges	Characteristics that can make Ukrainian refugees vulnerable at the stage of the journey	Potential tensions
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refugees have more or unfair access to housing</li> <li>Ukrainians create a burden on the housing system and take locals' places</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing shortages and high prices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Single mothers with children</li> <li>People on lower incomes, more vulnerable to exploitative landlords</li> <li>Elderly people who may require adapted housing which is limited</li> <li>Roma community who are more likely to face discrimination</li> <li>Residents in collective shelters</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Additional pressures on and rising cost of housing (also in the context of a lack of social housing)</b></li> <li>More support for Ukrainian refugees than other refugee groups, such as more housing options</li> <li>Overcrowding of refugees in apartments and state-run dormitories create pressures on surrounding communities</li> <li>Ukrainian refugees (Roma in particular) seen as undesirable tenants</li> <li>Uncertainty regarding length of stay for Ukrainian refugees in host country, leading to lack of commitment to longer-term contracts</li> </ul>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ukrainians create a burden on the education system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pressures for kindergarten places</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth aged 17-18 face obstacles finalising Ukrainian high school graduation and/or entering Polish universities</li> <li>Children attending online school face risks of isolation</li> <li>Roma children who do not speak Ukrainian or Polish</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Uncertainty regarding length of stay for Ukrainian refugees in host country, leading to poor school attendance, high dropout rates</b></li> <li>Pressure on schools</li> <li>Pressure on kindergartens and available spaces</li> <li>Integration issues in schools and lack of special programmes, resulting in negative social experiences (such as bullying)</li> </ul>

Journey stage	Discourses about Ukrainian refugees	Underlying challenges	Characteristics that can make Ukrainian refugees vulnerable at the stage of the journey	Potential tensions
Employment and income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New arrivals from Ukraine are taking jobs from the local population, are willing to work for significantly lower wages, are destroying the labour market</li> <li>• Ukrainians are rich, drive around in fancy cars and spend their time in malls and cafés while locals work; they're in the host country on holiday; they don't need assistance</li> <li>• <b>Economic challenges and the energy crisis are fuelled by hosting refugees</b></li> <li>• Refugees are supported more financially and get better benefits than the local population</li> <li>• Ukrainians are supported more than other refugees</li> <li>• They don't need help as the language and culture in the host country and Ukraine are similar</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High inflation</li> <li>• Geographic differences in employment rates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mothers lack access to childcare</li> <li>• Ukrainians are often employed in lower-skilled roles than their professional background and qualifications</li> <li>• People who were not economically active prior to arrival in Poland</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>High inflation pressures on host and refugee communities</b></li> <li>• Tensions over distribution of scarce resources between disadvantaged local population and Ukrainians, including poverty among local population</li> <li>• Reduced financial assistance to refugees could lead to more refugees experiencing poverty and the need for the state (or other organisations) to support the vulnerable</li> <li>• Rising inequalities</li> <li>• High and rising unemployment strains host community and Ukrainian refugees and could lead to scapegoating of refugees</li> <li>• Underemployment of refugees, including difficulties with recognition of qualifications</li> <li>• Ukrainian refugees receive more support (such as financial support and labour market access) than other refugee groups, including TCNs from Ukraine</li> <li>• Uncertainty regarding length of stay for Ukrainian refugees in host country, leading to low retention of jobs among refugees</li> </ul>

Journey stage	Discourses about Ukrainian refugees	Underlying challenges	Characteristics that can make Ukrainian refugees vulnerable at the stage of the journey	Potential tensions
Community, social, and political life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Refugees are ungrateful, have high expectations and demands for support and shelter; and they abuse hospitality—they leave messy apartments and are disrespectful; refugees are selective about the types of support that they receive—e.g., they don't want to live in small cities, only want certain types of products</b></li> <li>• They should be in Ukraine, defending their country, not here</li> <li>• Women come to look for husbands and citizenship</li> <li>• They are not really traumatised—they go to cafes and live a nice, normal life</li> <li>• Portray local citizens as not welcoming Ukrainian refugees and refugees are not receiving help on arrival or do not support Ukraine any more</li> <li>• <b>They threaten a country's national identity, culture and social fabric ('Ukrainisation of Poland')</b></li> <li>• Historic tensions or figures (e.g., the Volhynia massacre)</li> <li>• Ukrainian refugees in country create diplomatic tensions between Poland and the EU/other EU countries, as insufficient support is given from the EU</li> <li>• Poland is trying to regain some of Ukraine's territory (e.g., historic Polish claims on Lviv)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language barrier</li> <li>• Trauma</li> <li>• Unresolved historic tensions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People with mental health issues, particularly trauma and PTSD</li> <li>• People who are employed in long-hour jobs</li> <li>• LGBTQIA refugees face housing discrimination</li> <li>• Religious people face challenges accessing their full religious services</li> <li>• Roma</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Historic grievances over Volhynia massacre</b></li> <li>• Negative views of Ukrainians provoked by political discourses and parties</li> <li>• Lack of integration into host society</li> <li>• Language barriers not learning local language (lack of opportunity or difficulty of language)</li> <li>• Differences between Ukrainians' experiences (including origins in Ukraine, pre- and post-war arrivals, level of integration in Poland, etc.)</li> <li>• Lack of understanding of Ukrainian trauma and its consequences</li> <li>• Fear of insecurity and war; refugees seen as making the situation worse</li> <li>• Locals' fatigue with supporting refugees</li> <li>• Expectation of more gratitude from refugees</li> <li>• Individual incidents that harm people (e.g., car crash) framing Ukrainians as a danger to host society</li> <li>• Prior conceptions of Ukrainians as economic migrants (pre-February 2022)</li> <li>• Stereotypes of Ukrainians as 'low-skilled'</li> <li>• Xenophobia and discrimination</li> </ul>

## Annex 1. Acronyms and Abbreviations

Acronym	Meaning
ChatGPT	Chat Generative Pre-trained Transformer
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DMDS	Disinformation, Misinformation, and Dangerous Speech
EU	European Union
EUROSTAT	Statistical office of the European Union
GDP	Gross domestic product
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ID	Identification
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
ILO	International Labour Organization
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRI	International Republican Institute
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Plus
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PESEL	Powszechny Elektroniczny System Ewidencji Ludności
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
TCN	Third-Country National
TP	Temporary Protection



UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
USD	United States Dollar
WHO	World Health Organization

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## Annex 2. Key Statistics

The table below summarises Poland's key economic, political, and demographic factors, and the numbers and characteristics of refugees hosted by Poland.

Type	Characteristic	Poland statistics
Economic factors	GDP/per capita purchasing power parity for 2021, in USD (in thousands)	37.5 <sup>435</sup>
	Inflation, year on year, 2022	13.2% <sup>436</sup>
	Official development assistance eligible?	No <sup>437</sup>
	Regional Refugee Response Plan funding requested for 2022 (USD million)	777.8 <sup>438</sup>
	Regional Refugee Response Plan funding requested for 2023 (USD million)	709.4 <sup>439</sup>
Political factors	Political party in power	Conservative (Law and Justice)
	Next presidential election	2025 <sup>440</sup>
	Next parliamentary election	Autumn 2023 <sup>441</sup>
	Next local election	2024 <sup>442</sup>
Country demography	Total population (million)	37.8 <sup>443</sup>
	Poverty rate	14.8% <sup>444</sup>
	Unemployment rate as of December 2022	Eurostat estimate: 2.9% <sup>445</sup> Statistics Poland: 5.2% <sup>446</sup>
	Size of Russian minority (Russian citizens living in Poland) before 2022	37,030 <sup>447</sup> (2019)

<sup>435</sup> World Bank. [GDP Per Capita Poland](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>436</sup> European Commission. 2023. [Economic forecast for Poland](#). Accessed 2 April 2023.

<sup>437</sup> OECD. 2022. [DAC List of ODA Recipients](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>438</sup> UNHCR. 2022. [Ukraine Refugee Response Plan 2022](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>439</sup> UNHCR. 2023. [Ukraine Refugee Response Plan 2023](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>440</sup> Rzeczpospolita. [Sondaż: Prezydentem po Dudzie Morawiecki lub Trzaskowski](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>441</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. 2022. [Elections](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>442</sup> INFOR. 2022. [Wybory samorządowe w 2024 r.](#) Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>443</sup> World Bank. 2022. [Population – total, European Union](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>444</sup> World Bank. 2022. [Multidimensional poverty headcount ratio - European Union](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>445</sup> Eurostat. 2022. [Euro area unemployment at 6.6%](#). Accessed 24 March 2023. Eurostat explains: 'Eurostat publishes harmonised 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 (ILO). The measurement is based on a harmonised data source, the European Union Labour Force Survey (LFS). Based on the ILO 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'.

<sup>446</sup> Statistics Poland. 2023. [Unemployment rate 1990-2023](#). Accessed 26 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'.

<sup>447</sup> Główny Urząd Statystyczny. 2020. [Populacja cudzoziemców w Polsce w czasie COVID-19](#). Accessed 23 March 2023.

Type	Characteristic	Poland statistics
	Size of Ukrainian minority (Ukrainians living in Poland) before 2022	Ukrainian minority (Polish citizens of Ukrainian descent): 38,797 <sup>448</sup> (2011) Migrant population: 1,351,418 <sup>449</sup> (2019)
Number of refugees hosted <sup>450</sup>	Refugees from Ukraine recorded in Poland as of March 2023	1,577,289 <sup>451</sup>
	Ukrainian refugees hosted as a % of total population	4.1% <sup>452</sup>
	Total refugees hosted in 2022	1,210,582 <sup>453</sup>
	Total refugees hosted in 2021	4,875 <sup>454</sup>
	Total refugees hosted in 2020	2,771 <sup>455</sup>
	Total refugees hosted in 2019	12,658 <sup>456</sup>
Ukrainian refugee demographics	% women and children among Ukrainian refugees	86% <sup>457</sup>
	% refugee households with at least one member with disability	18% <sup>458</sup>
	% refugee households with at least one elderly member	14% <sup>459</sup>
Support received by Ukrainian refugees	Funds received upon arrival/registration	One-time payment of PLN 300 (€64) per individual <sup>460</sup>
	Total funds received per adult/month	No automatic social support payments, but access to means-tested social benefits on par with Polish citizens
	Total funds received per child/month	PLN 500 (€106) <sup>461</sup>
	Total funds received by hosts	PLN 40 (€8.60) per person per day for up to 120 days <sup>462</sup>
Access to services	Employment rate	61% of working-age individuals (November 2022) <sup>463</sup>

<sup>448</sup> Serwis Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, [Mniejszości narodowe i etniczne](#). Accessed 5 January 2023.

<sup>449</sup> Główny Urząd Statystyczny. 2020. [Populacja cudzoziemców w Polsce w czasie COVID-19](#). Accessed 23 March 2023.

<sup>450</sup> UNHCR. 2022. [Refugee Data Finder](#). Accessed 17 March 2023.

<sup>451</sup> UNHCR. 2023. [Refugees from Ukraine recorded across Europe](#). Accessed 30 March 2023.

<sup>452</sup> Author calculation based on available statistics cited within this table. The population of Poland was 41.48 million as of 13 February 2023; 1,577,289 Ukrainians in Poland as of 27 March 2023.

<sup>453</sup> UNHCR. 2022. [Refugee data finder](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

<sup>454</sup> UNHCR. 2022. [Refugee data finder](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

<sup>455</sup> UNHCR. 2022. [Refugee data finder](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

<sup>456</sup> UNHCR. 2022. [Refugee data finder](#). Accessed 29 March 2023.

<sup>457</sup> UNHCR. 2022. [Ukraine Refugee Situation - Operational Data Portal](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>458</sup> UNHCR, REACH. 2022. [Refugees from Ukraine in Poland: Profiling Update \(September 2022\)](#). Accessed 23 March 2023.

<sup>459</sup> UNHCR, REACH. 2022. [Refugees from Ukraine in Poland: Profiling Update \(September 2022\)](#). Accessed 23 March 2023.

<sup>460</sup> Warszawa 19115. 2022. [Jednorazowe świadczenie pieniężne w wysokości 300 zł dla obywateli Ukrainy](#). Accessed 23 March 2023.

<sup>461</sup> [Ustawa z dnia 12 marca 2022 r. o pomocy obywatelom Ukrainy w związku z konfliktem zbrojnym na terytorium tego państwa](#). Accessed 23 March 2023.

<sup>462</sup> OECD Library. 2022. [Rights and Support for Ukrainian Refugees in Receiving Countries](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>463</sup> Kantar Polska. 2022. [Portret Ukraińek i Ukraińców w Polsce](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

Type	Characteristic	Poland statistics
	Total number of total Ukrainian children in Poland enrolled in school	187,405 <sup>464</sup>
Housing used by refugees	% hosted in large cities	70% of refugees reside in the biggest 12 cities (July 2022) <sup>465</sup>
Host population attitude polling	% of host population who believe Russia is not responsible for starting the war (it's NATO or Ukraine)	4% <sup>466</sup>
	% of host population with positive attitudes toward Ukrainian refugees (Spring 2022)	84% believe Poland should receive refugees from Ukraine <sup>467</sup>
	% of host population with positive attitudes toward Ukrainian refugees (Winter 2022)	80% <sup>468</sup>

<sup>464</sup> As of 13 January 2023. UNHCR. 2022. [Ukraine Refugee Situation - Operational Data Portal](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>465</sup> Unia Metropolii Polskich. 2022. [3,4 mln Ukraińców w Polsce. Nowy raport Unii Metropolii Polskich](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>466</sup> GLOBSEC. 2022. [Perception of Ukrainian refugees in the V4](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>467</sup> Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej. 2022. [Polacy wobec wojny na Ukrainie i ukraińskich uchodźców](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

<sup>468</sup> Staniszewski, Roberta. 2023. University of Warsaw. [Społeczna percepcja uchodźców z Ukrainy, migrantów oraz działań podejmowanych przez polskie państwo](#). Accessed 24 March 2023.

## Annex 3. Statistics, Surveys, and Research Reports

Please see the below sources for up-to-date statistics and for deeper dives into the specific subject matter areas.

Subject area	Source	Type <sup>469</sup>	Language	Notes
<b>Statistics</b>				
Number of Ukrainian refugees	<a href="#">Official Open Data (Otwarte dane) website</a> . 2023.	NG	Polish (PL)	Regularly updated with data collected by a number of national and municipal institutions. Takes into account people who left Poland for more than 30 days.
	<a href="#">UNHCR Operational Data Portal</a> .	MLR	English (ENG)	Regularly updated with data for Poland.
	National Statistical Office ( <a href="#">Główny Urząd Statystyczny, GUS</a> ).	PD	PL/ENG	Regularly updated with data from diverse online databases.
Demographics of Ukrainians under TP	UNHCR. 2022. <a href="#">Ukraine situation: Regional protection profiling and monitoring factsheet</a> .	MLR	ENG	Source type is multilateral, but the original data source is aggregated data from national governments. Document is dated December 2022; updated iterations are published quarterly and <a href="#">made available here</a> .
	UNHCR. 2022. <a href="#">Displacement patterns, protection risks and needs of refugees from Ukraine, Regional protection analysis</a> .	MLR	ENG	
	IOM. 2023. <a href="#">Ukraine Returns Report January 2023</a>	MLR	ENG	Report is updated quarterly.
	IOM. 2023. <a href="#">Ukraine Internal Displacement Report January 2023</a> .	MLR	ENG	Report is updated quarterly.
	<a href="#">Official Open Data (Otwarte dane) website</a> . 2023.	NG	PL	
	<a href="#">Union of Polish Metropolises (Unia Metropolii Polskich)</a> .	NGO	PL/ENG	Research reports on Polish municipalities' responses to

<sup>469</sup> AR = Academic research; DR = Donor report; MLR = Multilateral report; MR = Media report; NG = National government; NGO = NGO report; PD = Polling data.

Subject area	Source	Type <sup>469</sup>	Language	Notes
				the arrival of Ukrainian displaced persons and their situation in the 12 largest Polish cities.
	<a href="#">Sytuacja życiowa i ekonomiczna uchodźców z Ukrainy w Polsce</a> (Life and Economic Situation of Refugees from Ukraine in Poland) Polish National Bank. 2022.	PD	PL	
	UNHCR. 2023. <a href="#">Refugees from Ukraine in Poland – Profiling Update (November 2022)</a> .	MLR	PL/ENG	Published January 2023 with findings from November 2022 research. Updated version expected to be <a href="#">made available here</a> .
	<a href="#">Pomagam Ukrainie, support for Ukraine</a> .	NG	PL/UA	Government website with forms of support available to Ukrainian refugees.
	Polish Society’s Assistance to <a href="#">Ukrainian</a> Refugees. 2022.	AR/PD	PL	Report by Polish Economic Institute on Polish society’s support to Ukrainian refugees.
Support for Ukrainians under TP	<a href="#">Union of Polish Metropolises</a> (Unia Metropolii Polskich).	NGO	PL/ENG	Research on Polish municipalities’ responses to the arrival of Ukrainian displaced persons and their situation in the 12 largest Polish cities.
	<a href="#">‘Check, where and what sort of assistance is needed’</a> . 2022.	NG	PL	Government website with forms of support available to Ukrainian refugees.
Access to social services	EU Agency for Fundamental Rights. 2022. <a href="#">Online survey on persons displaced from Ukraine</a> .	MLR	EN	
	OECD. 2022. <a href="#">Rights and support for Ukrainian refugees in receiving countries</a> .	MLR	EN	
Accommodation for Ukrainians under TP	UNHCR. 2023. <a href="#">Poland: Poland Chapter of Ukraine Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan 2023</a> .	MLR	EN	
	EU Agency for Fundamental Rights. 2022. <a href="#">Online survey</a>	MLR	EN	



Subject area	Source	Type <sup>469</sup>	Language	Notes
	<a href="#">on persons displaced from Ukraine.</a>			
Public attitude polling	<a href="#">Centre for Public Opinion Research</a> (Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej).	PD	PL	Public opinion research, including on attitudes regarding the reception of Ukrainian refugees, policy on the Russian war against Ukraine, etc.
	<a href="#">Public Perception and Integration of Refugees from Ukraine</a> , UKREF Research Report. 2022.	PD	PL	
Donor support	<a href="#">UNHCR Operational Data Portal</a> Poland.			
<b>Deeper dives</b>				
	<a href="#">Sytuacja życiowa i ekonomiczna uchodźców z Ukrainy w Polsce</a> , Polish National Bank. 2022.	PD	PL	Study by the Polish National Bank on the life situation of Ukrainian refugees.
Ukrainian refugees' needs; analyses of vulnerabilities	UNHCR. 2022. <a href="#">Displacement patterns, protection risks and needs of refugees from Ukraine, Regional protection analysis.</a>	MLR	ENG	
	UNHCR REACH. 2023. <a href="#">Poland: Multi-sectoral Needs Assessment 2022.</a>	MLR	ENG	Multi-sector needs assessment.
	EU Agency for Fundamental Rights. 2022. <a href="#">Online survey on persons displaced from Ukraine.</a>	PD	ENG	
	<a href="#">Poland: Human rights, needs and discrimination – The situation of Roma refugees from Ukraine in Poland – September 2022.</a>	NGO	PL/ENG	
Examples of discrimination	<a href="#">Let's preserve solidarity with refugees. Discrimination report.</a> 2022.	NGO	PL	Examples of discrimination.
	<a href="#">Report on discrimination of Ukrainians, discourse analysis.</a> Association of Ukrainians in Poland 2018.	NGO	PL	Discourse analysis by the Association of Ukrainians in Poland, showing anti-Ukrainian sentiments in the Polish public sphere.

Subject area	Source	Type <sup>469</sup>	Language	Notes
Pressures on social services	<a href="#">Human Rights, Needs and Discrimination: The Situation of Roma Refugees from Ukraine in Poland, Central Council of German Roma and Sinti</a> . 2022.	NGO	PL	On discrimination against Ukrainian Roma.
	<a href="#">Letter of the Commissioner for Human Rights to the Minister of Health</a> (April 13, 2022); and the <a href="#">Ministry of Health's response</a> (May 12, 2022).	NG	PL	Commissioner for Human Rights raises possible concerns about pressure on the healthcare system.
	<a href="#">Letter from the Commissioner for Human Rights to the Minister of Education</a> (August 2022).	NG	PL	Possible concerns regarding pressure on the education system.
	<a href="#">Poles on The War and Ukrainian Refugees</a> , opinion poll report, CBOS. 2022.	PD	PL	Opinion poll question on problems in accessing public services.
	<a href="#">Wise Europa report</a> . 2022.	NGO	PL	Media reports about pressures on accommodation and social services.
Profile of host communities	<a href="#">Centre for Public Opinion Research</a> (Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej).	PD	PL	Public opinion research, including on attitudes toward reception of Ukrainian refugees, policy on the Russian war against Ukraine, etc.
	<a href="#">Pew Research Centre</a> .	PD	ENG	
	<a href="#">National Statistical Office (GUS)</a> .	PD	PL	
Public attitudes	<a href="#">Pew Research Centre</a> .	PD	ENG	Regular polls on societal issues.
	<a href="#">National Statistical Office (GUS)</a> .	PD	PL/ENG	Wealth of statistical data on Polish society.
	<a href="#">Centre for Public Opinion Research</a> (Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej).	PD	PL	Public opinion research on public opinion on various issues, including attitudes toward reception of Ukrainian refugees, policy on the Russian war against Ukraine, etc.

Subject area	Source	Type <sup>469</sup>	Language	Notes
Tensions between host and refugee communities	<a href="#">Klub Jagielloński</a> . 2022.	NGO	PL	Attitudes and tensions related to access to social services.
	<a href="#">Poles for Ukraine, but Against Ukrainians, Sociological Study Report</a> , Krytyka Polityczna. 2022.	AR/NGO	PL	Research on attitudes of Poles about Ukrainian refugees and narratives around their reception and stay in Poland, based on qualitative interviews.
Disinformation discourses	Hargrave, Karen, Homel, K., and Dražanová, L. 2023. <a href="#">Public narratives and attitudes towards refugees and other migrants: Poland country profile</a> .	NGO	ENG	
	Dražanová, Lenka, and Geddes, A. 2022. Migration Policy Centre, European University Institute, <a href="#">Attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees and governmental responses in 8 European countries</a> .	AR/MR	ENG	
	<a href="#">Ukrainian Refugees: Situation in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania</a> .	NGO	ENG	
	'Stop the Ukrainization of Poland' report, Polish Crown Confederation.	Other	PL	Pamphlet by far-right politician Grzegorz Braun.
	'Boundaries of Hate' <a href="#">'Boundaries of Hate' report</a> . Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights. 2022.	AR/NGO	PL	Report on social media hate speech and disinformation narratives.
	Walter, Jan D. and Klug, T. 2023. <a href="#">Fact Check: How propaganda denigrates Ukrainian refugees</a> .	MR	ENG	Uses examples of fake news to show how to check the sources and truthfulness of various types of information.
	Ukraine Monitor, <a href="#">"Ukrainianization" in pro-Russian propaganda in Romania, Poland, Serbia and Hungary</a> .	NGO	ENG	Disseminates information about Ukraine and describes how ultra-nationalist and radical groups use it to promote objectives compatible with Russian interests.

Subject area	Source	Type <sup>469</sup>	Language	Notes
	The Beacon Project. 2023. <a href="#">HOSTILE NARRATIVE BRIEF WAR IN UKRAINE</a> , Issue 19. February 2022-2023. A Year of Aggression.	NGO	ENG	
	Reppell, Lisa, and Shein, E. IFES. 2019. <a href="#">Disinformation Campaigns and Hate Speech: Exploring the Relationship and Programming Interventions</a> .	NGO	ENG	Describes how recent technology-driven disinformation campaigns exacerbate the problem of hate speech.
	Brady, W. J., Gantman, A., and Van Bavel, J. 2020. Attentional capture helps explain why moral and emotional content go viral. <a href="#">Journal of Experimental Psychology</a> , 149, 746–756.	AR	ENG	
	Feinberg, Matthew, and Willer, R. 2015. <a href="#">From Gulf to Bridge: When Do Moral Arguments Facilitate Political Influence?</a> <i>Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin</i> , 41(12), 1665–1681.	AR	ENG	
Good practice examples	Cramer, Cristopher, Goodhand, J., and Morris, R. 2016). <a href="#">Rapid Evidence Assessment for Conflict Prevention</a> .	DR	ENG	Reacts to a clear policy demand and serves as a foundation for future study.
	Saferworld. n.d. <a href="#">Conflict Analysis, Chapter 2</a> .	DR/NGO	ENG	Address queries such as what conflict analysis is, why it is important, and how to conduct one.
	United Nations. 2016. <a href="#">UN Conflict Analysis Practice Note</a> .	MLR	ENG	
	World Bank. n.d. <a href="#">Conflict Analysis</a> .	MLR	ENG	
	Bolton, Laura. 2020. <a href="#">Lessons from conflict resolution interventions</a> .	DR	ENG	
	Michael Wodzicki, Michael, Pichola, I., and Patorska, J. Monitor Deloitte. 2022. <a href="#">Refugees from Ukraine in</a>	Private sector report	ENG	

Subject area	Source	Type <sup>469</sup>	Language	Notes
	<a href="#">Poland: Challenges and potential for integration.</a>			
	Government Communication Service. 2021. <a href="#">Resist 2: Counter-disinformation toolkit.</a>	NG	ENG	Addresses the topic of disinformation and how to recognise it, address it, and prevent its spread.



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