



# Protection Monitoring Report Poland

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April-June 2023

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# Introduction

This report provides an overview of the protection needs and risks refugees from Ukraine coming to Poland after February 24, 2022 are facing. The data analyzed in this report were collected during the Protection Monitoring (PM) conducted by the IRC in April, May, and June 2023. During this period, the Protection Monitoring Team of the IRC in Poland interviewed a total of 274 adult displaced people in Warsaw and Katowice region. Where justified, the comparisons to the first cycle of the Protection Monitoring (February-March 2023) are provided. The IRC realizes many differences in the result are due to the sampling (please refer to the Methodology section of this report), therefore comparisons should be made cautiously.

It has been over a year since, on February 24, 2022, the war in Ukraine, which started in 2014, escalated. Those displaced were mostly women, children, and the elderly, as men of conscription age were largely prohibited from leaving the country(1). People who remain in Ukraine face significant challenges in daily life, with some 17.6 million persons in the eastern part of the country in need of humanitarian assistance (2). When writing this report, 966,630 refugees from Ukraine were registered in Poland(3).

The past few months have been marked by serious humanitarian concerns. On June 6, an explosion caused significant damage to the hydroelectric Kakhovka Dam on the Dnipro River, located in Kherson oblast in Ukraine (4). The flooding that resulted from the destruction of the dam severely affected around 17,000 people in government controlled part of Kherson oblast and potentially affected more than 42,000 people in the region.(5) Further, at least 28 towns and villages have been in the emergency stage.(6)

In addition to other military activities around Ukraine, this event led to an expectation that the numbers of refugees to Poland would increase. However, this has yet to happen, and the number remains steady. Month to month, the number of people coming to Poland from Ukraine is higher than the number of people leaving for Ukraine by about 50 thousand since February 2023. (7).

The Protection Monitoring Team of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) started operating a year after the war escalation in Ukraine. This is the IRC's second Protection Monitoring report. It provides an overview of the protection needs and risks faced by those who came from Ukraine to Poland after February 23, 2022. The data was collected between (and including) April and June 2023. During this period, the protection monitoring team of IRC in Poland interviewed 274 adult displaced people: 195 in Warsaw, 14 in Rusiec near Warsaw, and 65 in Katowice.

1 UNHCR, 'Multi-Sector Needs Assessment – 2022', accessed 14 July 2023.

2 UN OCHA, 'Ukraine: Humanitarian Response Plan, February 2023', , accessed 14 July 2023.

3 <https://dane.gov.pl/pl/dataset/2715,zarejestrowane-wnioski-o-nadanie-statusu-ukr/resource/49372/table>

4 Médecins du Monde, 'Floods in Ukraine: Destruction of Kakhovka Dam will impact thousands', 13 June 2023, accessed 17 July 2023.

5 Médecins du Monde, 'Floods in Ukraine: Destruction of Kakhovka Dam will impact thousands', 13 June 2023, accessed 17 July 2023.

6 Médecins du Monde, 'Floods in Ukraine: Destruction of Kakhovka Dam will impact thousands', 13 June 2023, accessed 17 July 2023.

7 The only exception was April 2023, when that difference was 106 thousands. Ukrainian in Poland, 'Aktualna sytuacja granicy ukraińsko-polskiej', 11 July 2023, <https://www.ukrainianinpoland.pl/how-many-ukrainians-have-crossed-the-ukrainian-polish-border-since-the-beginning-of-the-war-current-data-pl/>, accessed 14 July 2023.

# Methodology

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From April to June 2023, the IRC has been implementing protection analysis through the Protection Monitoring (PM) of Persons of Concern (PoC) living in Warsaw and Katowice regions covering 274 adult individuals. The individual survey consists of questions allowing data collection at the individual level.

The quantitative data were further contextualized based on qualitative data, collected mainly through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and stakeholder interviews (KIs). The IRC team conducted 6 FGDs and 5 KIs. Secondary information, including social media monitoring, complemented the primary data collection.

The IRC's protection monitoring exercise aims at identifying and analyzing risks and trends relevant to the protection and assistance of affected populations to allow informed decision-making and the design of humanitarian responses.

This protection monitoring analysis is published quarterly and is mainly based on the above-mentioned information but is complemented by the information available through secondary sources.

In addition to the General Protection Monitoring, as of May 2023, IRC conducts Child Protection (CP) monitoring. Selected findings from the CP are presented in this report, complementing the results of the General PM.

The main objective of Child Protection monitoring is to explore the perspective of teenagers from Ukraine (ages 12-17) on their situation in Poland, with a focus on the psycho-social consequences of displacement, perceptions of safety in Poland, support networks (relationships with family members and peer), integration into the Polish society. Much of the research regarding the situation of children from Ukraine in Poland shows the situation either through the lens of the parent's/guardian's perception or the perspective of the service providers. Less attention is paid to the voice of children. Child Protection monitoring follows the children-centered approach and focuses on the data collected directly from children.

In May 2023, 19 individual interviews with refugees from Ukraine aged 12-17 were conducted. In the final sample, 12 girls and 7 boys participated in the individual interviews, 11 participants aged 12-14, and 9 participants were 15-17 years old.

Each interview is preceded by the consent expressed by the child's guardian. The guardian also completes the demographic data, including age, gender, household composition, disability, or chronic illness of the child. Before the interview starts, the child is also asked to confirm one's consent to participate.

The interview occurs in public spaces, and parents/guardians are absent. The preference is for the interviews to be conducted by two interviewers – one conducting the interview and the second taking notes. Since the interviews are not recorded, the quotes in this report are based on notes and may not be the precise words used by the interviewee. Moreover, all quotes and notes are translated into English from Ukrainian or Russian, depending on the language of the interview.

# Limitations

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## General PM

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

## CP Monitoring

- Convenience sampling and the small number of participants: qualitative research generally does not aim to obtain representative sampling. The selection of participants depends on the availability and particular characteristics of the respondent (e.g., age, nationality, specific experiences). Since the aim is to obtain a more in-depth perspective and individual experience, the results should never be generalized to the total population of teenage refugees from Ukraine. Considering technical limitations, such as limited access to the population and time constraints associated with the interview duration and non-automatized report production (notes from each interview must be structured and translated before putting them into the pre-designed template), as well as the need to obtain a guardian's consent, the number of participants is small.
- Greater interviewer effect and social desirability effect: qualitative research, often semi-structured, is more prone to the interviewer's effect, which is difficult to mitigate. While the key principle of conducting qualitative interviews is neutrality, the effect of the biases a specific person (the interviewer) brings to the interview cannot be overcome completely. Moreover, in qualitative research conducted by adults with children, the social desirability effect – the tendency to present one's behaviors and thoughts favorably- might have a greater impact on the answers provided by the interview.
- Lower degree of cross-interview comparability than in quantitative research: considering the interviewer effect and social desirability effect, but also the space and surroundings changing from interview to interview, the comparability of results in qualitative research is generally lower than in quantitative research, where questions and answers are more standardized and cover topics on the more general level.

# Protection trends & highlights

## Amendments to the Special Act

There was a change in the Polish legislation that was supposed to affect those who arrived in Poland after fleeing Ukraine upon the escalation of the conflict. The Polish government introduced a Special Act on March 12, 2022, on assistance to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the conflict on the territory of that state. The aim was to provide the specific legal regulation and a legal basis for legal stay in Poland and a number of rights for the Ukrainian citizens fleeing the hostilities in their country. Ukrainians who fled the conflict could obtain temporary protection in Poland, confirmed by a special security number, PESEL UKR, and receive social benefits, use public medical services, work, and study at Polish schools and universities.(8)

The subsequent amendment to the Act (fully in force as of 1 March 2023) provided, among all, that after 120 days from their arrival in Poland, the refugees are to cover the cost of their stay in collective accommodation in the amount of 50% (not more than 40 PLN per day), and after 180 days - in the amount of 75% (not more than 60 PLN per day).(9) However, as of now (mid-July), these payments are not collected. Additionally, a subsequent amendment prolonged the legal stay and all the benefits that were supposed to apply to people with PESEL UKR until August 23 this year, to March 4, 2024.

## PESEL UKR status termination

According to the information provided by the Office of the Ombudsman, there are numerous complaints submitted by refugees from Ukraine regarding the termination of the PESEL UKR status (and all benefits associated with this status). (10)

According to the Special Act (art.4.sp. 17a), the temporary protection (status PESEL UKR) is terminated after 30 days outside Poland. However, there are cases where temporary protection has been terminated where refugees never left Poland and where they return within the 30-day period. In such cases, refugees often find out about the termination of status when the benefits are suspended. The reasons for the unjustified change of status from UKR to NUE (non-European Union resident) can be improper registration of border crossing in the respective system. E.g., there were cases when the Border Guards registered only the date when the person left Poland but not the date when the person re-entered the jurisdiction. When a refugee from Ukraine uses an app Diia.pl, Border Guards often do not stamp the refugee's passport, making it hard to prove that the stay outside of Poland was shorter than 30 days. Another identified issue is renewing the status instead of resuming, which means that PESEL UKR is registered with the new date, and a person is not eligible for benefits for the time when the PESEL UKR status was terminated. In addition, sometimes neither the person nor social services are informed timely about the status termination, which leads to a continuation of social benefits payments. There are cases when social services are informed about the person's status lost months after PESEL UKR was terminated and then request a refugee to reimburse all amounts paid "unreasonably". While the active or inactive status of PESEL UKR could be checked in Diia.pl, not all Ukrainian refugees have the application installed. Some do not use the application because they do not have smartphones or lack digital literacy, while for children of the age below 14 Diia.pl is not available.

Representatives of the local governments (gmina) dealing with the termination and renewal of PESEL UKR status claim that they did not receive specific guidelines on how to solve these cases and, therefore, there is no consistent approach throughout Poland.

8 Ustawa z dnia 13 stycznia 2023 r. o zmianie ustawy o pomocy obywatelom Ukrainy w związku z konfliktem zbrojnym na terytorium tego państwa oraz niektórych innych ustaw (Dz.U. 2023 poz. 185).

9 Footnote as above.

10 <https://bip.brpo.gov.pl/pl/content/rpo-pelnomocnik-uchodzcy-ukraina-status-ukr-utrata-wyjazd-ponowne>

# Key demographics



## Gender

Females constitute 91% of the survey participants. Among the male participants (9%), the largest groups are men aged 35-49 (39%).



## Age

The largest age cohort is 35-49 (46%), followed by the respondents who are 25-34 (16%). A quarter of the participants are older than 60.



## Date of arrival

Unlike the first cycle of Protection monitoring, where the majority of the participants were “new arrivals” being in Poland for six months or less, the second cycle of Protection Monitoring covered respondents who primarily arrived at the beginning of the conflict - 7% in February and 49% in March 2022.



## Education

60% of participants have a higher education (BA, MA, or specialization), and another 23% have a technical/vocational education.



## Main activity before leaving Ukraine

57% of participants were employed before leaving Ukraine, 18% were retired, and 11% were engaged in full-time unpaid care work in the home.

### Protection Monitoring Q1 vs. Q2

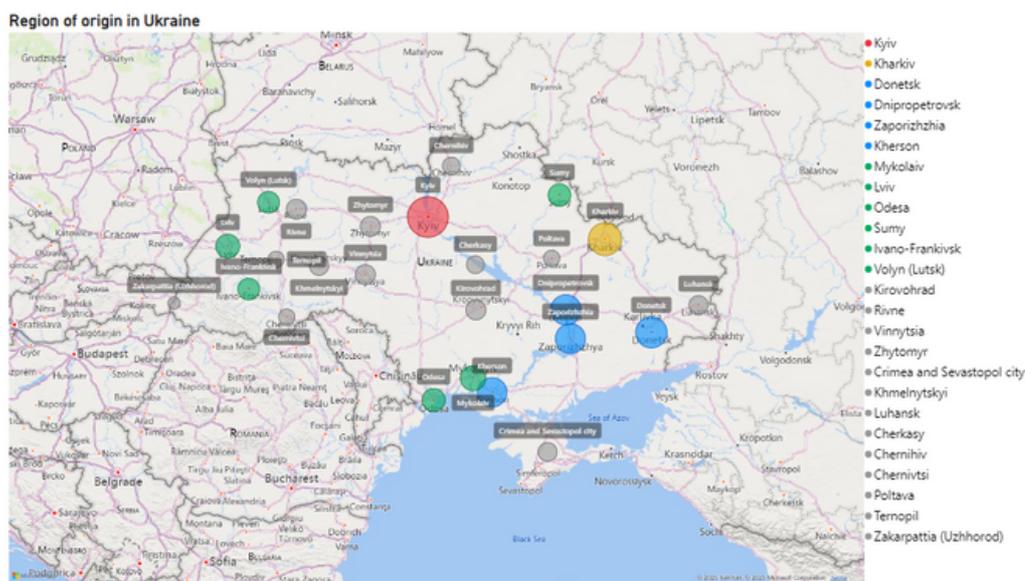
Protection monitoring is a continuous research endeavor aiming to show the growing and stable trends in the population of concern. However, it does not mean that sample in each round of the PM is the same and therefore the results are directly comparable. While showing similar demographic structure in terms of age and gender, the key difference in the sample of Q1 and Q2 of the IRC PM are the following:

- Unlike the first cycle of Protection monitoring, where the majority of the participants were “new arrivals” being in Poland for six months or less, the second cycle of Protection Monitoring covered more respondents who arrived at the beginning of the conflict;
- Unlike the first cycle, where most of the participants were coming from the regions close to the frontline – Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Kharkiv, and Dnipro, this cycle covers a wider representation of the regions of origin, including almost all regions of Ukraine.



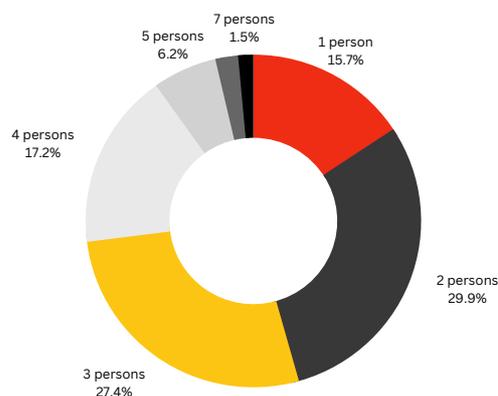
## Region of origin in Ukraine

20% of participants are from the Kyiv region, the most represented in the second cycle of the Protection Monitoring. Unlike the first cycle, where most of the participants were coming from the regions close to the frontline – Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Kharkiv, and Dnipro, this cycle covers a wider representation of the regions of origin, including almost all regions of Ukraine.



## Household composition

The average surveyed household size is 3 people (the maximum household size is 7).



60% of participants are accompanied by at least one adult, and 65% by one child. Among the single households (16% of all households), 58% are participants older than 60. While in this sample, the number is not sufficiently high to speak of the risks to the population, the number and prevalence of single households consisting of 60+ refugees deserve closer monitoring in the future. Currently, the needs of elderly refugees, to a large extent, are being addressed by the Polish government program (free accommodation and provision of basic needs). In case of the program's scaled down, this group of refugees will be at greater risk of being unable to meet their basic needs and might consider returning to Ukraine, despite it not being safe. The household size should not be considered as the only factor influencing the decision to stay in Poland or return to Ukraine but combined with age and low income (mostly pension), it can be an important contributing factor for premature returns.

Below is the quote from one of the FGD participants exemplifying this risk: “I am old and I have a disability, so even when I try to apply for a job, the first question is, how old are you? When they hear my age, they are not interested to hear about anything else. If I have no free housing, I must return to Ukraine”. (FGD participant, female, 60+, Warsaw). (11)

In non-single households, the participants typically reported being accompanied by partners (37%), children (27%), or parents (18%). Those who are accompanied by children (younger than 18 years old) are most often accompanied by their biological children (87%) or grandchildren (11%). When one of the household members is not the participant’s biological child, in 9 out of 10 cases, the child’s legal guardian is in the same household as the child.

23% of households include at least one person with a disability, and 39% at least one person with a chronic illness (not necessarily the respondent).



## Psychosocial well-being of the refugees from Ukraine

32% of participants indicated that they noticed a negative change in the behaviors of the adult members of the household since they arrived in Poland, and 9% noticed a positive change. At the same time, 44% noticed a negative change in children, and 12% a positive change in children. While 41% of all participants noticing the change in their household members (children or adults) mentioned that the person receives only informal support from family or friends, 29% reported that the person receives professional help, and 16% pointed out that the person receives help from volunteers not specialized in the psychological help.



*Photo: Karolina Jonderko for the IRC*

11 Since the FGDs are not recorded, all quotes in this report are based on the notes taken during the FGD or household surveys (protection incidents). They may not be using the exact words participants used. However, IRC puts much effort into creating detailed notes and believes that this report’s quotes accurately reflect what respondents said.

## Insights from the CP monitoring: adolescents on psychological wellbeing



Any sudden dramatic event, such as the conflict in Ukraine, negatively impacts the well-being of adults and children. The interviewees participating in the Child Protection monitoring activities had to deal with both experiencing war in Ukraine (some interviewees spent a few months in the non-government-controlled areas (-NGCA-) or the areas affected by the shelling), and the consequences of displacement.

One of the typical patterns that appear from identified during the analysis of the interviews is eating disorders problems. For example, a 15-year-old girl from Warsaw mentioned that she had lost weight since she arrived in Poland because “she forgets to eat.” At the same time, a 12-year-old boy from Katowice pointed to the opposite problem – he stress-eats and gains weight. Other health-related issues mentioned by participants are sleeping problems (insomnia), fatigue, and anxiety. The anxiety is more often mentioned by older participants, especially those who are actively following the news covering the war in Ukraine:



*I think I'm more mature now and more connected to the Ukrainian context than when I was in Ukraine. I monitor all the apps with shelling alarms for my region and often wake up at night to check the status. I'm scared of planes and helicopters; I get very anxious when I hear a plane or helicopter approaching. My parents put me on sleeping pills when the war started because I could not sleep. I also often think about how Poland may not be a safe country; Russia may attack Poland or other EU countries.*

**Female, 17 Siedlce**

*We have the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. Knowing that they can destroy it at any moment makes me very scared. I also realize that I can die anytime. It makes me anxious. I feel slightly calmer in Ukraine. I can't explain why. I noticed no stray cats on the streets in Poland, so I can't pet any cats here to relax (Female, 15, Warsaw).*

**Female, 15 Siedlce**



It is worth noting that, besides of all the points mentioned above, some participants reported that their psychological and physical health improved after moving to Poland, e.g., they started eating healthier food, doing sports, and sleeping better.

# Type of entry, short- and long-term intentions

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*My neighbor in the shelter is young man 25 years old. He escaped from Mariupol through Russian border. In Russia he was interrogated and tortured. None knows what happened to him. But now he is not alright. He needs psychological aid.*

**Focus Group Participant, Female, 18-59, Warsaw**

*I'm from Zaporizhzhia oblast. The only road to leave the town to Ukraine was closed, so to get to Warsaw, we had to travel to Crimea to cross the border to Russia and then to Latvia. My sister, husband and I, knew we would have a border crossing on foot, so we took only one bag with warm clothes for each person. The border crossing into Russia was relatively easy. They checked every piece of our things, but they didn't make us wait for too long, only three hours. They allowed me to enter with the Ukrainian internal passport. But leaving Russia for Latvia was not so easy, we waited for twelve hours. There was no obvious reason for waiting so long, the border guard would mock us saying be happy it's not raining. Everyone was waiting there outside - old people, children. And then they just decided they had enough of us and would let us cross the border. Once we crossed the border, we were exhausted but were relieved to be in Latvia.*

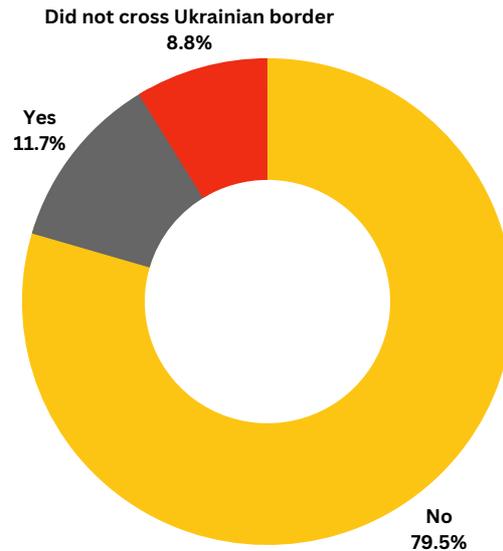
**Focus Group Participant, female, 60+, Warsaw**



As indicated in the first cycle of the Protection Monitoring, approximately 10% of respondents, primarily residents of non-government-controlled territories, still use the alternative routes to arrive in Poland. Out of those surveyed in the second cycle of the PM, who did not travel through the Ukrainian-Polish border, almost all participants reported using the “Baltic route” instead – Russia-Latvia-Lithuania-Poland or Russia-Estonia-Latvia-Lithuania-Poland. One person traveled via Russia-Belarus and Lithuania.

Five in eight participants reported incidents at the Russian border, including long waiting times and interrogation focused on the relations to the Ukrainian army and attitude toward the war.

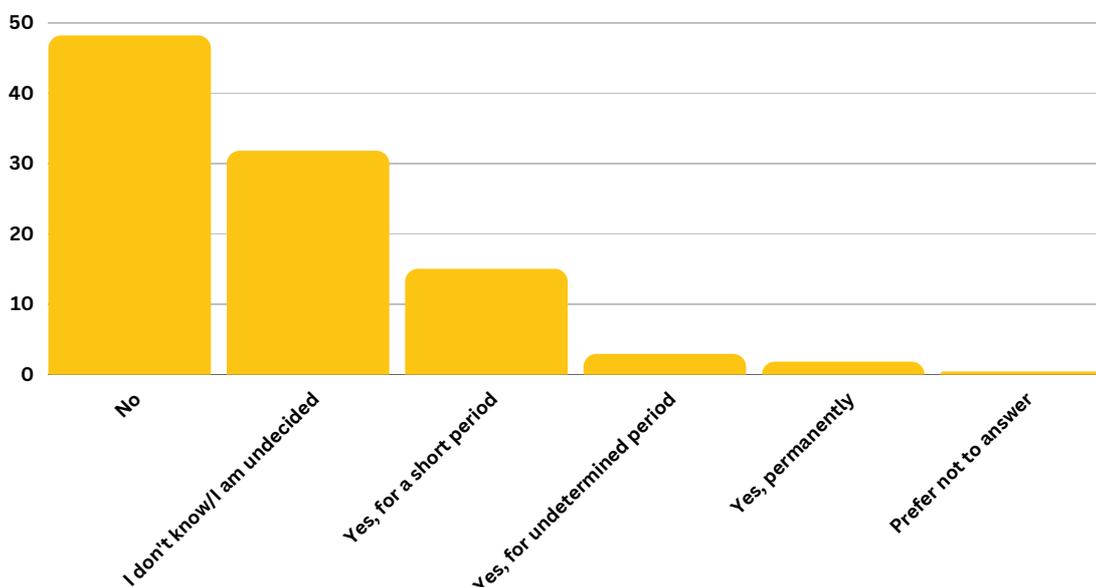
## Have you face the issues while crossing the Ukrainian border?



Among those crossing the official Ukrainian-Polish border, 12% of respondents reported incidents at the Ukrainian border, mostly difficulties due to martial law (despite having the required documentation, male respondents were subject to additional checks), and 2% at the Polish border. The incidents at the Polish border included long waiting times, lack of translation services, and negative attitudes toward people crossing from Ukraine.

67% of participants reported that they have never returned to Ukraine since they arrived in Poland, 18% visited once, 13% 2-4 times, and 1% mentioned visiting Ukraine frequently – over 5 times. The main reasons to travel back to Ukraine are the same as indicated in the first cycle of the PM – visiting family/friends (36%) and accessing healthcare (27%). 24% of participants reported difficulties associated with their trip to Ukraine. Among them, the commonly cited one is that benefits were suspended/terminated (62%), and temporary protection status was revoked (28%) upon return to Poland.

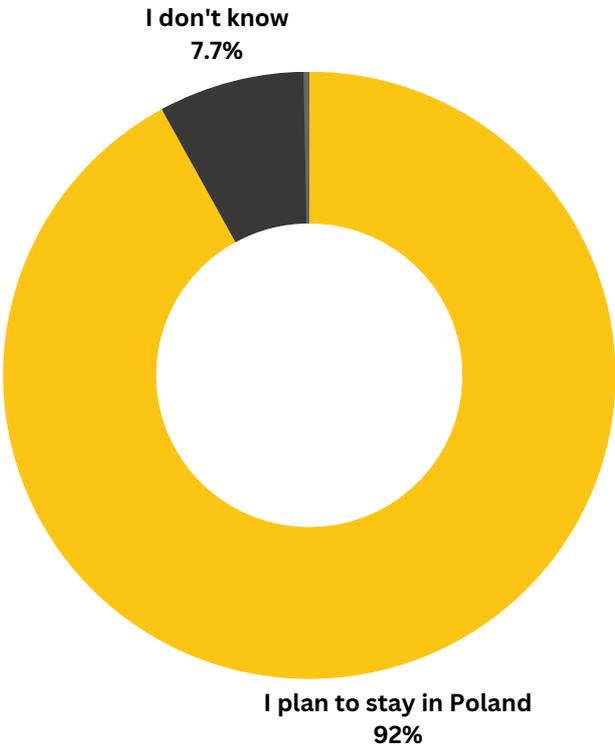
## Do you plan to go back to Ukraine in the next 3 months?



48% of participants reported not planning to go to Ukraine in the next 3 months, and 32% did not know/were undecided. At the same time, 15% of participants said they plan to visit briefly, 3% for an undetermined time, and 2% permanently. The key reason for the permanent return remains the will to reunite with the family in Ukraine.

92% of participants plan to stay in Poland for 3 months, and 8% are undecided about their plans for the next 3 months.

**Within the next 3 months, do you plan to stay in Poland or move somewhere else?**



## Insights from the CP monitoring: uncertainty and premature transition to adulthood



Considering that many adult participants of the Protection Monitoring activities did not have a clear vision of their future – in Ukraine, Poland, or a different country- it can be assumed that this adults' uncertainty might impact children's motivation to learn the language and integrate.

Losing their “whole world” is a typical narrative, especially among the children who lived in the villages and small towns before arriving in Poland. The quotes below illustrate how the routine of two child participants, one 12-years-old girl and one 14-years-old girl, has changed:



*We lived in a village in Ukraine, and I had many friends. I have spent most of my time outside with friends. Now we live in this sleepy small town, and nothing is happening here. I don't have friends and rarely spend time outside.*

**Female, 14, Siedlce**

*I was more comfortable in my home in Kherson. I used to live closer to nature, in a private house. My life was much more fun and more adventurous. Also, our apartment here is not so nice because we have loud neighbors who do not listen to us when we say something about their behavior. That's why I sleep less here because they wake me up around 7 am, usually, I go to bed around 12 pm. But this time is enough for me, in Ukraine I used to sleep more hours, from 12 pm till 11 am.*

**Female, 12, Warsaw**



Some of the interviewees graduated from middle or high school in Poland. The decision about where and how to continue their education would have been difficult in Ukraine anyway, but being outside their home country makes it more difficult and requires taking more responsibility for the decision:

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*I used to be happier. Now, I have many responsibilities and decisions about my future. All this affected me so much. I became less communicative, less confident, more closed, and sadder.*

**Female, 14, Siedlce**

Another participant, a 17-years-old from Siedlce, explained that when she talks to adults about her problems, she feels like an additional burden to people who already have a lot on their plate:

*First, I always try to solve all my problems myself. I don't want to be a burden to my parents. If I can't, I contact my mother, but she is in Ukraine, so if there is anything that requires support in Poland, I will ask my boyfriend's mother, who is also my legal guardian, to help me*

**Female, 17, Siedlce**

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Moreover, 3 participants – aged 15 to 17, specifically mentioned that they feel responsible for not only their financial situation but that of their parents:

”

*I'm looking for a job and planning to work in the summer. So, I need more information about job offers and human rights. And not less important – about social activity in the city.*

**Male, 15, Warsaw**

*I'm done with school now, so I plan to start working full-time to make money for myself and make it easier for my parents to move to Poland.*

**Female, 17, small town in Mazovian voivodship**

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# The situation in the host country

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Considering that a lot of the participants in this cycle of PM arrived in Poland at the very beginning of the conflict, geographic proximity to Ukraine being the most common reason to select Poland as a destination country is not surprising – 39% of respondents mentioned that to be the main factor behind coming to Poland, while 37% of participants selected having family or friends in Poland. Interestingly, around 5% of participants in this cycle of Protection Monitoring recalled that they either did not think about the destination country's choice at all (e.g., the volunteers at the bus/train station offered transportation to Poland) or initially planned to go to another country but ended up staying in Poland.

The positive perception of acceptance in the host community remains high - 88% of participants indicated they feel completely accepted (40%) or mostly accepted (48%) by the local community.

At the same time, 35% of respondents experienced tensions/conflicts within the Ukrainian community. The umbrella term “cultural differences” was cited as the most common source of conflicts and tensions. Participants of the FGD and key informants mentioned different sources of the conflicts among refugees in Poland, such as conflicts stemming from the language spoken/regional differences or unequal access to humanitarian aid (refugees who arrived at the beginning of the conflict had access to more unconditional humanitarian aid options, while now they are scaled down and targeting mostly to the most vulnerable groups). At the same time, both participants of the survey and participants of the qualitative research mentioned that tensions are caused by protracted stress and lack of stability (e.g., income, employment, housing), which results in conflicts between refugees from Ukraine, especially in the collective accommodation sites.

**While over 90% of participants reported feeling either very safe or safe in Poland, some FGD and household survey participants reported protection incidents, mostly focusing on work-related issues (labor market exploitation) and discrimination.**

## **Work-related issues:**

Labor market exploitation was indicated as one of the protection threats associated with the low level of employment among refugees from Ukraine. The results of the second round of PM revealed that 55% of participants experienced at least one form of labor market discrimination. 14% of that mentioned that they receive a lower salary than Polish employees, work in different conditions than Polish employees (e.g., different working hours, different working tools), or work in conditions other than initially agreed with the employer. Participants also mentioned negative attitudes toward employees from Ukraine, as well as serious legislation violations such as not reporting of accidents at work or non-providing medical assistance to an injured employee. 10% of participants mentioned working without a contract. A case having signs of human trafficking was reported.

Be it low salary, unfavorable working conditions, or mistreatment, they can be a reason for the refugees to feel unsafe and turn from the legal employment option to cover their needs. The quotes below describe the stories of the two FGD participants who are employed in Poland:

”

*I want to work officially, but no employers want to sign a contract. Soon after I arrived in Poland and did not understand Polish well, I got a cleaning job at the hospital. They gave me a civil contract to sign in Polish. When I learned Polish better, I read it and realized that my responsibilities differed from what was mentioned in the contract. This contract could have been a blank sheet of paper.*

FGD participant, female, 60+, Warsaw

*I clean the office spaces. I feel humiliated. I'm not allowed to clean the offices during the day, only at night when employees are already gone. None must see me. Cleaning a huge office space is limited to only a few hours. Moreover, the chemicals employer provides are toxic, and one of my colleagues burned her face while cleaning. No medical help was provided. I receive 16 PLN per hour, although I was promised 18 PLN per hour. The manager treats us like dirt. He finds pleasure in humiliating Ukrainian staff.*

FGD participant, female, 18-59 years old, Warsaw

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*I was injured at work. None offered me any help. Only later I found out that the employer was responsible for taking me to the hospital, but that day I went alone. Only in the fourth hospital I received medical help while I was bleeding all the time, and doctors did not want to help me.*

Survey participant, additional comments, male, 18-59, Warsaw

*One of the employers offered me higher pay if we did not sign the contract. I accepted, and immediately, they started cutting the payment, complaining about the quality of my work, and giving me the most difficult tasks.*

**Survey participant, additional comments, female, 18-59, Warsaw**



*I was hired to work in a resort in one of the tourist towns on the Baltic seashore. I was supposed to work as a waiter, but I did everything – cleaned dishes, cleaned the restaurant, helped with the food preparation, and cleaned the hotel rooms and the resort’s territory. The employer took my passport. My contract stated that I’m a student and my official hourly rate is 22 PLN, while I received 11 PLN and was not a student. Moreover, later I found out that the employer received the money for housing from the government program, and I never received the money from him. The work hours were crazy, and rarely, I worked less than 12 hours. I always received my salary in an envelope, never as a bank transfer. I was allowed to take one day off per month. I worked like that for four months, and the employer repeated multiple times that if I resigned before the end of the contract, I would not be paid anything. The employer gave me the passport back a week after I finished work.*

**Survey participant, additional comments, female, 18-59, Warsaw**

Additionally, results of monitoring the social media posts related to job offers (Facebook and Telegram are mentioned as the key sources of information) showed that many adverts openly offer a salary below the minimum wage (hourly rate below 22.10 PLN). Moreover, as mentioned by the key informant, a lawyer working with the refugees in Poland, the cases of fraudulent schemes when refugees are “hired” to conduct illegal activities became more frequent. One of the schemes involved searching for divers to transport refugees attempting to cross the Polish-Belarus border from Poland (if they managed to cross) to other European countries, which ended up with the driver crossing a restricted border area and being arrested. Another popular scheme is paying the person to open a bank account in their name and receiving payments for online transactions. Once the payment is wired to the account, the “employer” asks the person to transfer the money and close the bank account. However, the payment received by the “employee” is for the service or good, which is never delivered to the end client, and they are being accused of fraud.

## **Discrimination:**

Another issue that makes the participants feel unsafe is perceived discrimination, especially against children reported both by children and adults. Respondents mentioned different scenarios, ranging from open discriminatory comments to the generalized feeling of discrimination, arising from real or presumed hostile attitude or behavior of the host community. This perception is often linked to a lack of proficiency in Polish language, making respondents feel even less safe and welcome in Poland.

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*The doctor taking care of my pregnancy was very indifferent to me. He told me once: "You Ukrainians are getting too much help here". I wish I could afford another doctor but have no money for private health care.*

Survey participant, additional comments, female, 18-59, Warsaw

*People of my age (around 19 years old) all hate Ukrainians. They hated us even before the war started. People who are after 40 don't care. I work with Polish people of this age, and they don't bother about me being Ukrainian.*

Survey participant, additional comments, male, 18-59, Warsaw

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*I feel that some Poles are aggressive, and the longer we (Ukrainians) are here, the more hostile they become.*

Survey participant, additional comments, female, 18-59, Warsaw

*My child is bullied at school. Classmates openly say: "Go back to Ukraine.*

Survey participant, additional comments, female, 18-59, Warsaw

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*My son has special education needs. He is bullied at school; it's probably both because he is special and because he is Ukrainian. I heard Polish children screaming, "Don't play with the Ukrainian" on the playground more than once.*

FGD participant, female, 18-59, Warsaw

### **Risk in focus (1): Labour market exploitation**



#### **Threat to the population:**

Most refugees reported experiencing at least one form of labour market exploitation in Poland, with lower wages than local employees receive (and potentially lower than minimum wage) being the most common.

#### **(Potential) effect of the threat:**

Refugees might experience psychological and physical trauma and lose the ability to work. They may develop negative coping mechanisms and avoid employment being threatened by the possibility of the negative experience repeating. They may also require more assistance to help them navigate the Polish labor market, considering previous negative experiences.

#### **Capacity to address the risk:**

The risk could be minimized by bidirectional actions, targeting both employers and employees. Broad awareness raising campaign, led by Polish government, highlighting the employers' responsibilities and liability for their non-fulfillment, as well as inspections of employers for compliance with labor legislation might be possible methods to address the issue. On the other hand, rising awareness about employees' rights and ways to report the cases of labor market exploitation is of high importance. The information must be provided in the language refugees understand. Moreover, they should have the possibility to report incidents in their language, as well as receive needed legal support. On top of this, psychological help and assistance with finding a decent employment must be provided to the survivors of the labor market exploitation.

## Insights from the CP monitoring: perception of safety



Like in the General Protection Monitoring case, most participants feel safe in Poland. Perceptions and definitions of safety greatly varied among the participants. Many participants pointed to physical safety: safe streets, no drunk people around, no stray dogs on the streets, and respect for personal space. Others focused on the fact that safety depends on knowing that all your loved ones are safe. Participants also mentioned that their feeling of safety depends on the environment, especially people around them, thus, sense of discrimination and exclusion from community affect some of participants' perception of safety.

One of the themes which appeared in a few interviews is parental neglect, described by the participants as limited contact with parents and adults and support from them in general. One of the interviewees (a 14-year-old girl) mentioned that the person she can rely on if she needs help is not her mother but her sister, who is the same age as her. She also mentioned that some situations make her feel uncomfortable or even unsafe, but she will not mention them to the mother not to worry her:



*I guess I feel safe most of the time, it's a small town, and life is safer here than in a big city. Sometimes when I go to the park, adults talk to me. One guy says, "You are pretty". He is old, probably in his forties. I did not feel comfortable. Other times, some guys took pictures of me and my sister and laughed. You could hear them saying that we are pretty girls. I don't tell anyone about it, my mother will be worried and will not allow me to go to the park.*

**Female, 14, Siedlce**

At the same time, not reporting of harassment cases by children not only to parents, but also to other adults indicates not only lack of trust to the adults, but also lack of knowledge of different types of violence and awareness about possible reporting mechanisms. In its turn, this ignorance might heighten protection risks.

Another participant, a 15-year-old girl from Warsaw, said that, based on her experience, she cannot rely on adults in any difficult situation. She also mentioned that her mother works long hours in Poland, and her mood is often unstable to discuss matters that bother the girl.

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*I never feel safe. I have never felt safe in my life. I was bullied at school in Ukraine, and teachers would do nothing about it. I realized how bad people could be back then, so I always felt in danger and couldn't rely on anyone. I must be strong myself and not dependent on anyone. I can't afford to be weak.*

**Female, 15, Warsaw**

A 12-year-old boy from Katowice explained that although he can discuss any matters that bother him with his mother, she is often unavailable. She is always at home but works remotely for around 18 hours daily and has no time for the boy. The same participant also added that he does not understand his legal status in Poland, making him feel unsafe: “Safety means stability - when you are sure that tomorrow you will not be expelled from the country. I don't feel safe in Poland”. Two participants mentioned access to healthcare and its quality as a concern, which does not make them feel safe (see more in “Medical services” chapter).

One of the recurring themes in the interviews is the sense of isolation, which can stem from different factors. While none of the interviewees mentioned cases of bullying or openly negative attitude toward them from their Polish peers, some mentioned that Polish classmates do not want to communicate with them or limit the communication to the bare minimum:

*“I attend a Polish school. There are six other Ukrainian children in our school, there is also a girl from Belarus who arrived a few years back, and we don't have much contact... . We don't have any contact with Polish children. They ignore our presence at school. This is the second school I attended. First, I went to a different one here in Siedlce. On the first day, all the Polish children were super excited that Ukrainian children were now their classmates. They asked about our Instagram pages and started following us. But it quickly vanished. They did not care about us anymore after a few weeks.”*

**Female, 14, Siedlce**

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Another 14-years-old participant has a similar experience with the Polish classmates:

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*We don't communicate with Polish classmates, but they also don't communicate much with each other. The reason why it's hard to get along with Polish students is not a language barrier but a different mentality and culture.*

**Female, 14, Katowice**

The solution participants see are structured integration events for Polish and Ukrainian children to bring them together and get to know each other better: Another participant points to the need to master the Polish language to be accepted by their Polish peers:

*I had first to protect [personal] my boundaries in front of Polish classmates. They were rude, teasing me. Because of my poor Polish, they will not accept me. Poles love their country. At first, I felt they feared someone would take their country from them. But now that my Polish language improved, my Polish classmates, are nice to me. Some Ukrainian students don't make enough effort to learn Polish, and some say bad things about Poland or Polish classmates. I don't understand how they say they want to live in Poland, but they don't want to learn Polish and befriend locals.*

**Male, 13, Warsaw**

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While knowledge of local language is definitely removing communication barriers, it might not be solution to all the problems of Ukrainian children connected with exclusion from the host community as this exclusion sometimes has another, more deep and less obvious roots.



04 August 2022. Ukrainian Cultural Center, Warsaw Poland. Valentyna Melnyk, a refugee from Ukraine, works in a bar in Ukrainian Cultural Center and also runs classes for children.  
Photo: Anna Liminowicz for the IRC

# Access to documentation and procedures

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## Documentation and social benefits

82% of participants have all the civil documentation, 17% do not have an international passport, and 1% do not have an ID card/internal passport. Close to 80% of participants said they could obtain or renew all documents in Poland.

All respondents reported having PESEL UKR status, and 14% of participants had to re-apply for PESEL. At the same time, difficulties related to applying or re-applying for PESEL are mostly long queues and waiting times (67%).

95% of respondents accessed at least one type of social benefit in Poland, with 68% of participants reporting that they did not have any difficulty accessing social benefits in Poland.

Out of the quarter of all participants who reported difficulties accessing benefits, 28% indicated that the information about available programs and access to them is difficult. The most common difficulties with receiving social benefits (36%), however, were typically around the suspension, removal of the PESEL UKR status, and the benefits associated with this status or issues with the long waiting time for the money transfers to be renewed after the benefits were cancelled or suspended. The most common scenarios mentioned by participants were:

- Benefits were suspended or canceled (the person traveled to Ukraine but returned within 30 days)
- Benefits were suspended or canceled due to technical or clerical mistakes (the person did not leave Poland)

62% of those participants in the second round, who reported traveling to Ukraine, also reported finding out that their PESEL UKR and associated benefits were terminated. With such a high percentage of people, reporting the problem might mean that the problem is widespread and potentially become a bigger issue.

The key informants (caseworkers and lawyers working with refugees from Ukraine) also confirmed that obtaining a PESEL UKR number for the first time is very easy while the procedure of restoring a PESEL UKR number if suspended (together with all benefits associated with the temporary protection) is not clear and can take a long time.

Since losing PESEL UKR status is associated with the loss of all social benefits, which are often the main source of income for refugees, and the right to receive free medical help, for some refugees, especially the most vulnerable, it can lead to a lack of ability to cover basic needs and decisions to return to Ukraine prematurely. The interviews also show that people are not as concerned about losing temporarily protection status in the country, as they are about losing associated benefits, which might be an indication that people do not fully understand what the temporary protection status is.

## **Risk in focus (2): Termination of PESEL UKR and associated benefits**



### **Threat to the population:**

Apart from the cases when refugees left Poland for more than 30 days and lost PESEL UKR status and associated benefits, some refugees lost it due to clerical mistakes or miscommunication between the local governments and the Border guards. Considering the important role benefits play in refugees' budgets and importance of access to services, including medical, even temporary loss of status can cause serious financial problems and inability to receive help.

### **(Potential) effect of the threat:**

Losing PESEL UKR status is linked to losing sources of income and services, which refugees are not eligible for otherwise or cannot afford. Moreover, if the person has one's PESEL terminated, de-jure the person has no legal grounds to stay in Poland for more than 90 days, which is even more concerning.

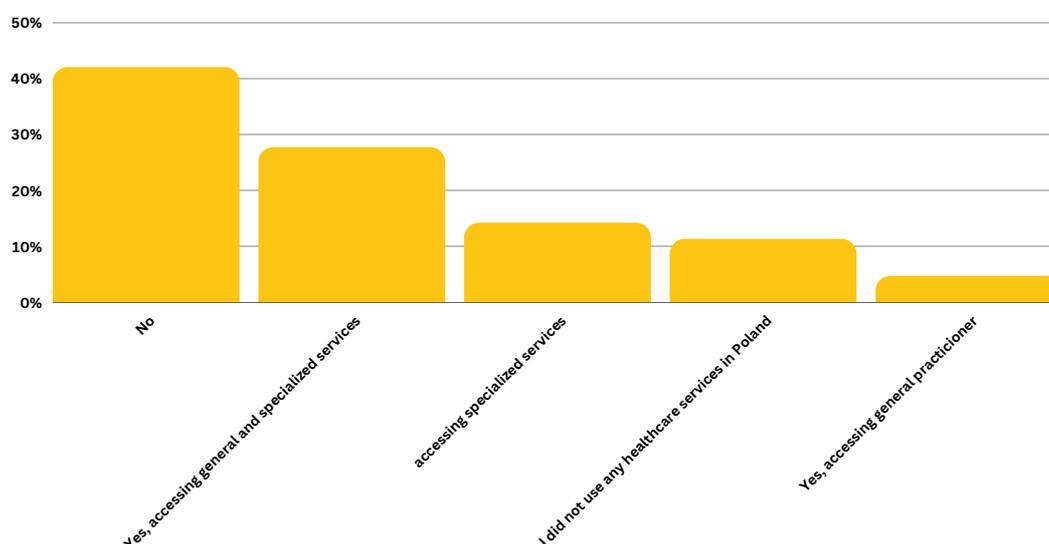
### **Capacity to address the risk:**

As there is no clear unified procedure, as of now each case of PESEL UKR and social benefits termination and restoration is considered on individual basis. Advocacy efforts should be put in place to introduce more clear and shorter procedures for restoring PESEL UKR status in case of clerical mistakes.

## **Medical services**

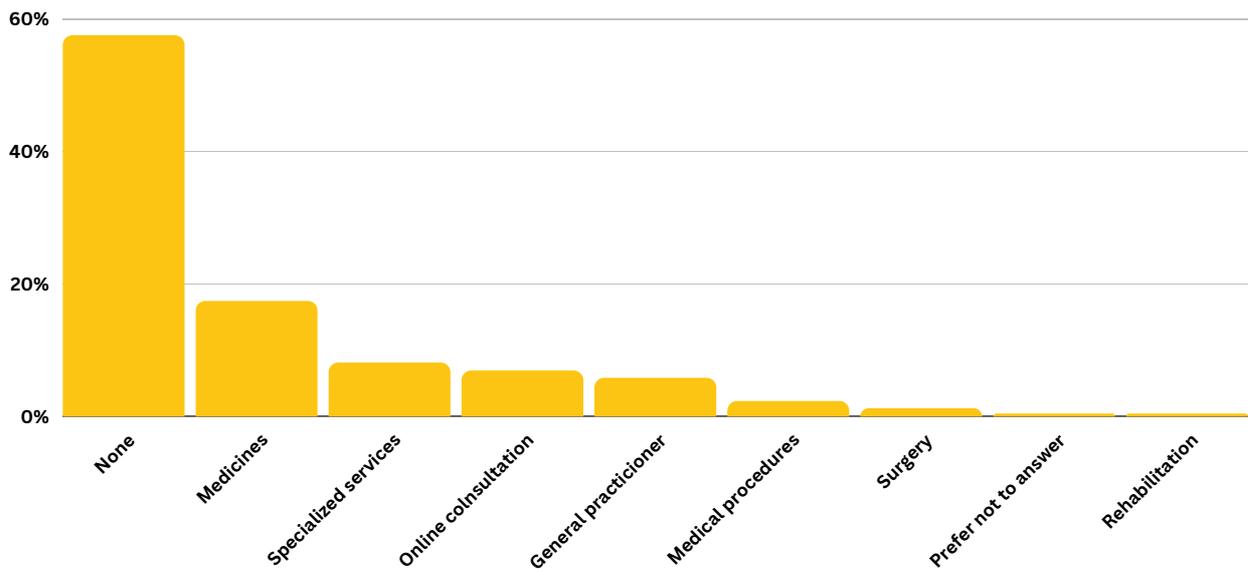
In the second cycle of the Protection Monitoring, 47% of participants had trouble accessing the general practitioner, specialized services, or both. Only 11% of participants reported that they did not use medical help in Poland, and 42% indicated that they had no difficulty accessing it.

### **Did you or any of the household members had difficulties accessing medical services in Poland?**



In the first cycle of PM, it was revealed that one of the coping mechanisms to overcome the limitations of the Polish healthcare system was to travel back to Ukraine to purchase medicines or get medical services in the home country. Additional questions in the second PM cycle give a better overview of these strategies' prevalence. 58% of participants reported not using any medical services in Ukraine or purchasing medicines since arriving in Poland, while 17% purchased medicines, 8% went back to Ukraine to receive specialized medical services, and 6% consulted a general practitioner. Moreover, 8% of participants said they consulted a physician online in Ukraine.

### Have you or your household members used any medical services in Ukraine since you arrived in Poland?



The perceived causes of the difficulties participants mentioned most often related to lack of access to health services/medicines in Poland and long waiting time (to receive the medical services) – 36% each, while 17% of participants mentioned the better quality of the services/medicines in Ukraine and 10% cited lower price to be reasons for using healthcare services in Ukraine rather than in Poland. The FGD participants also mentioned language barrier and lack of trust in the local doctors as contributing to their lack of access to healthcare in Poland. One of the FGD participants, a 60+ female from Warsaw, said:



*I was lying on a surgery table when the nurse gave me a form in Polish to sign. I couldn't understand a word. I was crying there because they would not start the surgery without this signature, and I could not understand what the form said.*

Other participants mentioned that the medical services they received were inadequate compared to Ukraine.

Getting medical services remains the second most quoted reason to return to Ukraine (27%) after the wish to reunite with family and friends (36%).



*My pension is 300 PLN. I need to buy a lot of medicines, for example one of them costs 50 PLN per month. I guess you can imagine how much money I have left after buying all the medicines.*

FGD participant, small town in Mazowieckie voivodship

*Tooth extraction costs 500 PLN in Poland. It is cheaper to go to Ukraine, extract it there and come back. And even with this high price, it's hard to get an appointment with the doctor.*

FGD participant, Warsaw



*I need eye surgery. It's urgent, otherwise I will lose my sight. In Poland, I got an appointment in half a year, and it's just a first appointment! So, I am going back to Kharkiv to get surgery.*

FGD participant, small town in Mazowieckie voivodship

## Insights from the CP monitoring: medical services



Some participants of the CP Monitoring reported difficulties around access to medical services in Poland. Two participants mentioned access to healthcare and its quality as a concern, which does not make them feel safe. A 17-years-old boy from Siedlce did not feel safe during the surgery because, in his opinion, the doctor was not professional (he forgot to remove one of the stitches after the surgery), and a 15-years-old girl from Warsaw mentioned difficulties getting an ophthalmologist appointment and new glasses prescription.

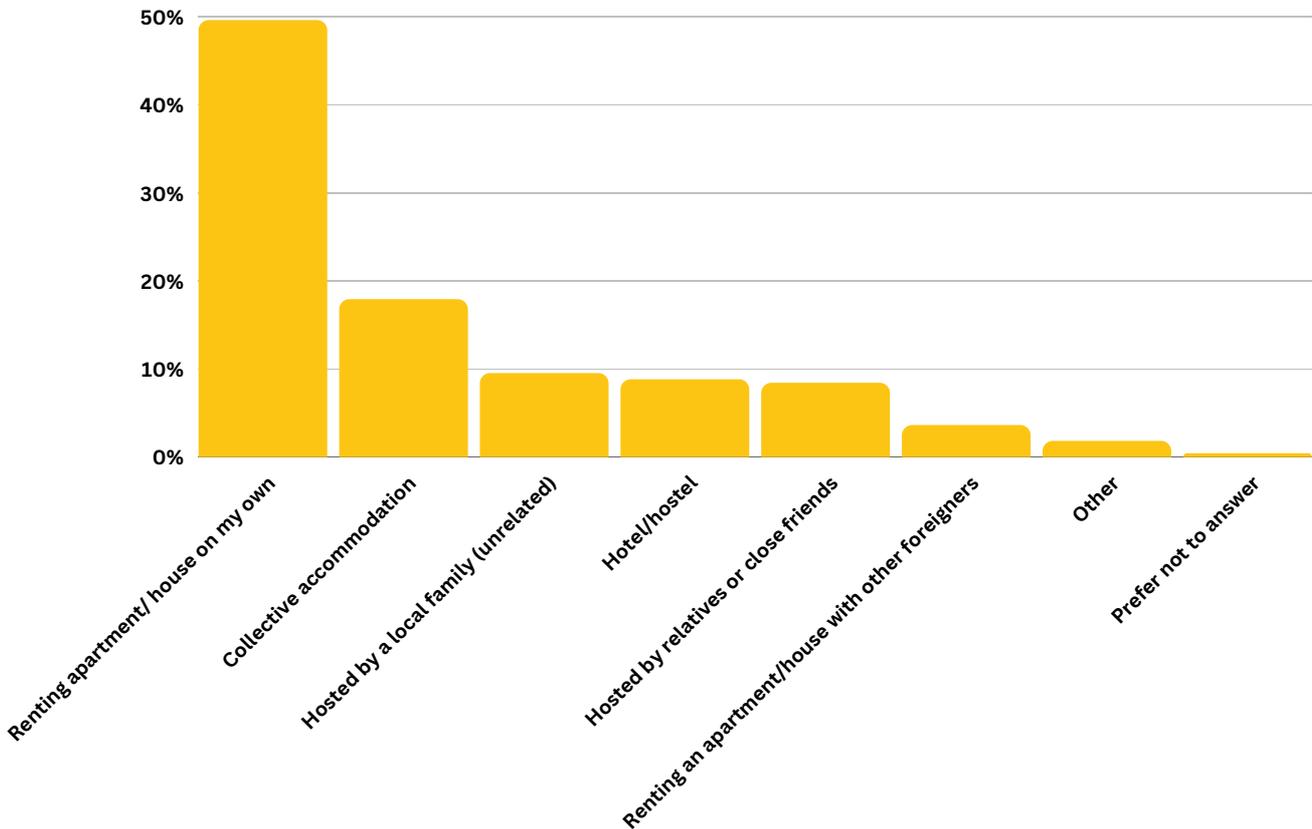
## Housing

Half of the participants indicated renting an apartment alone, and another 4% renting the apartment with other foreigners. 18% live in collective accommodations, and 9% in hotels/hostels. Nearly 20% of participants, in almost equal shares, are hosted by unrelated local families or families/friends.

47% of participants have remained in the same accommodation since arriving. Among those who changed their accommodation, 29% used to stay with the local family or in collective accommodation (22%).

**56% participants who stay in hotels/hostels reported that the accommodation cost is covered by the government program (52%) or other sponsors (4%). The small number of participants who pay for this type of accommodation reported the average monthly cost per person to be 750 PLN.**

### Where do you live?

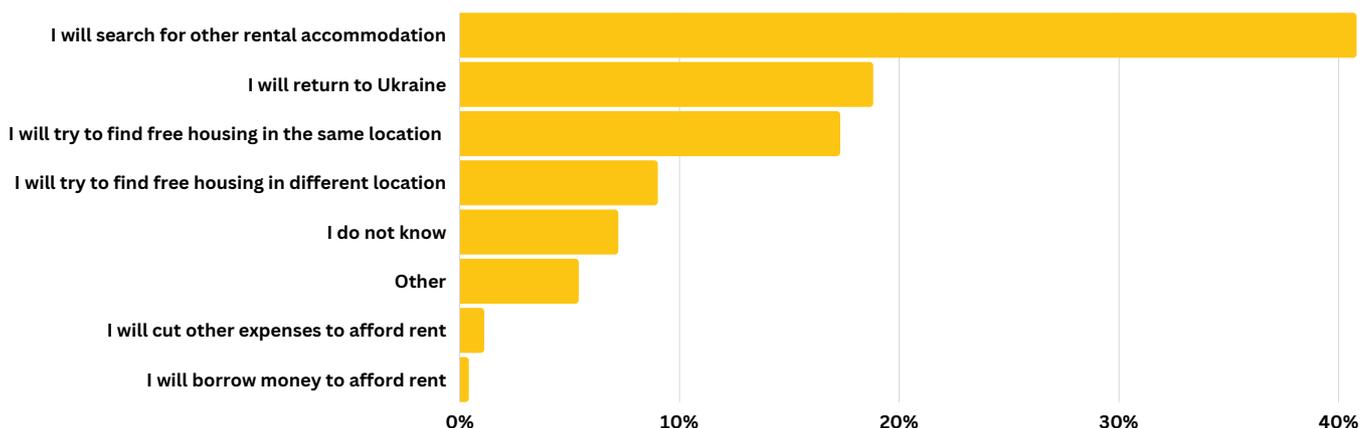


Two-thirds of participants reported that they do not have a specific time limit on how long they can stay in this accommodation; however, 14% said that they don't know how long they can stay in the current accommodation. While the number is not extremely high alone, combined with 6% of participants who mentioned that they could stay in their current housing for 1-3 months and 3% for no longer than one month, there is a quarter of participants whose housing situation is not very stable.

Echoing the findings of the first cycle of PM, the highest proportion of participants renting accommodation – 71% - reported that they do not have any time limitations on how long they can stay in their current accommodation. Among those who stay in collective accommodation, the proportion is much lower – 49% and only slightly higher in hotel/hostel – 50%.

Housing remains one of the most urgent needs refugees from Ukraine in Poland have (9%), potentially one of the most impactful pull factors preventing premature returns to Ukraine. In the second round of Protection Monitoring, the hypothetical question exploring the coping strategies in case of losing the current accommodation was added. 41% of participants reported that they would search for another rental accommodation, 19% would plan to return to Ukraine, and 26% would search for other free housing option in the same location (17%) or in a different location (9%). Out of those planning to return to Ukraine in case of losing housing, the most concerning percentage is between single-headed household. When asked what their strategy would be if they lost housing in Poland, 30% of participants who currently live in a single household reported that they would return to Ukraine, in contrast to 16% of respondents in non-single households.

### What would be your strategy if you lose your current accommodation?



While participants rarely mentioned the specific issues with the free accommodation (covered by the government programs), some mentioned the “grey” schemes some landlords use to trick the refugees from Ukraine into paying for the technically free accommodations. One of the FGD participants said: “The landlady says that she did not receive the money from the government to cover the cost of our housing (and we cannot check if it’s true). She says that if the money is not transferred, we will have to cover the total accommodation cost of 12k PLN by now.”

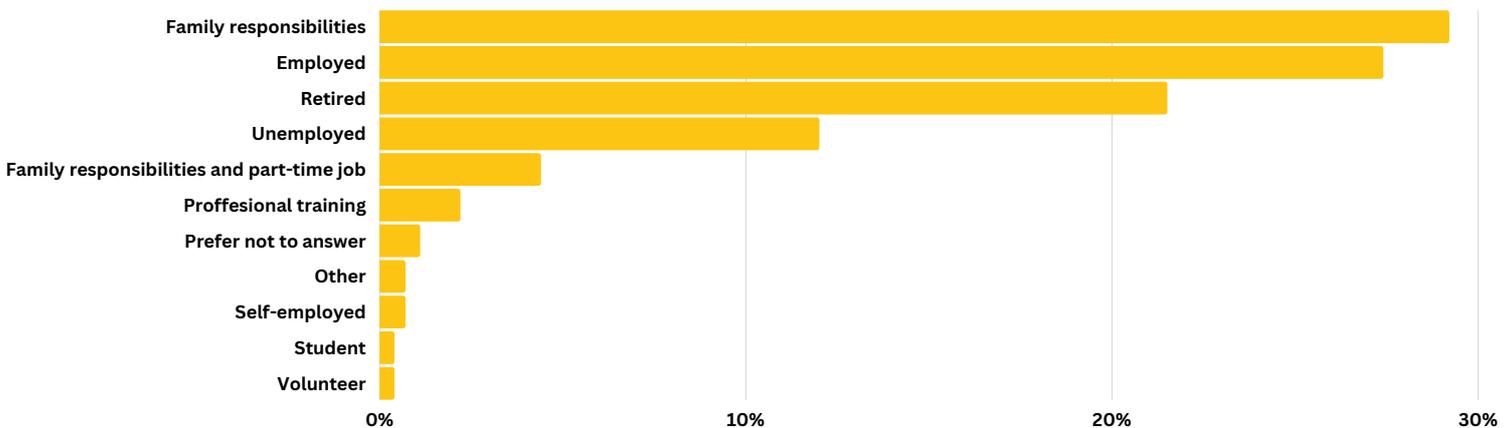
The same participant explained that when staying in free accommodations, such as hotels/hostels, means obeying any rules imposed by the owner – in the case of this participant, it was placing an additional unrelated man in her family’s room for two weeks or limiting the number of times the family can do laundry for free (anything more than two uses of the washing machine is paid 30 PLN per one load of laundry). Any complaints to the landlady in her case were dismissed, and she stopped complaining, afraid of eviction.

# Main activities and sources of income

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In the second PM cycle, 27% of participants reported being employed in Poland. However, the largest group of participants – 29%, are still those primarily performing unpaid care work in the family. 22% of participants are retired.

## What is your main activity in Poland?



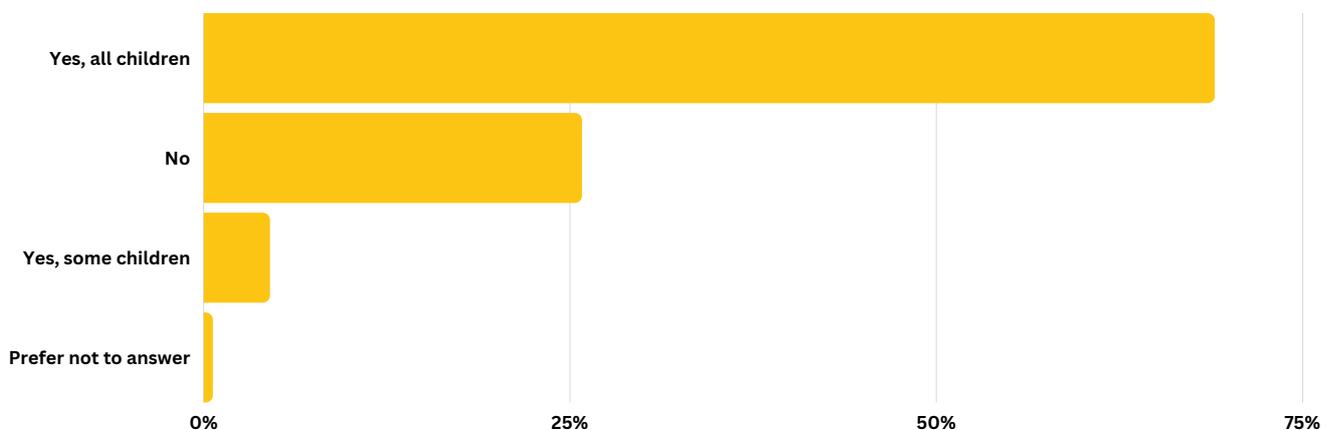
The key issues with finding employment mentioned by participants are lack of language proficiency (22%), lack of employment opportunities (12%), and lack of access to childcare (6%). At the same time, 20% of participants reported having no issues finding employment.

Participants still rely heavily on benefits as a source of income (30%), while salary in Poland and retirement benefits in Ukraine (18% and 15%) are the second and third sources mentioned most often.

# Education

69% of participants reported that all children of school-age in the household are enrolled in the Polish educational system whilst 5% of participants stated that some children of school-age in the household are enrolled in the Polish educational system. Among the participants who mentioned that children are not enrolled in the Polish educational system, 56% mentioned the preference to continue with the online remote Ukrainian curriculum. Other reasons, such as the lack of available places in the schools near current accommodation or lack of a plan to stay in Poland (5% each), were quoted by very few participants.

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



Around 30% of participants mentioned other reasons not initially envisioned by the PM questionnaire, such as:

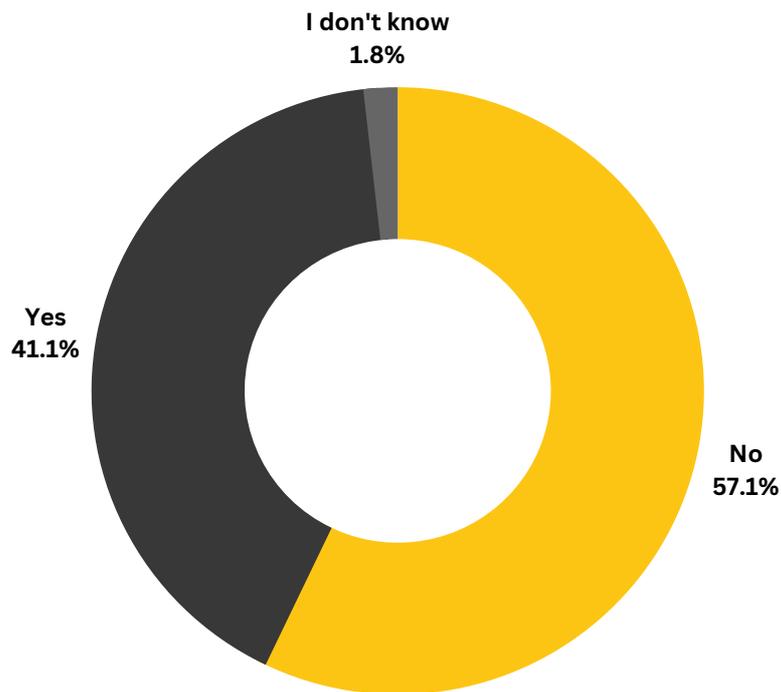
- Despite being the schooling age in Poland, the child has already graduated high school in Ukraine and does not need more formal schooling in Poland.
- Parents prefer to send a 6-year-old child to preschool for better adaptation instead of primary school.
- Preference for homeschooling due to the negative experience in Ukraine.



Photo: Andrew Oberstadt for the IRC

41% of participants reported that preschool-aged children attend childcare institutions in Poland. 91% of participants added that the child attends a Polish-speaking childcare institution, and only 9% mentioned that the teaching language is Ukrainian.

## Are pre-school aged children attending childcare institutions?



Similarly, 43% of respondents mentioned that pre-school-aged children do not attend childcare institutions because they are too young. Other commonly cited reasons are the lack of available places in the kindergarten close to the current accommodation (16%), lack of special needs education, language barrier, and lack of a plan to stay in Poland (3% each).

Just over 30% of participants, same as in the case of school-aged children, mentioned additional reasons for children not to attend childcare institutions in Poland, such as:

- Parent's preference not to send the child to the childcare institution;
- Adjustment difficulties;
- Attending different activities for children instead of the formal childcare institution.

# Urgent needs

The needs cited by participants as urgent are material assistance (non-food items (NFIs), clothes, etc.) – 18%, employment - 17%, and medical treatment/items – 15%. The needs ranking for the group of refugees staying in Poland for over a year in most cases is the same as in the first round of Protection Monitoring, covering mostly newcomers.

## What are your most urgent needs?

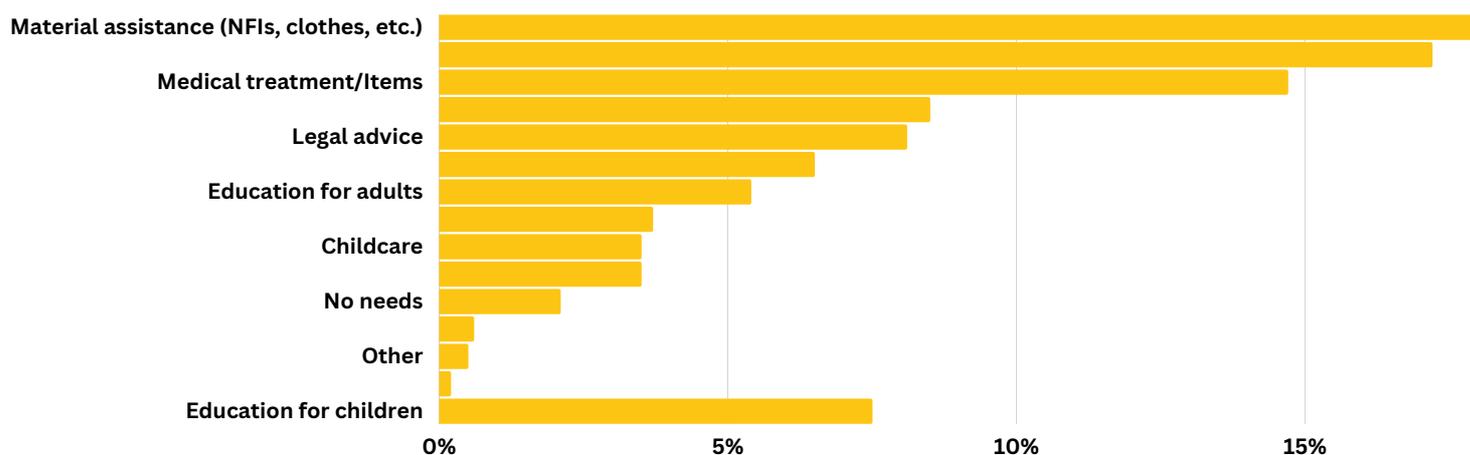
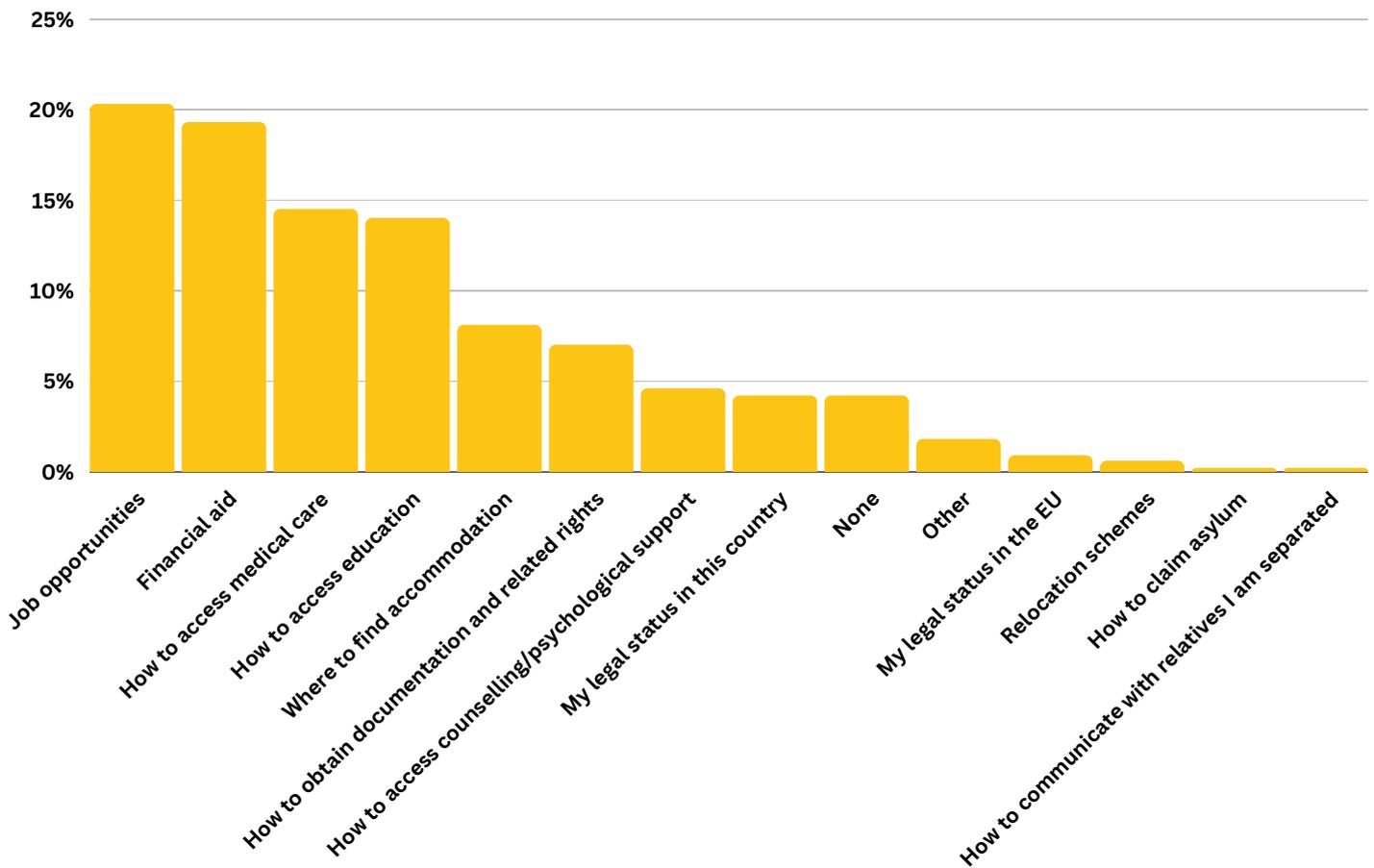


Photo: Karolina Jonderko for the IRC

# Information needs

Similar to urgent needs, the same information needs are mentioned by the refugees most often: job opportunities (20%), financial aid (19%), and access to medical services (15%). Social media remains the main information source for refugees (51%), with Telegram and Facebook being the most used (28% and 25%).

## What would you like to receive more information about at the moment?



# Recommendations

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## Government of Poland

- Amending legislation with the aim of establishing a clear and accessible procedure of checking PESEL UKR status, even by those, who don't use Diia.pl application, as well as transparent procedure of the PESEL UKR status termination and restoration, including the procedure of appeal against the decision of PESEL termination.
- Preparing and cascading unified guidance and recommendations on procedure of PESEL termination and restoration, including the ways of timely informing the status holder of the changes, to be used by municipalities before above mentioned changes to the legislation are made.
- Initiating a wide information campaign targeting employers on their responsibilities toward employees according to current legislation. The campaign is to be coordinated with non-government actors, and to be complimented by efforts to inform employees of the channels to report employers' misconduct.



## Protection sector

- Close monitoring of persons living in a single household, especially those 60+ years old.
- Close monitoring of refugees who lost PESEL UKR status and associated benefits and its impact on the decision to stay in Poland or return to Ukraine.



## Health Sector

- Implementing awareness-raising activities aimed in equipping refugees with knowledge and understanding of the services and medicines availability in Poland, especially compared to what is available in Ukraine.



## **Donors**

- Continuing support for integration programs, especially livelihood programs aiming to help refugees to find safe and decent employment.
- Funding health-related programs especially on increasing the availability of specialized medical services.



## **Humanitarian organizations**

- Continuing creation and implementation of programs focused on integration of refugees from Ukraine and building cohesion with the host community.
- Creating targeted programs aimed at resettlement of those living in shelters and building their resilience, including by activation at the labor market.
- Implementing programs supporting refugees in finding legal and decent jobs together with intensifying of activities aimed in engaging private business to livelihood programs.
- Scaling up programs, focused on prevention and response to labor market exploitation, including awareness raising, psychological support, legal assistance, job counselling etc.
- Strengthening refugees' resilience by enhancing their legal awareness and provision of tailored legal assistance.
- Keeping active multi-purpose cash assistance programs for the most vulnerable refugees, while gradually shifting to more selective cash programs such as cash for rent, cash for protection etc.
- Scaling up programs on increased availability of medical services, including through having assistants in medical facilities in order to inform patients of the peculiarities of Polish medical system, provide with translation and light-touch case management services.



## Contact:

- If you are interested in our activities and would like to get in touch with us, please write to: [contact.poland@rescue.org](mailto:contact.poland@rescue.org).
- Media contact: [veronika.rzezutka@rescue.org](mailto:veronika.rzezutka@rescue.org).