



Child Protection Monitoring Report

September - December 2023



Child Protection Monitoring Report

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“Describing the state of my soul is difficult” (Female, 15, Warsaw)

It is estimated that over half of Ukrainian children have been displaced due to the war. Currently, in Poland, there are 956,633 registered refugees¹, with over 44% estimated to be children²

As of February 1, 2024, the Polish education system had registered 180,959 Ukrainian children with refugee experience. This number does not include those who have registered but later dropped out of the education system, or those who have never enrolled in school. The estimated number of children and teenagers not attending school exceeded 111,500 (CEO, 2023; IRC, Save the Children, CARE, 2024).

Education disrupted by the pandemic, war, and displacement suggests that for some children, the lack of a stable learning environment has persisted for four years. However, education-related concerns are not the only issues faced by Ukrainian children in Poland.

Protection Risks

In the previous cycle of Child Protection Monitoring, children's voices highlighted problems with social isolation and a lack of friends in Poland. Additionally, among the emerging risks and factors exacerbating difficulties were language barriers, increasing discrimination, and bullying. In the second report, we identify two main risks evident among Ukrainian children:

- risk of distress and mental health disorders,
- bullying.

1. Number of registered refugees with active PESEL number UKR, according to UNHCR (2024). Available here: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/dataviz/330?sv=54&geo=0>. According to Eurostat the number is 950 965. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/MIGR_ASYTPSM_custom_10935776/default/table?lang=en

2. Based on Eurostat data on the beneficiaries of temporary protection in March 2024.

METHODOLOGY & LIMITATIONS

From September to December 2023 the IRC's Child Protection Monitoring Team conducted 45 interviews with Ukrainian children across Warsaw, Poznan, and Katowice.

The aim of this activity is to explore the perspective of children from Ukraine (age 12-17) on their situation in Poland. An approach based on child participation allows to better understand the best interests of each individual child.

Monitoring focuses on the psychological consequences of displacement for Ukrainian children, their perception of safety in Poland, their support networks (relationships with family and peers), and their integration into the host community.

From October to December 2023 IRC's Protection Monitoring Team interviewed 45 children from Ukraine.

Much of the research regarding the situation of displaced children is done through the lens of their parents'/guardians' perspective. Less attention is paid to the voices of children themselves.

CP Monitoring follows a child-centered approach and focuses on the data collected directly from children. Each interview is preceded by the consent expressed by the child and that of their parent or legal guardian.

Parents or legal guardians also complete the demographic data, including age, gender, household composition, disabilities, or chronic illnesses of the child. Interviews take place in public spaces, and parents/legal guardians are absent.

The preference is for the interviews to be conducted by two interviewers (one conducting the interview, while the other takes notes). Moreover, all quotes and notes are translated into English from both Ukrainian and Russian.

Sampling

Convenience, non-probabilistic sampling was used. Since the aim was to obtain an in-depth qualitative analysis, these results should not be generalized for the overall population of Ukrainian children in Poland.

Methods

Semi-structured interviews, that allow for a balance between standardized questions and the flexibility to explore individual perspectives.

The data analysis employed the method of thematic analysis along with qualitative coding (initial and axial).

Child-centered approach

Prioritizes the perspectives, needs, experiences of children in research or interventions. It involves actively engaging children in the process by considering their input valuable and utilizing child-friendly methods to ensure their comfort and effective communication.

The Social-Ecological Model

The qualitative analysis is based on the social-ecological model. This model explores the complex interplay among individual, relational, community, and societal factors.

Qualitative coding was conducted based on vulnerabilities and protective factors outlined in the Child Protection Case Management Training Package for Caseworkers in Humanitarian Settings (2023) and in the Socio-Ecological Model described by UNICEF (2023).

METHODOLOGY & LIMITATIONS

From September to December 2023 the IRC's Child Protection Monitoring Team conducted 45 interviews with Ukrainian children across Warsaw, Poznan, and Katowice.

Limitations

- The selection of participants depends on the availability and particular characteristics of the respondents (e.g., age, nationality, specific experience, possibilities of reaching respondents). Availability also relates to the ethical principle of voluntary participation. Ensuring that participants have the freedom to choose whether or not to participate without coercion or undue influence is essential. This means respecting the availability of individuals to consent to participate based³ on their own circumstances and preferences.
- All of the participants were Ukrainian citizens. There were no Third Country Nationals. Although this can be understood as a limitation, it aligns with IRC's CPM guidelines.
- The interviewer's impact and the social desirability effect (the tendency to present one's behaviors and thoughts favorably) are more prominent in qualitative research, particularly in semi-structured interviews, made by adults with children.
- Achieving complete neutrality in these interviews is challenging since the interviewer's biases cannot be eliminated.
- Lower degree of cross-interview comparability than in quantitative research: considering the interviewer 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 one.
- There was a discrepancy in the sampling, where most of the interviews were conducted in Warsaw (26).
- The quotes and notes are translated from Ukrainian or Russian into English, which may introduce issues related to the accuracy and nuances of the children's original expressions, potentially affecting the validity of the findings.

Demographics

- Interviews were conducted with children aged 12 to 17, 23 females and 22 males, comprising 14 twelve-year-olds, 12 youths between 13 and 14, and 19 individuals aged 15 to 17.
- Most participants were from Kharkiv and its region, as well as Kyiv, with others from Lutsk, Ivano-Frankivsk, Sumy and Donetsk oblast. Overall, children from 19 different Ukrainian cities participated in the monitoring.

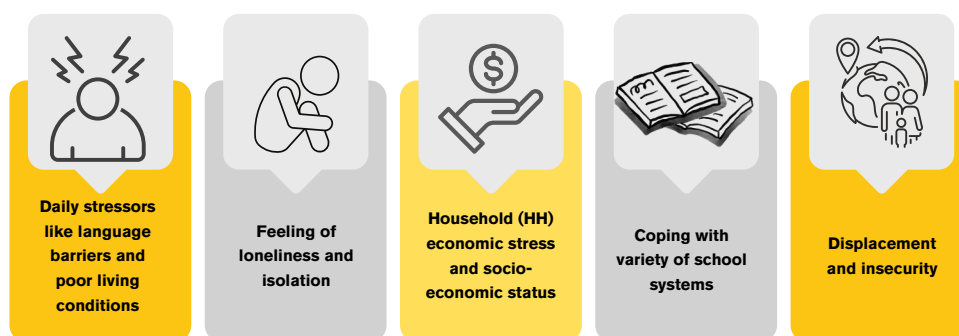
3. The limitation regarding "availability" in participant selection refers to the practical constraints in accessing and recruiting individuals (geographical accessibility, logistical constraints).

RISK OF DISTRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

Protection Risk 1

"I find it challenging to form close friendships here, as often when I start to connect with someone, they end up leaving the city. It's become common for people to move away, so I've learned not to get too attached"
(Female, 17, Warsaw).

"My condition initially worsened. But I learned now to worry less"
(Male, 13, Poznan).



During interviews, the vast majority of Ukrainian children spoke about daily stressors related to language barriers and feelings of loneliness and isolation. In this cycle, more children directly pointed to insecurities linked to post-conflict displacement and exposure to trauma related to the ongoing war.

Time spent in Poland, may have an impact on this. Most of the children who shared their stories arrived in the first quarter of 2022.

Children did not always explicitly state that they were dealing with inner struggles or that their mental health had deteriorated. However, their narratives showed signs and risk factors for mental health and psychosocial well-being issues.

The children also noted burdens related to school and balancing between two systems, or challenges associated with online learning.

In several statements, stress related to household situations and concerns about financial circumstances were also evident.

This section presents the five main themes with contributing factors emerging from the interviews, which particularly relate to the identified risk of low mental health and psychosocial well-being among Ukrainian children in Poland.

Factors influencing this vulnerability are discussed in the next section.

RISK OF DISTRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

Daily Stressors

Experiences related to trauma and exposure to traumatic experiences caused by war and displacement have a significant impact on the psychological situation of refugee children. However, the co-existing stressors of daily life in host countries and post-conflict settings are equally significant.

This aligns with the socio-ecological systems models, which emphasizes the strong influence of daily challenges in new environments.⁴

One of the recurring problems that affect the daily lives of children are language barriers. These barriers exacerbate feelings of isolation and loneliness. Children indicated that these barriers not only hinder the educational process, but also determine their ability to interact and form friendships with Polish peers. More than half of the respondents spoke about language issues. “The relationships at school are just okay. The biggest challenge with Polish kids is the language barrier” (Male, 16, Warsaw).

“At first, I ran into a lot of problems. I'm scared to speak Polish, but it feels easier when I'm talking to my brother or when I know the exact answer to a question in class at the lyceum. That's when I can answer confidently” (Female, 17, Warsaw).

“In the beginning I entered the musical lyceum in Poznan, but it was very difficult to study there. Also, there were problems with language barriers and there was no intercultural assistant. I didn't manage to adjust there and had no friends” (Male, 16, Poznan).



Photo: Tamara Kiptenko for the IRC

4. Unsupportive and hostile environments, and poor social integration may be more strongly associated with depression and PTSD than the traumatic events themselves (McEwen et al. 2023).

RISK OF DISTRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

Daily Stressors

In many stories, daily life was also marked by poor living conditions.

This is particularly true for collective accommodation centers, but also for overcrowded rented apartments and rooms. "In general, my mood is normal, but I used to enjoy everything before we moved to this shelter" (Male, 16, Warsaw).

Inadequate conditions include overcrowding (e.g., five people in one room, including living with strangers, such as combining several families in one residential room). "We live in a shelter with two other people in the room" (Female, 15, Warsaw). Additionally, there are questionable sanitary conditions and access to good quality food. In two cases, restrictions on movement were mentioned.

Children also noted limitations on cooking meals independently in shelters. The inability to cook in the shelter deprives refugees of the opportunity to prepare and enjoy familiar meals. This loss of autonomy over food choices can lead to feelings of frustration.

It can also lead to limited ability to provide balanced and nutritious meals. This is evident in one of the statements, in which the child points to "getting used to prepared meals from semi-products." In several cases, children indicated that they had difficulty accessing food in school cafeterias, especially due to financial constraints.

"Initially, we were living in another shelter. This shelter is better because I can go for walks anytime; in the previous one, it was forbidden." (Female, 15, Warsaw)

"My mother cooks delicious food, but it's forbidden and impossible to cook in the shelter. They provide us with food that isn't very tasty, although their soups and salads are alright. However, I still miss regular food." (Male, 16, Warsaw)

"I've gotten used to eating convenience foods with semi-products. In the first shelter, there was no opportunity to cook, and although I've heard that we can cook in this shelter, I don't have the energy for it. When there's normal food available in the shelter, I can eat it. I take my packed lunch to school as the school canteen opens late in the day and is expensive." (Female, 15, Warsaw)

In two instances (involving two different centers in Warsaw), concerns about food safety were raised. Cases of food poisoning or intoxication in the shelter raise justified concerns about the safety and quality of the meals provided.

"My mother cooks for us because in shelter they feed us with terrible food and there even were cases of intoxication after meals here. Also, I can't find bread that I would like here" (Male, 15, Warsaw).

RISK OF DISTRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

Daily Stressors

The daily life and associated daily stressors markedly vary for children residing in collective accommodation centers. In addition to this, highly alarming issues related to children's safety have emerged. Interviews revealed troubling conditions, including communal showers used by both women and men. Compounding the problem, many facilities lack basic privacy safeguards due to malfunctioning locks on bathroom doors and insufficient lighting.

“Describing the state of my soul is difficult, but it's undeniable that it has changed for the worse.

My mood is now heavily influenced by the constant changes in shelters. Initially, everything seemed fine when we were at X shelter, where we shared a room only with my grandmother and we did meet kind people. However, everything feels different here. Upon arrival, we were placed in a room with four other people, and our belongings remained in the corridor for several weeks until another room became available, now shared with two other women. I'm currently in the process of adjusting to this new environment. You know, here we have the common shower for men and women and also the lock and light are broken” (Female, 15, Warsaw).



Photo: Karolina Jonderko for the IRC

RISK OF DISTRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

Feeling of loneliness and isolation

Another factor identified as impacting mental health is the sense of isolation and loneliness. This is accompanied by disrupted social networks and nostalgia for friends. Children spoke about friends who remain in Ukraine and with whom contact has been lost. This sometimes is associated with feelings of guilt towards those who stayed "at home".

In some cases, it is also tied to fears for the lives of their friends. Sometimes, significant changes in life and new responsibilities were mentioned as barriers to maintaining contact. Particularly for children living in collective accommodation centers, a lack of access to the internet and telephones was noted, further hindering their ability to keep in touch with friends.

"I've been bumping into my Ukrainian friends on the street, but I don't have their phone numbers, you know. The city was occupied, and there were fights over the city. I don't even know if my friends are alive." (Male, 15, Poznan)

"I haven't made other friends yet, but I do communicate with some Poles at school. I can't say that my friends have stayed in Ukraine; we lost touch because I couldn't talk to them for a few months - I had no phone or computer at all" (Male, 16, Warsaw).

"If you would ask 3 months ago, I was always in touch with friends via telegram, etc. Now I am mostly playing games, sometimes I could do it the whole day" (Male, 16, Warsaw).

This feeling was intensified by the fact that more than half of the children reported having no friends. "I have no friends here. All my friends live too far away, I have no one here" (Male, 14, Warsaw). The lack of contact with Polish peers was frequently mentioned. Among the needs classified as unmet, contact with peers was identified by 16 out of 45 respondents.

"I don't really have friends here. I miss my life back home. Most of my friends are in Ukraine and we communicate online. Can't wait to reunite with them" (Male, 14, Poznan).

"Most of my friends are in Ukraine. I have not that many friends in Katowice" (Female, 12, Katowice).

"Overall, my situation remains unchanged, though I still feel a lack of friends here" (Female, 12, Warsaw).

The disruption of social networks is linked to challenges related to family separation. This often involves parents, most commonly when the father has stayed behind in Ukraine. "My father has stayed in Ukraine, but we call each other every day and talk for hours" (Female, 17, Warsaw).

"I call my parents often and we talk long. If I need advice, they're my go-to. While I have a good relationship with my grandmother, living in the same room can be challenging at times." (Female, 15, Warsaw).

RISK OF DISTRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

Feeling of loneliness and isolation

“We used to share an apartment until our relatives returned to Ukraine. Since this summer, I've mostly been living alone as my mother and three-year-old brother went back to Ukraine to be with our father. They visit me, though” (Female, 17, Warsaw).

Children often expressed a profound longing for their grandparents who remained in Ukraine, underscoring the emotional toll of family separation. This sentiment is reflected in the testimonies of respondents, including a girl from Kharkiv, who are in Poland accompanied solely by their grandparents.

“The person I'm closest to is my grandmother. She lives in Crimea, and we haven't seen each other since 2019. We talk on the phone sometimes, but due to political reasons, there are many things I can't share with her” (Female, 17, Katowice).



Photo: Karolina Jonderko for the IRC

RISK OF DISTRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

HH economic stress and socio-economic status

"I would like to live in our normal apartment, like in Ukraine, or at least separated room." (Female, 16, Warsaw)

In three cases, household economic stress and a decline in socio-economic status were evident from difficulties in accessing "normal accommodation." One respondent expressed a longing for the living conditions they had before becoming refugees. When children mentioned such situations, economic barriers were most often the obstacle.

It is noteworthy that the majority of references to financial challenges within households concerned respondents from Poznan (12/45). These challenges involved affording extra-curricular activities, enabling the continuation of passions, or additional English classes.

"In Ukraine I used to...

attend basketball and swimming. In Poland it's very expensive. We can't afford it here" (Male, 13, Poznan)

"In Ukraine I used to...

learn English on additional courses, I would like to continue, but it's expensive here. It would be impossible" (Male, 15, Poznan).

"In Ukraine I used to...

swim professionally, here I have stopped because there are no available pools and they are very far away from my house. We can't afford it". (Female, 13, Poznan)

In some instances, the financial challenges also affected the ability to eat in school cafeterias.

In the context of Poznan, this seems to be a particularly severe financial burden. According to some statements, the inability to join peers in the cafeteria was associated with additional isolation from their classmates.

"Eating in a school canteen is expensive. I can bring food with me, or not eat at all." (Female, 14, Poznan)

"I don't go to the school canteen: it's expensive and not very tasty so I have to carry food with me and eat alone." (Male, 13, Poznan)

Several children, aged 16-17, were engaged in part-time work, and a few expressed a desire to start working. In one instance, a 17-year-old mentioned her part-time job as a waitress, noting that she has been working since the age of 12. In two other cases, children expressed a willingness to work in order to financially support their parents.

"My mother and I rent a separate room. My mother works in the kitchen at a kindergarten. On weekends she works there for extra pay, and I help her with this" (Male, 17, Warsaw).

"I have been working since I was 12 years old. Now I work as a waitress at a hotel. My mother works there too." (Female, 17, Warsaw)

RISK OF DISTRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

HH economic stress and socio-economic status

Another respondent, a 16-year-old, reported working as an assistant chef in a pizzeria, the same establishment where his mother is employed.

This scenario can impose considerable stress on a young individual, as they might feel the burden of contributing financially to their family.

“I have a job now. I work as an assistant cook, making pizzas. My mother also works in the same cafe. I plan to go to university. My salary is enough to cover not only my needs but also mother’s. (...)

**In Ukraine I used to have less worries than in Poland. Here I have to combine work with studying and also, I need to clean. But you know, I do it successfully. (...)
You know, I dream to be a millionaire, but I do understand that it is not realistic.**

So, I might study at the university, maybe IT, to cover all my needs and needs of my mother” (Male, 16, Warsaw).



Photo: Tamara Kiptenko for the IRC

RISK OF DISTRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

Displacement and insecurity

“During the blackout in Ukraine, we had no choice but to subsist on dry Mivina noodles for weeks. My nutrition was not balanced, and my sleep schedule was irregular. So now I have got serious health problems: a stomach ulcer and anxiety disorder. Upon my arrival in Poland, I found myself grappling with an intense fear of airplanes, you know as the fear remained after the anxious time spent in Ukraine. Now is getting better a bit.” (Female, 12, Warsaw)

Some of the children's statements indicate experiences of potentially traumatic events (PTEs). “I'm from Kherson city. I came here almost two years ago. We went from occupied territories through the “corridors” (Male, 16, Warsaw).

This is evident not only in the sections where children describe their arrival to Poland but also when they were describing their perception of safety. In 10 interviews, the perception of safety was clearly linked to the “absence of war.”

“I feel safe. Because enemies can't reach here. And I have never had conflicts in the streets here. For me, security is when there is a permanent roof over your head, minimal comfortable living conditions, a house that does not fall apart, not like in war in Ukraine.” (Male, 17, Katowice)

“Safety means being in a place where there are no explosions. I feel safe and more in peace than in Ukraine” (Female, 12, Katowice).

In the previous cycle, children less frequently referred to experiences during migration or events in their places of origin and exposure to war trauma.

This time, references to these traumatic events surfaced in 14 out of the 45 interviews conducted. The fear of airplanes mentioned after arriving in Poland highlights a specific traumatic reaction associated with the sounds related to conflicts (e.g., bombings or air raids).

“I started having panic attacks in Poland because I was stressed a lot in Ukraine because of the war.” (Female, 14, Warsaw)

“I feel 100% safe here, way safer than in Ukraine. Because Sumy is right next to Russia, we always had missiles flying over us, and it was really scary” (Female, 13, Katowice).

“We thought the war wouldn't happen and things would calm down fast, so we first stayed in Poltava for two days, then in Lviv for another two days. But when we saw things weren't getting better, we decided to come to Warsaw.” (Female, 17, Warsaw)

Children grapple not only with the previously mentioned poor living conditions, but also with the temporariness and lack of stability caused by displacement, such as frequent changes in accommodation.

RISK OF DISTRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

Displacement and insecurity

“We initially stayed in a gym in Poland. Then we moved to my uncle’s house, which was the best option. After that, we lived in another hostel and temporary accommodations, and now we’re staying in this shelter. There are five of us sharing one room.” (Male, 16, Warsaw)

“The first night, we stayed at the shelter, but then we returned to Ukraine (near Lviv) for a few days and nights because we didn’t have a place to stay in Poland. However, we eventually came back to Poland, initially staying near Warsaw with a Polish family, and then moving to Krakow. Later, we settled in Warsaw, where we currently live in a shelter” (Male, 12, Warsaw).

In several of the testimonies, the necessity to relocate was driven by the search for employment opportunities or the prospect of reuniting with family members in Poland or other countries. Moreover, in two cases, the challenges of adjusting to the host country culminated in a strong inclination among some children to return to Ukraine.

“At first, in 2022 we lived close to Warsaw, but then we moved into the city because my mom got a job there. It was her decision for us to live here. I didn’t really want to move to Poland; I wanted to stay home. I found it hard to adapt, so I went back to Ukraine and stayed with my grandfather for a few months. I finished the 9th grade there and even started college, aiming to become a programmer. But as things back home got worse, like having no electricity, my mom thought it was best for me to move back to Poland at the start of 2023” (Male, 17, Warsaw).

“I dream of traveling across Europe, but I worry there isn’t much time left to do so because there might be wars spreading all over the world.” (Male, 16, Poznan)

The sentiment expressed by the child about their dream to travel Europe, overshadowed by a fear of potential global conflicts, sheds light on several aspects concerning the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of youth refugees.

This anxiety can be particularly acute in youth who have already experienced the disruptions of war and displacement. Such ongoing stress and fear about future instability can lead to chronic anxiety, affecting daily functioning and long-term mental health.

Moreover, in several cases, there was evidence of fear among children of being conscripted into the military. For children’s refugees, prior exposure to conflict and violence can result in a pervasive sense of insecurity and dread about future safety - not just personally but globally.

RISK OF DISTRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

Coping with variety of school systems

Among the respondents, 18 children are exclusively enrolled in the Polish education system.

However, 12 children are participating in both systems, attending a local Polish school and continuing their education online following the Ukrainian curriculum. Additionally, 7 individuals (15% of respondents) are exclusively engaged with the Ukrainian school online.⁶

The remaining children either attend a Ukrainian school locally or combine Ukrainian education both online and onsite. In one particular case, a child was involved in a triple arrangement, attending a Ukrainian school online, a Ukrainian school on site, and a Polish school.

“I’m currently enrolled in three schools: a local Polish school, an online Ukrainian school in the form of homeschooling, and an in-person Ukrainian school in Poznan. In addition to my school activities, I actively participate in some extracurricular things like volleyball, swimming, basketball, athletics, knitting, and drawing” (Female, 14, Poznan).

“I’m currently studying online with a school in Ukraine and attending a school in Poland. I chose to enroll in because I didn’t want to lose a year after being asked to repeat the 8th grade in Poland. Given the uncertainty about whether we would stay in Poland or return to Ukraine, I decided it was best to keep my options open by maintaining my education in both systems” (Male, 14, Poznan).

Among the motivations for participating in two educational systems are the children’s potential plans to return to their home country and the uncertainties surrounding their future. While many have tried to adapt to Polish schools, they have often encountered challenges such as discrimination and bullying from peers.⁷ In seven cases, the support from teachers was deemed insufficient.

Cultural differences and varied teaching methods also posed challenges, which were not always embraced positively by the children. Notably, three participants perceived a lack of rigor and a too casual approach from educators, with one such instance occurring in an evening high school.

“I’m currently attending an evening lyceum. I don’t like it because nothing is demanded from kids and the program of studying is weak. There is no homework at all, and we almost do not write during the classes. I don’t have much contact with Poles because of language barriers. There are other Ukrainians and to be honest I communicate more with them” (Female, 17, Warsaw).

Participating in two educational systems can be taxing. Half of the children attending dual systems reported feeling frustrated. However, a lighter homework load in Polish schools helps some manage the demands. Notably, 41 out of the 45 surveyed children mentioned receiving less homework compared to their previous experiences in Ukraine.

6. This is information declared by the children. The CP Monitoring Officers are unable to verify the status of Ukrainian schools on-site.

7. The risk of discrimination and bullying is discussed in a separate sub-chapter.

RISK OF DISTRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

Coping with variety of school systems

“I might stay for a second year in technical college. In Ukrainian school, keeping up with all my homework is just impossible because there's so much of it!” (Female, 17, Warsaw)

“Now I study at both schools: Ukrainian online school and Polish school on site. I like Polish school more. The school program is easier and its less homework than in Ukrainian. Our class is very intercultural: my classmates are Ukrainians, Russians, Belarusians and Iranians” (Female, 15, Warsaw).

In four cases, children noted curriculum differences and issues with being placed in younger grades. Additionally, 17 of the 30 children participating in the Polish education system reported the absence of an intercultural assistant in their schools.

They also highlighted the burden of heavy homework loads in the Ukrainian educational system and the challenges of online learning. Among the feedback, five responses pointed to a lack of support from teachers.

One 16-year-old male from Warsaw remarked, “The Polish language teacher at school is quite awful and strict; she expects us to speak like natives without any room for compromise.”

Language barriers further complicate the situation, as illustrated by a 17-year-old female in Warsaw:

“When I first arrived in Poland without knowing any Polish, our teacher wouldn't let us use a translator. He even said that with such limited Polish, I wouldn't be able to move to the next grade. Thankfully, not all the teachers are like that.”

“I entered to a one-year lower class in Poland than I was in Ukraine: in Ukraine I had to finish the fifth grade, here I entered the fourth, but the program is the same” (Female, 12, Warsaw).

“I prefer this school more than my school in Ukraine. I also like learning in person much better than online. With online education, it feels like the teachers don't explain things as well, and you end up just staring at a screen all day” (Male, 15, Poznan).



Photo: Karolina Jonderko for the IRC

BULLYING

Protection Risk 2

**“At lyceum all my classmates are girls, I’m the only one boy. I have no friends. Once I spent a lot of time at the hospital and was trying to ask my classmates what the homework was. No one answered me, one girl even said: “The dog ate my homework” and then other girls laughed at me and repeated that. When I asked the teacher what the homework was, she told me to ask my classmates and finally gave me a bad mark. I felt lonely and helpless”
(Male, 14, Warsaw).**



In nearly half of the interviews, specifically in 20 stories, instances of discrimination or bullying were identified, primarily within the school environment (17 out of 20 cases).

"In this report, based on children's narratives, the second protection risk mainly manifests itself through bullying at school, primarily among peers.

One of the risk factors is discrimination, stemming from a child's nationality or refugee status. This discrimination can take various forms, such as exclusion, prejudice, or mistreatment.

Sometimes, the perceived discrimination involved overhearing opinions about refugees, while in a few cases, it stemmed from experiences of the parents or information found on the Internet.

BULLYING

Bullying at schools

Children face harassment in school hallways, cafeterias, sometimes during breaks on the playground, and even in classrooms.

"I talk to some of my Polish classmates, but there are others who don't like me just because of my nationality" (Female, 12, Poznan). In some cases, this has resulted in changing classes or dropping out of school. "Poles offend me a lot, I wanted to transfer to another class" (Female, 14, Katowice).

"When I talk to other Ukrainians in the breaks between lessons, in Ukrainian language, Polish kids tell me: "Don't speak Ukrainian! You have to speak Polish!" (Female, 12, Katowice).

"In class they didn't like me, they said nasty things and told me to return to Ukraine." (Female, 15, Poznan)

"I've faced a lot of bullying at my Polish school. I was the only Ukrainian in my class, and everyone would make fun of me. One time, my classmates stole another student's phone and blamed me for it, even though I didn't do it. It's been really tough. (...). There was another incident where they ruined my classmate's sweater with glue. Some of them are angry because a missile once fell on Polish territory, and they blame me, telling me, "Go back to your Ukraine. Because of you, Poles died." It's been really hard dealing with this" (Female, 12, Warsaw).

In conversations with children who remained exclusively in Ukrainian schools or attended online schooling, concerns about bullying also arose, influencing the decision not to pursue education in Polish schools.

"I continue studying online at Ukrainian school because me and my mother, we are afraid of bullying. I like my school very much. I have friends between my classmates." (Female, 12, Katowice)



Photo: Karolina Jonderko for the IRC

BULLYING

Discrimination due to nationality/ refugee status as a risk factor

“I had a conflict with a Polish kid and his friends. My cousin and I were hanging out at the playground, just talking to each other, when these boys overheard us speaking our language and started saying mean things about Ukraine, along with other harsh words. They even spat on me and my cousin from the top of a slide. It turned into a big deal, and I had to call my dad for help, and he ended up calling the police. I've seen that boy at the playground since then - he hasn't touched me again, but he still says mean things” (Female, 12, Warsaw).

Language often serves as an immediate identifier of one's nationality or ethnic origin, making it a common trigger for discriminative behaviors.

The derogatory remarks and accusations related to the missile incident reflect broader issues of stereotyping.

In some cases, participants mentioned seeing much offensive content and hate speech about Ukrainian refugees on the internet and social media. For refugees, already dealing with trauma and displacement, such experiences of aggression can exacerbate feelings of isolation and distress.

This incident serves as a reminder of the complex challenges faced by refugees and minority groups, especially children, as they navigate new social environments.

“I read a lot of news in Telegram about attacks on people, refugees from Ukraine” (Male, 17, Warsaw).

“I feel very safe but sometimes it is unpleasant to hear something bad about Ukrainians from Polish people” (Female, 12, Warsaw).

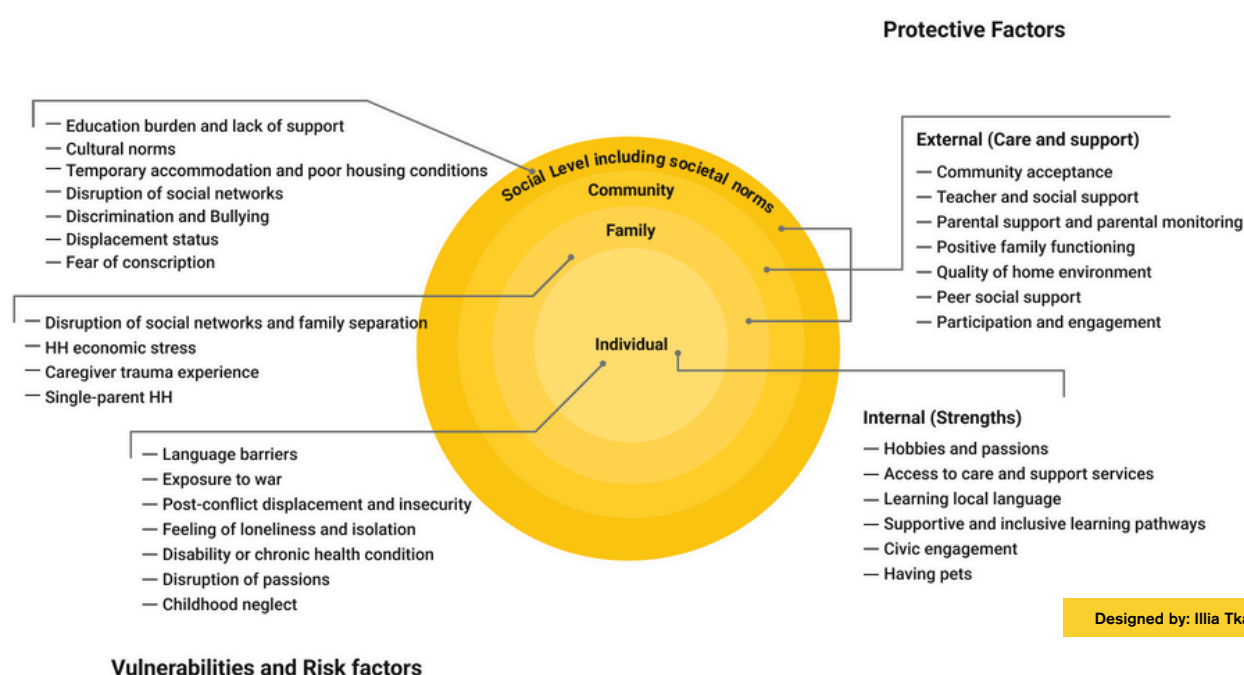
“I liked Poland, but I heard from parents that most Poles are against us” (Male, 12, Katowice).



Photo: Tamara Kiptenko for the IRC

THE SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL MODEL

Vulnerabilities, Risk factors* and Protective Factors



The socio-ecological model enables the identification of factors shaping the situations of refugee children in Poland. These encompass protective factors⁸ occurring across various levels (individual, family, community, and societal, including societal norms), as well as vulnerabilities and risk factors.

Many of these serve as both protective factors when present and as vulnerabilities or risk factors when absent in children's lives.

The socio-ecological model illustrates all identified vulnerabilities and protection concerns that contribute to the indicated protection risks.

On the other side, it highlights recognized protective factors from children's stories that contribute to their resilience. Several socio-ecological factors that shape risk have already been described.

At the individual level, already discussed were language barriers, post-conflict displacement and insecurity, exposure to war, disruption of social networks, and family separation. Additionally, socio-economic status, including household economic stress was mentioned. Displacement status plays a significant role in each of these stories.

8. The ability of children and their families to deal with, and recover from, adversity and crisis, influenced by individual characteristics and external factors like diversity of livelihoods, coping mechanisms, life skills such as problem-solving, the ability to seek support, motivation, optimism, faith, perseverance, and resourcefulness.

Risk factors, can be also known as "protection concerns".

VULNERABILITIES AND RISK FACTORS

The Socio-Ecological Model

Three children faced disability or chronic health conditions. For refugees who have experienced multiple displacements due to the war and have had to adapt to a new society, paying attention to the needs of children with illnesses and disabilities is doubly important.

"War started, and I feel worse than in Ukraine before the war. I have vegetative-vascular dystonia" (Male, 14, Warsaw).

"After moving to Poland, I went through a tough period of depression and didn't attend school for a while. However, this was more related to my autism rather than the situation itself. I'm actually quite adaptable and handle crises well. I'm feeling great now" (Male, 16, Warsaw).

Another vulnerability that increases protection risks is the disruption of children's passions.

This is a vulnerability best described by children's statements starting with "I used to." In 15 cases, the interruption of passions due to challenges in accessing certain activities was noted. One of the cases could be when classes take place too far from their places of residence, which particularly affected children living in collective accommodation centers. Financial challenges also hindered continuation. In some cases, children lost their desire to pursue their previous passions.

"In Ukraine I used to have the possibility to attend dancing classes, for four years my sisters and I were in a dance group. But here we didn't find dance clubs suitable for us (so that it would be free or inexpensive)"
(Female, 17, Warsaw)

"In Ukraine I used to attend singing and football. I lost the desire to do it here"
(Male, 15, Katowice).

"In Ukraine, I used to attend in a variety of martial arts, which I really enjoyed. Since moving here, I've only been able to go to the gym, but it's not as interesting for me. Another hobby of mine is radio technology, but unfortunately, I haven't found a way to continue that here either"
(Male, 14, Poznan).

"In Ukraine, I used to attend shooting classes and practice Aikido before war started. In the first small city where we came here, I couldn't find any activities. Now I am studying a lot and I have no free time"
(Male, 14, Warsaw).

VULNERABILITIES AND RISK FACTORS

The Socio-Ecological Model

At the individual level, children pointed out that they do not spend enough time with their parents.

This was mentioned in only 6 recounted stories. Moreover, children mentioned having more responsibilities at home and new duties that take away their time for play and pursuing passions.

As later emphasized, the lack of time does not apply to all children. Moreover, some of them pointed out that they are not spending time with their parents.

"No, I deal with all the things alone. I don't share with anyone. My parents are very busy, they are working a lot. We almost don't spend time together, at all" (Male, 14, Poznan).

In two cases, there were indications of a form of emotional neglect. Children mentioned a lack of consistent interaction with family and parents, and inconsistency in emotional availability and support. In the case of very busy, overworked parents (which may also stem from a decrease in socio-economic status and challenges in the host country), one child pointed to unmet basic needs. This related to the possibility of arranging for medical care.

"My mom works as a programmer here, she has got a lot of dreams and tasks, so she often forgets about my needs. For example, to make an appointment with a doctor. We may not communicate for several weeks, and then talk for several hours without stopping" (Female, 16, Warsaw).

At the family level, the previously mentioned vulnerabilities associated with the disruption of social networks, family separation, and household economic stress were identified.

Children did not directly point to caregiver trauma experiences. However, considering the mode of travel and displacement due to war, affecting both children and parents, it is a vulnerability that should not be ignored.

In 24 cases, children traveled solely with their mothers (and in 12 of these cases, together with their mother and siblings). In the context of refugee children in host countries, living in a single-parent household can be considered a vulnerability due to several factors. Single parents managing the resettlement process on their own may experience heightened stress and responsibility and often, as shown they face significant financial challenges.

In the context of community-level and macro-level vulnerabilities, education burden and lack of support (from both parents and teachers) were identified. Additionally, interrupted social networks due to displacement and displacement status itself were noted.

Furthermore, temporary accommodation and poor housing conditions may significantly impact mental health and also pose a risk of discrimination and bullying. However, discrimination and bullying can simultaneously contribute to vulnerabilities, affecting low mental health and psychosocial well-being.

VULNERABILITIES AND RISK FACTORS

The Socio-Ecological Model

Additionally, three boys, aged 15-17, expressed fear of being conscripted into the military.

“I realize that there is no point in returning to Ukraine now, since I can be immediately mobilized” (Male, 17, Warsaw).

During seven interviews, a notable factor surfaced: children faced cultural norm differences in their host countries, potentially increasing their vulnerability to identified protection risks. Importantly, five out of these seven instances occurred among children residing in shelters.

This could serve as an additional factor exacerbating isolation, lack of understanding from Polish peers, and integration challenges within the local community.

Troubling cultural differences were particularly noticeable among the group of children aged 16-17.

“We do not have common interests with most Poles, and we also have completely different views” (Female, 17, Warsaw).

“I meet Polish teenagers on the Internet. But we have very different mentalities. I try not to argue with them especially about religion. They take this topic very seriously” (Male, 17, Warsaw).

“I don’t understand people here. I prefer to be at home and playing computer games” (Male, 16, Poznan).



Photo: Tamara Kiptenko for the IRC

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

The Socio-Ecological Model

Refugee children endure hardships both pre- and post- migration. They are trauma, prolonged displacement, travelling long distances under dangerous circumstances, or difficulties in host countries, including social, cultural and language differences.

Yet, despite these challenges, many refugee children demonstrate resilience and coping strategies. Within the socio-ecological framework, certain protective factors have been identified that enhance the agency of refugee children and can help mitigate identified protection risks.

In this report, they are combined into two groups: internal protective factors and external ones.

In the respondents' narratives, a common theme that frequently arose was the experience of having more free time.

In the majority of interviews (38 out of 45), children expressed satisfaction with having more time for themselves. This surplus of free time can be understood as a protective factor, providing children with opportunities for leisure, relaxation, and personal growth, which can contribute to their overall well-being and resilience.

Many of them associated the lack of time in Ukraine with a significantly larger amount of homework brought home from school.

For example, one respondent mentioned:

"Here, I find myself with significantly more free time. In Ukraine, much of our time was devoted to activities at the house of worship" (Female, 14, Warsaw).

"In Ukraine, my schedule was much fuller compared to here. I had significantly more homework and tasks to tackle" (Female, 12, Katowice).

"In Ukraine, attending an art school and taking extra English classes kept me quite occupied. However, since I've been here, I've found that I have much more free time for my hobbies" (Female, 15, Warsaw).

"I have more free time here. I try to socialize, and I got used to the new environment" (Female 16, Warsaw).

"I have more free time here because its less homework than in Ukraine" (Male, 12, Poznan).

"I love vocals, playing the piano, and drawing flowers and cute spiders" (Female, 12, Warsaw).

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

The Socio-Ecological Model

Having more free time after school enables many children to pursue their passions. Children do this independently at home, with friends, parents, or in collective accommodation centers. Often, they engage in activities with local non-governmental organizations.

"After school, I attend Korean language courses, art therapy, and walk with friends" (Female, 16, Poznan).

"I dig having bike paths at school. But before I can hit the pedals, gotta sort out this Karta Rowerowa [eng. bicycle card] thing. In my free time I read. Recently I finished a book about the dog called Elf. Also, I'm into online chess, but I'm itching to join a chess club in Katowice" (Male, 12, Katowice).

"My hobbies tend to shift over time. I used to be into painting and even invested in a special tablet for it, but it didn't quite click for me. Now, I'm getting into wood carving, with a friend teaching me" (Male, 17, Warsaw).

Moving from smaller towns to a large city in Poland sometimes positively influenced the development of children's passions. Several respondents pointed out that they have many more opportunities in Poland.

The statement of the 14-year-old respondent highlights several protective factors contributing to the resilience of a refugee child, such as engaging in diverse activities and being part of a community.

The fact that all these activities are conveniently close to home is important as it reduces potential barriers to participation such as transportation issues.

"There wasn't much going on in the Ukrainian village where I'm from. But here, I keep myself busy with karate, swimming, language courses, and pottery classes – all conveniently close to home. I even crafted a candlestick in one of my pottery sessions. Plus, I'm a proud member of the Boy Scouts!" (Male, 14, Warsaw).

"Here, I have plenty of free time. I spend it drawing, reading, listening to music, and writing. Sometimes, I need to take breaks to rest and recharge. I also enjoy walking with friends. You know, I like Ukraine more. But this is probably just because of the memories. Poland is actually very nice" (Female, 12, Poznan).

"Back in Ukraine, I was hitting the art school and taking extra English classes, so yeah, I was pretty busy. Now I've got way more time to chill with my hobbies. In Kharkiv, I used to hang out at this cool art social club. Here, like six months ago at a literary night, I met some guys who are just as much into creating stuff as I am. In our crew, we write music for our poems and then perform them at these literary evenings. It's pretty awesome" (Female, 15, Warsaw).

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

The Socio-Ecological Model

On an individual level, engaging in hobbies such as writing music and performing provides the teenager with personal fulfillment and a constructive outlet for emotional expression.

Such activities can enhance self-esteem and self-efficacy by allowing children to develop and showcase their talents, crucial for psychological resilience.

This example illustrates protective factors that interdisciplinarity permeate the internal and external levels. It also includes integration with local peers.

These peer connections provide emotional support and validation, which are particularly valuable in mitigating the loneliness and isolation often experienced by refugee youths.

Moreover, participation in local initiatives, like literary events within the community, is an important factor in creating a supportive environment. It also provides opportunities for self-expression and social interaction. All children highlighted the importance of passions in their lives.

“Before the start of the war, I was all about diving into nuclear physics and chemistry. After the start of the war, I did not have time for all this and besides that my interests shifted. Plus, I had some realizations along the way that just made those subjects lose their spark for me. I started writing stories, and later I became interested in programming. I am taking paid programming courses. I really like it” (Female, 17, Warsaw).

Supportive and inclusive learning pathways are crucial in reducing both protection risks. In the statements of children, positive factors and good examples in this regard were observed.

Most commonly mentioned were assistance from teachers and intercultural assistants, a reduced amount of homework enabling the development of passions and learning in alternative systems, as well as the proximity of schools in several cases.

Children also noted differences in teachers' approaches to learning and children. They pointed out greater openness and "more relaxed" atmosphere.

"Here, teachers are tolerant and it's not pressuring. You have to carry responsibility for your studying by yourself" (Female, 16, Warsaw).

In several stories, preparatory classes also played a significant role.

"There is no intercultural assistant at my school, but there are special preparatory classes for Ukrainians with in-depth studying of the Polish language" (Female, 16, Warsaw).

"I've been studying at a Polish school for two months already. In preparatory class. It's my last year at school because I want to enter the technical college in Gdansk and become a sailor. It actually was my plan in Ukraine, I planned to enter Odessa National Maritime University. But due to the fact that circumstances have changed, I changed plans" (Male, 15, Warsaw).

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PROTECTIVE FACTORS

The Socio-Ecological Model

As mentioned earlier, language barriers contribute to the risk of low mental health and are significant in the context of discrimination, especially at school. Among the respondents, 24 of them mentioned learning Polish as well as other foreign languages (Korean or English).

"Now I read faster than my Polish classmates. I have started to write a book in the Polish language" (Female, 12, Warsaw).

Even if children have not yet been able to start learning Polish, they express the need and desire to do so. Some children learn in Polish schools, while others participating in the Ukrainian education system mentioned Polish language classes. Twelve participants mentioned free Polish language classes.

"My Ukrainian school recently added Polish language to a program, so I have already had a few lessons of Polish language. But I would like to learn Polish more" (Female, 12, Poznan).

"I don't know Polish yet, I would like to take language courses to understand when people address to me" (Female, 12, Katowice).

"I learn English and German languages now. I have learned Polish language for four months before entering technical college" (Male, 16, Warsaw).

"I learn English language and I like it. I have learned Polish language for two-three months already. So, I know four languages plus I also know sign language since my mother is deaf" (Male, 15, Warsaw).

This is linked to another protective factor, which is access to supportive services. In this cycle, 18 participants pointed out positive experiences and access to supportive services. These often revolved around the availability of additional activities and places where one can meet peers, such as during art therapy or ceramics classes. Children also noted that they utilize information networks provided by humanitarian organizations or local NGOs.

"Sometimes I can ask for some information at organizations like this one and it is helpful" (Female, 12, Katowice).

"Also, I'm asking for information and advice in different humanitarian foundations, there is always someone adult who knows better and who I can ask something" (Male, 17, Warsaw).

"Days in Ukraine were definitely more packed with lessons compared to here. I don't have that much homework here. That means I've got plenty of free time to hang out with friends and dive into all sorts of activities in organizations like this one. We chat, tackle puzzles, paint" (Male, 17, Warsaw).

"After school I came home, eat a dinner and usually go to the community center. It's my favorite place! We can do homework there and have different activities like making crafts, paint, play and so on" (Male, 12, Warsaw).

"The difference is the fact that in Ukraine there was no such a community center. And so, I was always sitting at home after school. Here is better for me because here is the community center and everyone respects you" (Male, 12, Poznan).

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

The Socio-Ecological Model

Some children attended sessions with therapists and benefited from free psychological support offered by local organizations. In addition, four participants indicated that they attend group therapy sessions or engage in private meetings with psychologists.

"I attend a psychological support group"
(Male, 17, Warsaw).

"I regularly attend art therapy classes, sessions with a speech therapist and a speech pathologist here"
(Female, 14, Warsaw).

Access to information is facilitated by local organization staff, employees of collective accommodation centers (in two cases), or peers. In over half of the stories, children indicated that it is their parents (most often their mother) or siblings who ensure access to information and support services.

The availability of free time and access to support services, in several stories, was also linked to civic engagement. Five children were very eager to engage in the life of local communities or the Ukrainian diaspora.

Participation involved attending festivals celebrating Ukrainian culture and events that brought together peers from Poland and other countries. This involvement also included a keen interest in volunteering.

"I also volunteer sometimes. Today I have brought some clothes of mine and my brother to the humanitarian foundation" (Male, 17, Warsaw).

"Here in Poland, I was one of the organizers of event "Ukrainian Spring". I like volunteering and would like to do it more" (Female, 16, Poznan).

In the context of protective factors like parental support and monitoring, information from children suggests the presence of both. In 27 interviews, children indicated trusting their parents or caregivers, often turning to them for advice and assistance.

"My mom and I are very close; I can share with her and ask for advice when I need it. We spend a lot of time together as a family, since my mother does not work and my father works remotely, and only goes to the office in the center of Warsaw 2-3 times a week. We are a very friendly family and communicate well"
(Female, 12, Warsaw).

"I have a good relationship with my mother. I can talk to her about lots of things and ask for advice and support" (Female, 15, Warsaw).

"I can always ask my mother for advice. I like that we talk every evening. I also help mother to go to the grocery shop and we can talk there. My father always helps me with homework" (Female, 12, Poznan).

It can also be reflected in the perception of safety indicated by participants as "family closeness". Safety was associated in eight/8 cases through the prism of security and the presence of loved ones.

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

The Socio-Ecological Model

“Safety for me is when I know what’s going to be tomorrow. I’m not afraid because I’m with my parents” (Female, 16, Poznan).

“I feel safe. Safety is when you are at home with your parents” (Female, 12, Poznan).

“I can handle anything. It is important for me to know that my loved ones are safe” (Female, 17, Warsaw).

“Safety for me is when I’m at home in a country protected by NATO (under the NATO umbrella), all the windows and doors are closed, I have a phone with me, and my parents know where I am, and even better - if they are next to me” (Female, 12, Warsaw).

For several children (7), the new environment and proximity to nature, as well as the quality of their new home environment, played a significant role in shaping their daily lives in Poland.

This is well illustrated by the example of a girl from Kyiv. The family's participation in activities together, such as feeding squirrels and playing board games in the evenings, highlights strong family cohesion and bonding. This closeness fosters emotional support, communication, and a sense of belonging.

“We live in a very nice green area, and I feel comfortable being in nature among cool parks. I often take my parents by the hands, and we go feed the squirrels. And in the evenings, we play board games” (Female, 12, Warsaw).

Some children express a preference for living in their new environment in Poland, particularly when they have access to larger spaces, support networks, and proximity to nature.

“I used to live in a less favorable area in Kharkiv, but now I live in a residential area near a forest.

I like it!” (Female, 15, Warsaw).

Lastly, it's crucial to highlight the significant role of peers and friends in the lives of children in a new country.

In many cases, this aspect was positively assessed. Compared to qualitative data from the previous report, where almost the majority of children mentioned loneliness and a lack of friends, in this cycle, more children, 17 of them, positively evaluated their relationships with friends and the opportunity to spend time with them.



CONCLUSIONS

“Safety is when there are no missiles” (Male, 13, Poznan).

One of the conclusions of the report aptly illustrates the quote from a 12-year-old girl from the Cherkasy region: **“I feel safe now. Safety is when there is no war”.**

In most cases, children viewed their safety through the lens of the absence of war and the proximity of their families.

Additionally, they pointed to the safety of their surroundings, near schools and their homes. In almost half of the interviews children expressed that although they miss their own homes, they currently wish to remain in Poland.

The report's conclusions shed light on the complex array of daily stressors impacting refugee children, affecting their mental health and psychological well-being. These stressors encompass various challenges, from language barriers intensifying feelings of isolation to substandard living conditions, such as overcrowding.

Furthermore, the instability stemming from displacement exacerbates their psychological burden, with many children experiencing frequent moves or changes in residence within the host country. The sense of loneliness and isolation can exacerbate their mental health struggles, as they grapple with disrupted social networks.

This cycle, we observed a heightened emphasis on the economic struggles faced by families, including difficulties affording school meals and participating in enriching activities due to financial limitations. Some children even expressed the need to take on additional work to help support their families, highlighting the extent of their financial strain. Additionally, the sense of insecurity stemming from exposure to conflict and displacement are palpable, as evidenced by the children's accounts of their experiences and fears.

The protection concerns, vulnerabilities, and protective factors identified in children's narratives, as highlighted in the report, find confirmation in humanitarian sector research in Poland. Reports from Save the Children and Plan (2023) highlighted the challenges associated with psychosocial distress and deteriorating mental health.



CONCLUSIONS

The exclusion of thousands of children from the Polish education system was also depicted in the report "Out of School" by CARE, Save The Children, and IRC (2024). The burden arising from the dual education system was also confirmed by data from the IRC Protection Monitoring Report in the last quarter of 2023⁹. In addition, the protection risks identified among adults, like insecurity of tenure and risk of homelessness, domestic violence, and access to legal identity, also affect the situation of children.¹⁰

The International Rescue Committee emphasizes several important strategies to support the mental health of refugee children. Among these strategies are creating safe spaces and allowing time and space for children to open up about their experiences, as well as encouraging emotional expression. Furthermore, an evidence-based approach highlights the need for building trust and belonging and making efforts to understand each child's unique background and interests.

The absence of identified protective factors can render children more vulnerable, both internally and externally. Conversely, the presence of such elements fosters resilience, enabling children to navigate adversity and thrive despite the circumstances.

This interconnectedness emphasizes the importance of addressing protection concerns and promoting protective factors to safeguard the rights and wellbeing of refugee children.

"I feel 100% safe here. Safety means my personal boundaries are respected, the environment is pleasant (which it is here), and I have some freedom, at least when it comes to overcoming obstacles" (Female, 16, Warsaw).

Resilience does not imply that a child remains unaffected by a crisis. Instead, it is shaped by both personal qualities and environmental factors that empower a child to recover and thrive despite facing adversity and traumatic experiences. It is not determined by a single factor. Instead, as shown children stories reveal a range of internal and external elements that can enhance resilience. Additionally, policies at the macro level and humanitarian support from international and local NGOs can further nurture and reinforce these qualities.

Taking this into account, IRC has developed the following recommendations.

EMPOWERING
CHILDREN
FOUNDATION
PROVIDE A
HELPLINE FOR
CHILDREN &
ADOLESCENTS. IT
IS FREE AND
AVAILABLE EVERY
DAY 24/7.
116 111.

9. For more on Ukrainian children in the education system, see the CEO report, Available at: <https://ceo.org.pl/dzieci-uchodzycze-w-polskich-szkolach-co-mowia-nowe-dane/>

10. See more: IRC (2024) Protection Monitoring Report Q4 2023, Available at: <https://www.rescue.org/eu/report/irc-poland-protection-monitoring-report-sept-dec-2023>

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations from the previous IRC Child Protection monitoring report retain their relevance.

Government of Poland and EU

- Establishing a system of responsive enrollment of children into the Polish educational system enhanced with proper integration measures such as intercultural assistants and additional language classes.
- Developing durable options for transition out of the Temporary Protection (TP) regime and taking into account educational needs and specific vulnerabilities attributed to children.
- Preparing awareness-raising and anti-discrimination campaigns with a particular focus on addressing discrimination experienced by displaced children.
- Introducing MHPSS services for children in collective accommodation.
- Maintaining support for displaced children by ensuring their access to all social benefits entitled to Polish children as well as to uphold their preferences and exclusions concerning payments related to collective accommodation.
- Supporting access to Ukrainian-speaking child psychologists and speech therapists.

Government of Ukraine

- Ensuring monitoring to prevent exclusion of children from Ukraine abroad from the educational process, establish cooperation in this regard with respective Polish authorities.
- Avoiding unnecessary burden of enrolment in several education systems by Ukrainian children, develop a regulatory framework for the effective functioning of the crediting of subjects studied by Ukrainian children in foreign schools, including in the case of studying in lower grades than in Ukraine.

Humanitarian Sector and local NGOs

- Enhance community development initiatives tailored specifically to children (sports, cultural events, arts, computer classes, recreational activities etc.)
- Foresee activities aimed at raising legal awareness and facilitating the responsible adaptation of adolescents to the labor market targeting both children and their parents.
- Continuing monitoring the situation of refugee children in Poland

Donors and Development partners

- Sustain the humanitarian field presence in Poland by maintaining a network of community-based initiatives that offer comprehensive services.
- Strengthen the support for refugees in host countries by providing appropriate funding for continued programming that helps fill gaps in social protection systems and reaches those with the highest needs. Child refugees should be assisted for as long as needed, including adequate funding for services for refugees with specific needs and recent arrivals.

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