

Ukrainian Refugees in Poland

Identity and Experiences

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ARISE The Frontline
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The Researchers:

This report was prepared by a group of experienced social researchers from the Centre for Migration Research as well as the Faculty of Applied Social Sciences and Resocialisation of the University of Warsaw. Together, the group deals with the issue of migration to Poland from the perspective of different scientific disciplines: legal, sociological and political science. In addition to theoretical knowledge, some of the authors have experience directly supporting migrants from Ukraine, even before 2022. This diverse knowledge and experience made it possible to gather valuable materials, used to develop the individual parts of the report. Agnieszka Dudzińska, PhD, initiated the report, and the Authors would like to express their gratitude for her help in creating the structure of the study.

This research was funded by Arise, as part of our commitment to studying human trafficking risks and responses. Research is a key pillar of Arise's strategy towards ending slavery in some of the worst affected areas of the world, based on the critical role of data and understanding in effective slavery prevention.

Photos throughout the report were shared by the WONDER Foundation and Pontes, capturing some of their operations in Poland.

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Executive Summary

The Russian invasion of Ukraine caused unprecedented forced migration to Poland and other EU countries. The scale of the refugee wave, primarily made up of women and children, challenged previous migration and integration systems and infrastructure. There are a number of important observations to make about the Polish response:



1



The need for urgent humanitarian resources exposed structural and institutional weaknesses of governmental approaches to migration, asylum and integration policies.

2



It simultaneously mobilised unprecedented waves of grassroots involvement, multi-level cooperation and crisis management.

3



The research conducted gives evidence of double standards within Poland's general refugee response, and politicisation and selectivity within the humanitarian response and integration policy of migrants in Poland.

4



The prolongation of war, together with economic and energy crises, is decreasing the availability and efficacy of support.

Structural Weaknesses

The research exposed systemic blind spots in protection. These vulnerabilities must be observed and acted upon, in order for state support services to be improved in general. Risks and challenges reported by the authors include;

- the risk of exclusion and deterioration of the health and mental situation of adults and minors with disabilities and chronic disease;
- deterioration of the situation of people with special needs, who need medical confirmation of the degree of disability or other diagnoses;
- the deterioration of the psychological state of single women, women with children who are separated with families and husbands/partners in Ukraine, and migrants with PTSD and depression;
- the lack of facilities and specialists for rehabilitation for migrants after surgeries and amputations;
- women's reproductive rights, contraception and specialist medical assistance;
- accessibility of medical and care assistance to older migrants;
- risks related to the lack of verification of and responsibility for information published on social media;
- limited access of children to the education and care systems in rural areas;

- sexual and physical exploitation;
- human trafficking;
- unfair and precarious work.

The report shows that those on the margins of communities - the underprivileged and the vulnerable - are at greater risk of suffering throughout the refugee process, despite the significant mobilisation of support from different levels of Polish society.

Unprecedented Multi-Level Support

Despite some central systemic oversight, there was an outpouring of support for Ukrainian arrivals from Polish families, civil society organisations and local government. Polish citizens, particularly those aged 30-39 and 50-59, were keen to help. They aided in the provision of financial support, Polish language assistance, administrative support, and job search assistance. Polish organisations helped with the arrangement of reception centres and hostels, information access including phone lines, psychological help, legal help and language help. Municipalities organised economic support and free public transport, and engaged in positive public acts of solidarity - like flying the Ukraine flags on public buildings. Many positive examples were set by the Polish response on the ground, and the research found Ukrainians to be wholly unconcerned about the prospect of Polish intolerance.



Double Standards

The contrast between the Polish response to the Ukraine war and to the Belarus border crisis in the summer of 2021 was regularly noted by observers. The 2021 border crisis saw Polish troops called to secure the border, with the Polish government declaring a state of emergency and restricting the movement of doctors, human rights activists and journalists. Poland accused Belarus of shepherding asylum seekers, refugees and economic migrants towards the EU border. Many of those at the Belarus border were Iraqi, and many others were African. Accusations of selectivity have been levelled at the Polish government for their markedly different response to Ukrainian arrivals.

Support Reductions

The resources of municipalities, social organisations and private individuals involved in support are limited and becoming exhausted. This has been accelerated by wider economic fallout from the war and supply chain difficulties. Cooperation between the national government and international actors is essential to ensure the continuity of assistance services and integration support for Ukrainian refugees.

Authorities should internalise long-term perspectives of integration of migrants in Poland. Further steps should be taken to ensure opportunities for migrants to gain autonomy and financial independence – the recognition of specialisations; the verification of fair and safe conditions of work; accessibility of education and care institutions for children close to the workplace, accessibility of Polish language courses. These are essential for the wellbeing and integration of migrants.

Further Research

The above risks are not exhaustive. As mentioned, the situation is highly complex and dynamic. As such, it is important to elaborate monitoring mechanisms and to undertake further studies that focus on specific areas such as:

- the evaluation and assessment of policy relating to migrants and assistance to them;
- the needs-assessment of municipalities and social organisations that provide long-term multidimensional humanitarian and integration assistance;
- needs-assessments adopting an intersectional approach to the needs and specific characteristics of refugees;
- studies on post-traumatic stress among Ukrainian migrants;
- evaluation of educational processes, programmes for children in educational and care institutions, drop-outs and problems reported by children and parents.

This research is reported across six chapters. The first summarises the legal measures instituted by the Polish government to receive Ukrainians, and the provisions and social entitlements set out for new arrivals. The second chapter analyses the demographic data available to profile the Ukrainians that came to Ukraine, and discusses their engagement with the Polish educational systems and labour market. The third chapter evaluates the refugee experience in Poland, including family situations, health, income, help received, risks, and long-term plans. The fourth chapter discusses some grassroots support and the use of social media by refugees. The fifth chapter analyses the role of NGOs and municipal governments, and the sixth discusses the various aspects of the war and the refugee presence discussed by the media. In every chapter, there are lessons to be learned about how mass refugee movements must be handled.

Arise is grateful to the researchers, and everyone involved at every stage of the project.

Introduction

The Russian invasion of Ukraine triggered a mass exodus of Ukrainian people. Within weeks, it became apparent that the world was witnessing the largest influx of refugees in post-WW2 European history. In that short period, more than 5 million Ukrainian refugees arrived in the European Union or other OECD countries. The main destination or transit country was Poland, due both to proximity to Ukraine, and also to a long history of Ukrainian migration to Poland, with an existing Ukrainian minority and immigrant community.

This report aims to analyse the demographic make-up and experiences of Ukrainian refugees. What exactly do we know about the size and profile of the Ukrainian refugees reaching Poland? Who was organising assistance for them in Poland and in what form? What needs did the refugees report? What are the main challenges and risks that affect refugee experiences and Polish responses?

In order to answer these main questions as accurately as possible, we posed several specific questions:

1

How did the government in Poland regulate the organisation of assistance to refugees from Ukraine?

2

How large was the scale of the influx of refugees to Poland?

3

Who are the refugees arriving in Poland?

4

What needs did they report in the first weeks of their stay in Poland?

5

Whose help could the refugees count on?

6

What kind of help did local governments and NGOs offer?

7

How were the problems of refugees presented in the media discourse?

8

What are the gaps in terms of the assistance offered to refugees from Ukraine?



To the best of the authors' knowledge, no report answering such questions has been published so far. One should appreciate the efforts of research centres, think tanks, and analysts who, from the very beginning of the war, collected data on the arriving Ukrainians in the most reliable manner available to them, during a highly dynamic situation.

We hope that the presented report will fill the existing data gap, providing a diverse group of readers with basic knowledge about the challenges and solutions that have emerged in Poland in relation to Ukrainian refugees.



Chapter One

Legal Status and Provision

Authors:

Kamila Kowalska, Maciej Tygielski

Introduction

The legal status of Ukrainians arriving in Poland after the 24th of February 2022 was regulated by a special law, called the 'The Act on Assistance for Ukrainian Citizens' that altered existing refugee structures and dictated the rights of Ukrainian refugees. In some cases, other laws or acts of a lower order are referred to, remembering the uniqueness of the situation caused by Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which was reflected in the Polish legal system.

Special Law: Legalisation of Stay

In order for the stay of a Ukrainian citizen to be considered legal for a period of 18 months after crossing the border after the 24th of February 2022, three conditions must be fulfilled simultaneously:

1



The Ukrainian citizen's border crossing must be legal - only permissible at the border crossing point during opening times (Art. 5(1) of Reg. 2016/399).

2



The Ukrainian citizen must declare the intention to remain in Poland.

3



The Ukrainian citizen's crossing must take place as a result of hostilities.

The legal residence of persons covered by the scope of the special law is independent of the documents held and of other provisions regulating entry and residence on the territory of the Republic of Poland. Moreover, leaving Poland for a period not exceeding 1 month does not result in the loss of this entitlement. The 18-month period set out in Article 2(1) of the special law expires, in accordance with the Code of Administrative Procedure (Article 57 par. 3), on the 24th of August 2023. The personal scope of Article 2(1) of the special law does not include the spouse of a Ukrainian citizen who does not hold Ukrainian or Polish citizenship. The law also omits the life partners of Ukrainian citizens and members of their immediate families.

Among other things, the legislation places a requirement to cross the border at a border crossing. This does not seem to be an exorbitant expectation. However, it precludes other migrants who, breaking through to Poland from Belarus, did not have the opportunity to cross the border legally.



Assistance to refugees

Pursuant to Article 12(1) of the special act, the provincial governor may provide assistance to the citizens of Ukraine referred to in Article 1(1), consisting of:

- accommodation,
- provision of collective meals on a daily basis,
- provision of transport to places of accommodation (between or to centres run by the Head of the Office for Foreigners on the basis of the provisions of the Act of the 13th of June 2003 on granting protection to foreigners on the territory of the Republic of Poland) or places where medical care is provided to Ukrainian citizens,
- financing travel by means of public transport and specialised transport intended for persons with disabilities (in particular to places of accommodation or between such places),
- providing cleaning and personal hygiene products and other products,
- organising places of emergency medical assistance,
- providing medical personnel carrying out follow-up visits, if necessary, with regard to persons with a positive diagnostic test result for SARS-CoV-2 and taking other measures necessary for the implementation of assistance.

However, all of the measures envisaged in Article 12(1) of the special law, “may” be provided by the provincial governor. This is despite the fact that the provincial governor is the sole coordinator of many of the measures. It would therefore be much more appropriate to use the term “will provide” or “ensure”.

The same “may provide” expression appears in reference to other public administrations and local authorities. It is hard to resist the impression that these provisions have been drafted in such a way that everyone “may” but no one “must” provide assistance to migrants.

Assignment of PESEL number

To gain access to public services, refugees must be assigned a Universal Electronic Civil Registration System (also known as PESEL) number. This is done at the request of the person concerned, and is submitted to any municipal office. According to official data, in the first month of assigning the PESEL number to Ukrainian refugees, almost 1 million people received it (cf. task 4). It caused a significant burden on the public administration apparatus. Not only were the case-competent offices faced with a great increase in the number of applicants during this period, but refugees were forced to stand in queues for hours.

Social benefits

Ukrainian families have been given access to a variety of social benefit schemes, including family benefits, upbringing benefits, good start benefits, family care capital and nursery subsidies.

The special law has also included an entitlement for PESEL-registered Ukrainians, of PLN 300 per person, allocated for subsistence, to cover expenditures for food, clothing, footwear, personal hygiene products and housing fees in particular. Such Ukrainians are also entitled to free psychological assistance, and may be provided with food aid under the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived.

In terms of health care, citizens of Ukraine and non-citizen spouses of Ukrainian citizens are covered by benefits on the same publicly-funded terms as Poles.

Access to education

It is important to underline that access to public education for Ukrainian pupils and students is extremely important for the inclusion of their mothers in the labour market. The Education and Science Minister made provisions, in March 2022, to allow Ukrainian children to be exempt from Polish educational requirements if they were able to continue remote education within the Ukrainian system.

Pupils of compulsory schooling age who are unable to learn from distance in the Ukrainian education system are admitted to public schools in Poland. Admission to school is possible throughout the school year. Children and pupils who do not speak sufficient Polish are granted various forms of support.

Access to the labour market

By virtue of the special law (Article 1.3), Ukrainian citizens who have crossed the Polish border from the 24th of February 2022 onwards are entitled to work in the territory of the Republic of Poland during the period of stay, in accordance with the applicable legislation. One is required to have a PESEL number to allow this.

There are special provisions in place to afford Ukrainian health professionals (including doctors, nurses, midwives and dentists) practice permits in Poland. The same provisions exist for psychologists, who were in particular demand following traumatic experiences of the war. Similarly, adequately qualified science professionals from Ukraine are given the right to be employed, without the usual requirements of the Polish Academy of Sciences. There are special provisions allowing for subsidies to pay for Polish language training for qualified Ukrainian teachers.

“ It is hard to resist the impression that these provisions have been drafted in such a way that everyone “may” but no one “must” provide assistance to migrants.

Chapter Two

Ukrainian Demographic Data

Authors:

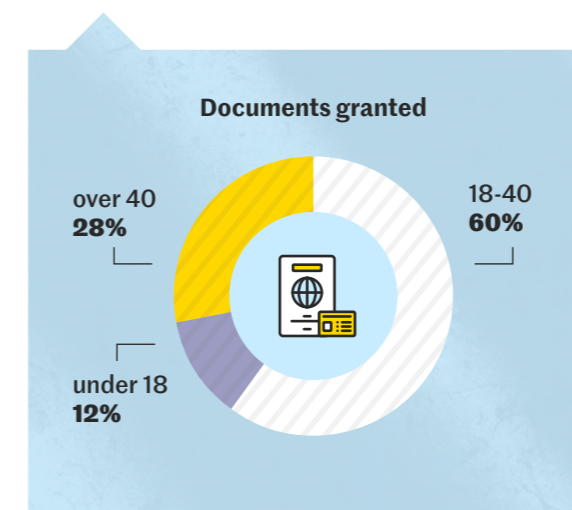
Kamil Matuszczyk, Kamila Kowalska

In order for the Polish Government and other humanitarian actors to make effective interventions, access to up-to-date statistics is essential. Reliable data allows for monitoring of the scale of the reception of Ukrainian citizens in Poland and their adaptation to life in Poland. Despite a lot of data, the picture of the situation of the Ukrainian newcomers in Poland is incomplete. We have attempted to collate data on the experiences of Ukrainian arrivals.

How large was the population of Ukrainians in Poland before February 2022?

In the 2011 National Census, there were only 51,000 people who identified as Ukrainians in Poland. However, numbers increased dramatically in the years between that census and the outbreak of war. The data on the number of permits granted to Ukrainian citizens shows that, during the analysed period, Ukrainian permits granted by Poland increased by 800%+. The most up-to-date data shows that in 2019, there were more than 570,000 first permits for Ukrainians issued.

According to a report by the Office for Foreigners, more than 300,000 Ukrainians had valid residence permits in 2021. Among this population, 60% of the documents were granted to persons aged 18–40. Children and adolescents under the age of 18 account for about 12% and those over 40 for approx. 28%. Men were slightly higher in number, accounting for 54% of the population. The overwhelming majority (84%) hold a temporary residence permit (up to a maximum of 3 years). As much as 77% of the permits are for work purposes in Poland.



How many people crossed the Polish-Ukrainian border as a result of Russian aggression towards Ukraine?

According to the Border Guard, 6.34 million refugees from Ukraine crossed the border into Poland between the 24th of February and the 19th of September.

On the first day of Russian aggression, a ban on Ukrainian men aged 18-60 leaving the country was announced. The ban did not extend to single fathers, people with three or more children and people with disabilities. Students of foreign universities, drivers of humanitarian aid vehicles and those with permanent residence abroad were also exempt.

The highest weekly volume of border crossings from Ukraine to Poland took place in the first weeks of March 2022. Thereafter, the scale of arrivals of Ukrainians, although still high, started to decrease. Arrivals stabilised as early as the end of March and the beginning of April, when an average of 100,000-200,000 people from Ukraine arrived in Poland each week. It should also be noted that the movement of Ukrainians was bi-directional. There was a similar volume of departures, also at the level of 100-200,000 people every week.

“ 6.34 million refugees from Ukraine crossed the border into Poland between the 24th of February and the 19th of September.

How many people from Ukraine were given a PESEL number?

In the six months between the 14th of March (when assignment started) and the 15th of September, more than 1.3 million Ukrainians applied for a PESEL. This accounts for about 20% of all refugees that crossed the border in the given period (as stated by the Border Guard). Still, not all the holders of the PESEL number remained in Poland.

Table 1. Basic characteristics of Ukrainian PESEL holders

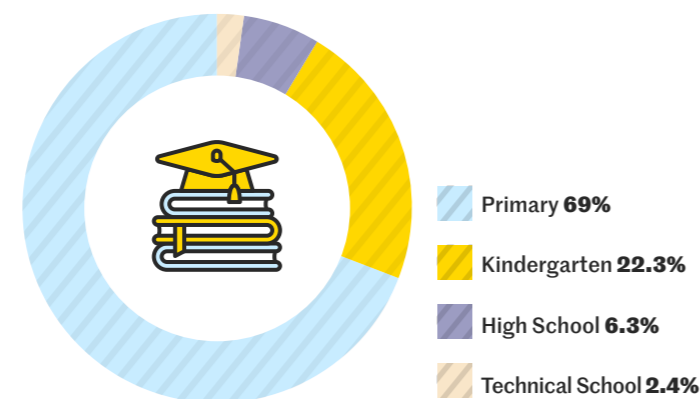
PESEL applications (14.03-15.09)	Total	Female 0-18	Female 18-65	Female over 65	Male 0-18	Male 18-65	Male over 65
	1,356,820	21.1%	46.6%	2.9%	21.1%	7.5%	0.8%

Source: own elaboration based on data retrieved from dane.gov.pl

How many children from Ukraine have been enrolled in the Polish school system?

As of the 27th of June 2022 (when the school year ended in Poland), a total of 182,245 refugee pupils from Ukraine were enrolled in Polish schools. This figure does not take into account the Ukrainian children already attending Polish schools. A significant number of children (up to 540,000 in the first weeks following the invasion) continued their education remotely, organised by schools located in Ukraine (Pietrusińska and Nowosielski 2022).

Figure 1. Ukrainian refugee pupils by type of school, June 27 2022



Source: Calculation based on data.gov.pl

To what extent have refugees from Ukraine been integrated into the labour market? What do we know about their employment?

During the first three months of the special law, a total of 270,000 refugees from Ukraine took up employment in Poland. Among this population, women accounted for 72%. This isn't proportionate to the huge overrepresentation of women over men in the Ukrainian refugee population. It can therefore be inferred that many women did not take up registered employment in the first period.

Table 2. Age and gender structure of refugee workers in March-June 2022

Age	Female	Male	Total
below 25	38526	18791	57317
25-34	47758	23865	71623
35-44	59049	18497	77546
45-54	37182	10256	47438
55-59	7956	1962	9918
60-64	3009	2240	5249
above 64	790	593	1383
Total	194270	76204	270474

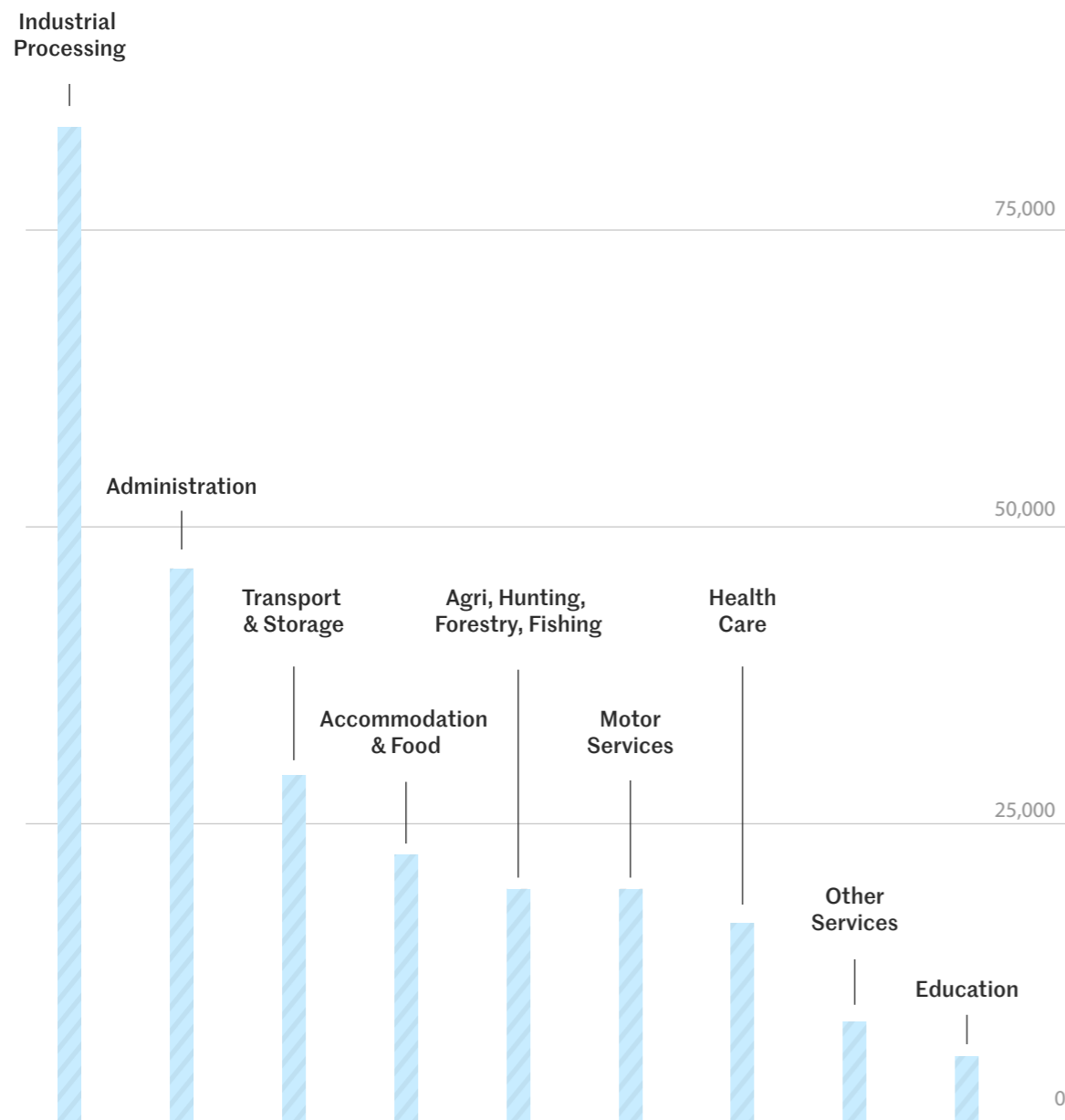
Source: own elaboration based on a database of Ministry of Family and Social Policy



Previous studies reveal that women are much more likely than men to undertake undeclared work in the host country (Colic-Peisker, Tilbury 2006; Górny, Jazwińska 2019). Among refugee workers, those aged 25-44 predominated. Nearly one in five workers was under 25 years old. Employment levels drop as age increases from the 25-30 bracket.

The overwhelming majority of workers found employment in the industrial processing sector (31%), followed by administrative and support service activities (17.1%) and transport and storage (11%). This structure deviates slightly from the share of Ukrainian workers in the labour market before 2022.

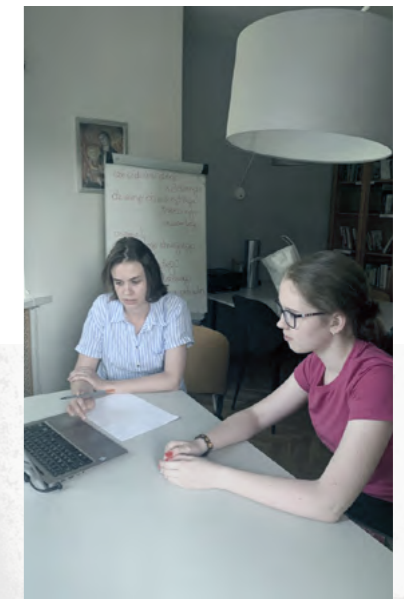
Figure 2. Top 10 sectors where Ukrainian refugees have taken up work, March–June 2022



Source: own elaboration based on a database of Ministry of Family and Social Policy

Nearly one in five workers (18%) found employment as labourers performing simple industrial tasks during their first period of stay in Poland. Nearly 20,000 found employment as domestic, office and hotel helpers and cleaners. Interestingly, just over 14,000 people took up work in agriculture. However, these figures do not reflect the true scale of seasonal employment in Poland.

Such a small share of refugees in agriculture can be partially explained by informality and the failure of farmers to register foreign workers (Fiałkowska, Matuszczyk 2021). It is very likely that a considerable amount of labour is hidden and therefore not represented in available statistics. In other words, official employment numbers, such as those shown in the above graph, are skewed by varying levels of official registration.





Chapter Three

Refugee Experience

Author:
Kamil Matuszczyk

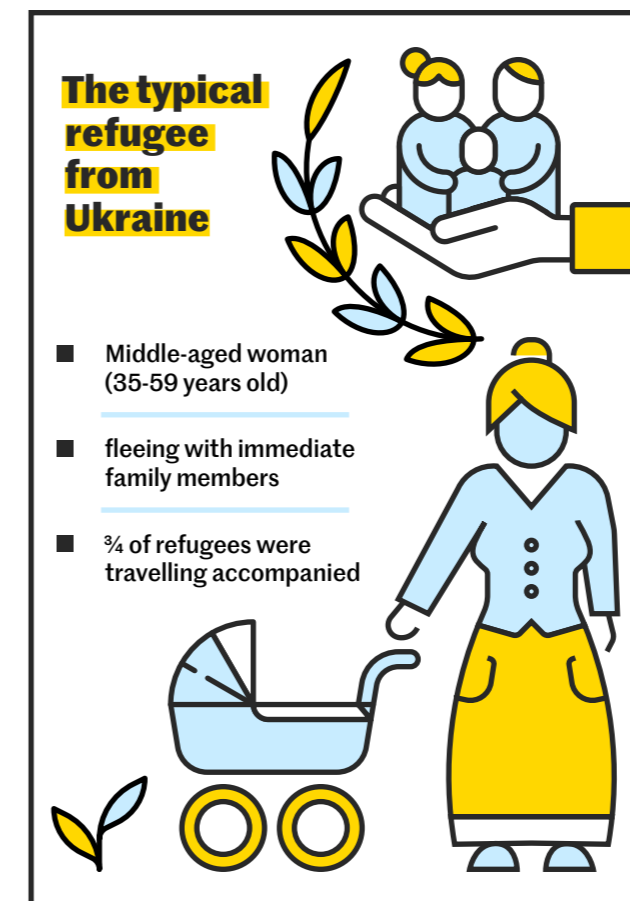
Introduction

There is a significant need for further research on the Ukrainian refugee experience. Most of the existing studies, despite the importance of their objectives, were carried out hastily, often online or among people temporarily staying in a specific common space (e.g. while dealing with the bureaucracy of obtaining a PESEL). Still, the available studies make it possible to identify the main trends and characteristics of forced migration from Ukraine to Poland.

Who are the refugees from Ukraine who arrived in Poland after the 24th of February 2022?

The typical refugee from Ukraine is a middle-aged woman (35-59 years old), fleeing with immediate family members. UNHCR's comparative research reveals that $\frac{3}{4}$ of refugees were travelling accompanied, with half accompanied by a child aged 5-17. One in five had a young child (0-4 years) with them, while 23% of people left Ukraine with a person over 60.

Experts in Poland point to the relatively large population of older people who arrived in Poland, as the experience of previous waves of refugee migration showed a different picture of refugees (mainly young men with families).



Why Poland?

- For Ukrainian refugees, **security** was of central concern. UNHCR research shows that safety is the main criterion for choosing a particular host country for 52% of respondents.
- 15% of UNHCR respondents justified their choice of destination by **family ties**, and another 11% by **employment**.
- According to the National Bank of Poland, 53% of refugees had no previous experience of Poland.
- According to the EWL (employment services firm) survey, one in three respondents indicated that Poland was the **culturally closest country**. Another 27% of Ukrainians surveyed chose Poland because they have **friends and acquaintances here**.
- In addition to cultural proximity or developed migration networks, one in five Ukrainians surveyed decided to come to Poland due to the fact that Poles are friendly to Ukrainians.

What is the family situation of those forcibly migrated to Poland?

A severe problem for refugees is family separation, mainly due to the ban on men aged 18-60 leaving Ukraine. As many as 94% of respondents claimed to have close relatives residing in Ukraine at the time of the EWL survey in late March. According to research by the National Bank of Poland, 35% of women have left their husbands in Ukraine, 54% have left their parents and 14% their children.



Pregnant women fled the war in high numbers. Although there is a general lack of information on child births among Ukrainian refugees in Poland, demographers note that 2,500 children were born between the 24th of February and April 2022. For the whole of 2021, the figure was 1,090 births (Nowosielska, Klinger 2022).

What is the health situation of refugees?

Health challenges for Ukrainians were observed in Facebook groups. Whilst Ukrainians who arrived in Poland after the 24th of February 2022 have access to free medical assistance, issues of disorientation, language barriers and systemic differences were observable in Facebook posts.

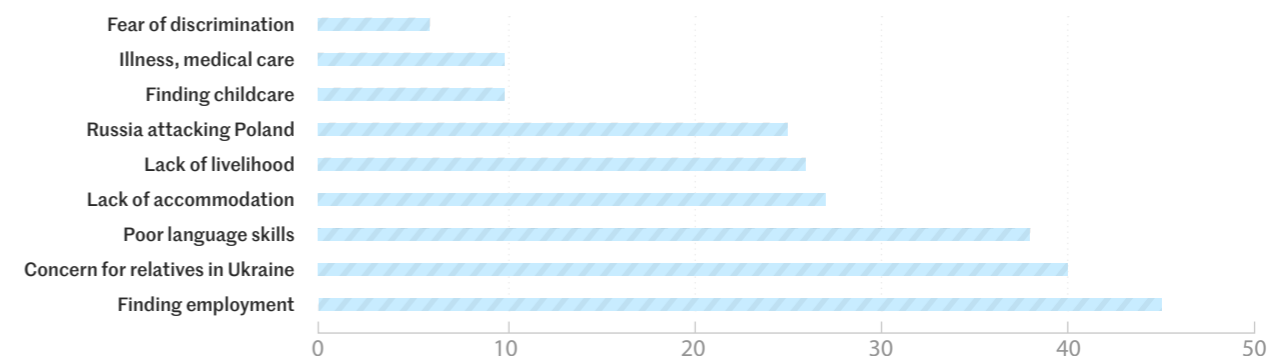
Female migrants asked for information about their healthcare rights relating to pregnancy and childbirth. Differences in accessibility of medicines posed additional challenges. Women asked on Facebook if people had medicine to give them, while others used medicines from Ukraine, and asked about substitutes in Poland. One of the female migrants posted that they urgently need medicine for a child: "We need insulin for a child, we just arrived in Poland, the supply was for three months, it overheated and spoiled, help...we are not registered yet."

What problems and difficulties did refugees face in Poland?

Fleeing Ukraine in a hurry, many Ukrainians ended up in Poland with their belongings crammed into a few suitcases, often not knowing the Polish language and having no relatives in Poland. The scale of need among Ukrainians was therefore vast and varied.

A UNHCR study ('Lives On Hold...', May-June 2022) identifies the most urgent needs experienced by refugees in the first weeks of the war in Ukraine. In the hierarchy of needs, cash came first (44%), followed by employment (40%) and accommodation (38%). The need for medical treatment and material assistance was indicated by 20% of respondents in each case. Surprisingly, among the urgent needs, psychological support or contact with family was indicated by 4% and 3% of respondents respectively.

Figure 3. The scale of problems faced by Ukrainian refugees during their stay in Poland, in %.



Source: own elaboration based on EWL data

A different picture was painted by Openfield research, conducted between March and May (before the UNHCR).

- They reported that one in three (38%) refugees surveyed cited longing for Ukraine/home as the greatest difficulty after arriving in Poland.
- 35% identified problems finding a job as the most serious difficulty.
- 27% of the refugees surveyed identified a longing for family as a difficulty.
- For one in six people, getting medical help was identified as a difficulty, while one in eight people cited a lack of information on where to get help as a difficulty.

It is important to note that only less than one per cent of respondents indicated intolerance or hostile attitudes from Poles as a difficulty. This means that although refugees experience many emotional or structural difficulties in Poland, they do not encounter negative attitudes from Poles.

What strategies did refugees take on the labour market in Poland?

The lack of experience of Polish employment resulted in difficulties for newly-employed Ukrainians.

Only one in five respondents indicated that they do not intend to work during their stay in Poland and want to support themselves with their own resources.

- Openfield reported that more than 55% of people were not working at the time of the survey (taken between March and May) but intended to take up employment.
- Less than one in three refugees had employment at the time of the survey.
- 35% of respondents indicated that they found a job through family or friends.
- Another 28% declared that they found employment in Poland on their own.
- 25% of respondents used an employment agency.
- Only 3% of refugees used the services offered by district labour offices in Poland.

What migration plans do refugees from Ukraine have?

EWL research showed that 30% of respondents plan to stay in Poland for the long term. The majority of people (58%) at the time of the survey declared a desire to return to Ukraine. Another 12% indicated that they plan to leave for a country other than Ukraine.

Data collected by the National Bank of Poland reveals that elderly people who have no experience of migrating abroad are mainly interested in returning to Ukraine as soon as possible. Younger people who do not have relatives in Ukraine are much more interested in settling in the country where they are currently residing.

Among those planning to go to another country, Ukrainians most often indicated Germany.

- Comparative research (UNHCR) and EWL research confirmed that one in four respondents planning to emigrate further indicated Germany as a destination country.
- UNHCR research shows that, in addition to Germany;
 - 10% indicated Canada,
 - 6%, the Czech Republic and;
 - 5%, the UK.
- According to EWL data, the USA (16%), the UK (11%) and Sweden (10%) came next.

Who has decided to return?

According to research by the Norwegian Refugee Council, people not involved in any income-generating activities in Poland (56% of respondents) decided to return. In addition, the children of 50% of returnees did not attend school while in Poland. However, the main motivation to return was cited as a desire to be reunited with family and homesickness.

To what extent have Poles been involved in supporting refugees from Ukraine?

Commentators and experts on migration management or refugee issues have unanimously stressed that, in modern history, there has been no case where such a huge population has been welcomed under the roof of a host society (Duszczuk and Kaczmarczyk 2022).

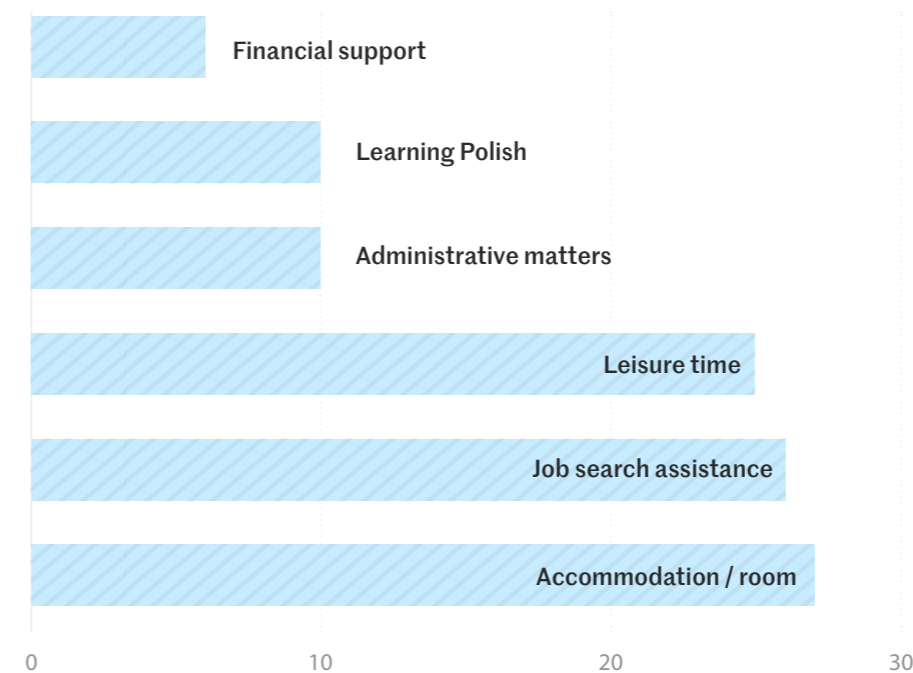
The most urgent need, after the influx began, was to organise temporary accommodation for newly arrived Ukrainians. As evidenced earlier, during the analysis of encountered problems, most Ukrainians were welcomed by Poles. According to COPOCS research, as many as 7% of Poles provided shelter to refugees. Ordinary residents, hotel owners, entrepreneurs and local authorities opened their doors to fleeing Ukrainians (e.g. in schools or public buildings). There were further media reports of public figures, including artists, actors and journalists, taking refugees in (Zawadzka-Palucka 2022).

So who are the Poles helping refugees?

The COPOCS survey reveals that employed people aged 30-39 and 50-59 are likely to be involved. As many as 15% of people with higher education took refugees in. The lowest level of involvement was observed among pensioners. The authors explain this mainly by the lack of access to the Internet and social media, which have become platforms to organise various forms of support for refugees.

“ As many as 15% of people with higher education took refugees in.

Figure 4. The degree of involvement of Poles in actively helping Ukrainians, and scale of assistance, in %



Source: own elaboration on COPOCS data.



Chapter Four

Refugee Aid, Social Media Analysis

Author:

Ksenya Homel

An analysis of common spaces on social media affords an insight into Ukrainian perspectives of refugee life. For this study, a qualitative social media analysis was performed, based on posts from two significant refugee Facebook groups. The study employed two techniques: e-content analyses and online observation. The two groups studied were selected on the basis of the number of participants and their geographical scope (covering the whole territory of Poland, not specific regions or cities).

How has grassroots humanitarian help developed during the first six months of the war?

The fatigue and exhaustion of resources are interrelated with increased economic instability, inflation and limited scope of government support programmes.

By August, Polish hosts were having to decrease their support for Polish refugees as money became tighter - "40 PLN is only for 120 days from crossing the border. Then it's getting much harder... The solution may be to move in with someone else to reduce rental costs. Or look for something cheaper in smaller towns".

Requests for more permanent accommodation increased through summer because people could not stay in initial accommodation (with Polish host families for instance) indefinitely. In many cases, this affected their sense of security and stability in Poland. The majority of requests concerned women with children. Although renting a flat in a group might help to reduce costs or be safer, the social media analysis highlighted difficulties in finding accommodation for larger groups or bigger families.

What were the most urgent and neglected needs expressed by refugees?

Accommodation was one of the most urgent needs for Ukrainian migrants (especially those with vulnerable dependents), along with accessing medical care, the assistance of disabled family members, finding a job and covering increasing living costs. Deteriorating psychological and physical health of female refugees and their children continues to be a pressing concern. Social media posts revealed the particular difficulties suffered by Ukrainian women who arrived with children with special needs (for example with disabilities, autism etc.).

The social media analysis found that the general chaos of the humanitarian crisis, elderly people, pregnant women, women with newborn babies, and people with disabilities and chronic diseases remained largely invisible.

What are potential risks related to informal grassroots support?

There are natural difficulties in verifying posts offering help. Admins of groups highlighted the inability to control or regulate posts. Awareness-raising posts (for example "HOW TO HELP SAFELY AND VERIFY POTENTIAL FRAUDSTERS") and emergency contact numbers are emphasised in the assistance forums.



The social media analysis concludes that accommodation insecurity, often related to wider financial difficulty, heightens the vulnerability of some Ukrainian refugee families. The obligation to combine work with care for children or elderly family members might push women to undertake precarious conditions of employment. Online groups, by providing a direct link to refugees, can be exploited by people looking to take advantage of the Ukrainians. The research found a high risk of exposure to misinformation online, which fuels exploitation.

Chapter Five

Civil Society Action

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The mass inflow of refugees in late February and March 2022 was accompanied by an unprecedented civil mobilisation in Poland. Thousands of people offered shelter to those fleeing war, and ad hoc reception centres were established at schools, sports facilities, cultural centres and dormitories amongst other places. Civil society organisations have been heavily involved at various stages of the reception and integration of Ukrainian families.

Below, we present the institutional and civic (including grassroots) initiatives providing support to the people fleeing the war in Ukraine. The main forms of support and assistance of Polish NGOs and civil society included:

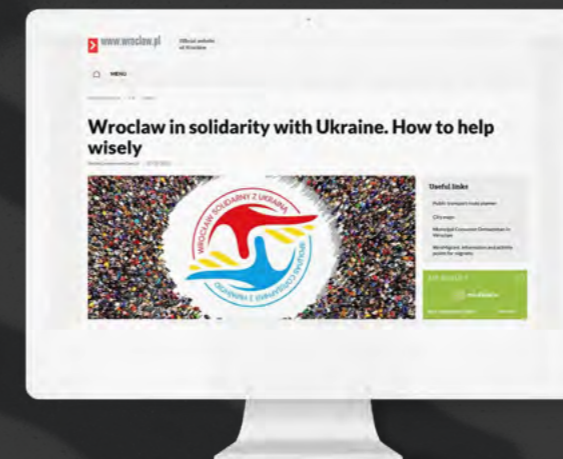
- Accommodation (providing places in private homes, organising shelters, arranging places in the reception centres) and brokering between the refugees and the reception centres.
- Facilitating information points and phone lines for the refugees, including helping with translation.
- Providing detailed information and databases of the legal situation of Ukrainian refugees, pragmatic commentaries and professional interpretations of the legal acts.
- Providing psychological help and assisting children.
- Providing Polish language classes for children and adults and support of the schooling process for children.
- Providing assistance and sharing information about non-citizens of Ukraine fleeing the country.
- Helping the Ukrainian Roma populations.
- Volunteering at the train stations, at the reception centres and at the border with Ukraine.

Support from local municipalities included:

- Arranging reception centres (hostels).
- Organising information points.
- Organising dedicated desks in some offices for registration, social assistance, etc.
- Providing free public transport within cities (in most cities, this lasted until the end of March/April),
- Providing financial support.
- Solidarity on a symbolic level: flying Ukrainian flags on buildings and public transport; banners and other public messages expressing solidarity with Ukraine.

Municipality case study

The local authorities in Wrocław, led by the mayor Jacek Sutryk, have long created a “brand” of Wrocław as a tolerant, multicultural and vibrant metropolis. On many occasions, Sutryk has voiced his sympathy and openness towards the foreigners living in the city (especially the Ukrainians). He is frequently heard delivering short speeches in Ukrainian. In 2019, the mayor nominated an official Proxy for Residents of Ukrainian Descent (Pełnomocnik do spraw mieszkańców pochodzenia ukraińskiego). The Proxy’s tasks include taking actions to support the Ukrainian minority and Ukrainian citizens who have expressed their intention to settle and provide work in Wrocław in the process of their adaptation and social integration.



- ▶ The Wrocław government website, encouraging residents to help Ukrainians the day after the invasion began.

Chapter Six

Media Analysis

Authors:

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Introduction

Through a review of the printed press, this report provides an insight into the Polish media discourse, mapping out the most important issues migrants face, as well as the scale and scope of assistance offered by Poles and the Polish government. The media outlets analysed are *Polityka*, a liberal political weekly, *Przegląd*, a progressive opinion-based weekly, *Gość Niedzielny*, a national, conservative-Catholic weekly, and *Do Rzeczy*, a conservative weekly opinion magazine.

Media attention on vulnerable groups

Rape Victims

Multiple articles noted the common presence of rape during wartime. An interview with a psychotherapist treating victims, who mentioned the assistance organised in Warsaw for refugees from Ukraine. In addition to psychological support, victims repeatedly require gynaecological interventions.

Ukrainian Roma

As publicised in an article in *Polityka*, the Ukrainian Roma were treated as 'refugees of an inferior sort', experiencing discrimination, indifference and even hostility when crossing the border or while staying at reception points. Moreover, Poles were much less willing to help Ukrainian Roma, which is a result of a long history of the Roma's social exclusion in Poland.

The Elderly

The difficulties faced by the elderly were discussed in media articles, as the elderly were at greater risk of social exclusion, mainly due to their lack of knowledge of the Polish language, lack of means of subsistence (i.e. lack of pensions in Poland) and state of health.

The Disabled

One interview given to *Polityka* by a couple with a disability from Ukraine highlighted the problem of the exclusion of disabled people from the Polish social assistance system. Apart from the fact that they struggled to integrate into Polish society (e.g. difficulties in finding a job), they were deprived of access to assistance from benefits dedicated to this category of residents.

Orphans & Abused Children

There was some attention on Ukrainian orphans and children in care. *The Review* weekly devotes two articles to them, describing the initiative of evacuating the whole groups and their attendants and establishing safe havens in Poland.

Discussion of refugee exploitation

According to the media analysis, refugees' desperation was exploited through speculative price rises by landlords and petrol station owners. Journalists also reported fake job offers, where 'employers' sought sexual services from Ukrainian women, or domestic servitude in return for accommodation.

Border workers and aid volunteers also cited other problems, including fake taxi drivers and pimps attempting to take women to brothels. The extent of such practices, although already identified in the first days of the presence of Ukrainian refugees in Poland, is still difficult to estimate.

Early on, the issue of unidentified carriers of persons appearing and offering transport services to victims of war was raised. The practice of smuggling Ukrainians (including Roma) from Poland to other EU countries was identified as early as April. A *Polityka* report illustrated an attempt to take women across the border by bus, which was thwarted by Polish anti-terrorist forces.

Municipalities as key actors left without support in managing the refugee crisis

As emphasised in numerous press articles, individual local authorities, most affected by the problems and challenges of the influx of refugees, are responsible for the success of assistance to Ukrainians in Poland. It was thanks to the quick reaction of local authorities that it was possible, as repeatedly argued in the press, to avoid an acute humanitarian crisis.

Most attention in the analysed press, however, was given to activities in the largest cities, where Ukrainians fleeing the war in large numbers moved. In addition to describing the types of support provided by the cities, a lot of attention was paid in this context to local governments being left to their own devices in funding and organising assistance to refugees. Many local government officials who commented in the press on the lack of an adequate government response were critical of cities being left without adequate support.

Polish-Ukrainian tensions and resentment towards refugees

Although Poland was portrayed internationally as the country that was most welcoming to and accommodating of refugees from Ukraine, there were initial indications in the press of emerging conflicts and resentment towards the newcomers. Examples of tensions were illustrated in several articles in the four weekly newspapers analysed. Examples include:

- Quarrels between local government employees and politicians about the support given to Ukrainians (e.g. free transport, separate sections in offices handling only PESEL cases for Ukrainians);
- Residents of border towns criticising Ukrainians for buying luxury cars in the European Union and returning to Ukraine;
- Reluctance of some property owners to rent flats to refugees with children;
- The reluctance of parents of Polish children to admit more Ukrainian pupils to Polish schools.

Education issues

Education provisions were criticised for a number of reasons. These included the lack of adequate staff with the necessary language training to teach foreign students, class overcrowding, and a lack of resources to deal with swelling numbers in schools.

Housing

Journalists pointed out that housing assistance is becoming expensive over time and that the financial assistance established by the Polish government is inadequate. *Polityka* argued on several occasions that the state should be much more involved in this assistance. For example, in a March article, it was argued that the central government, especially the state treasury companies subordinate to it, has numerous unused housing resources that could solve the housing problem for refugees.

Economic integration and labour market

Inadequate knowledge of the Polish language has been presented as a barrier to entry into the labour market for Ukrainian refugees. In an article on teaching Polish to Ukrainians, examples were cited of highly qualified refugees who are forced to seek work in the cleaning sector, mainly due to their linguistic unfamiliarity.

Elsewhere, there was positive coverage of economic integration. In a newspaper feature in April, the author pointed out that, despite the short time that had passed since February, a significant number of refugees are already establishing their professional lives in Poland. They include doctors, nurses, graphic designers and even ceramic decorators.

Women's reproductive rights Poland's ambiguous approach to accepting refugees

One of the issues that appeared in the two weekly newspapers during the analysed period was the protection of women's reproductive rights, particularly the reduced access to abortion and contraception. *Polityka* highlighted the drastic change following the Constitutional Court in Poland ruling in October 2020. As a consequence, women arriving in Poland who wish to terminate pregnancies face challenges. The article highlights the voices of Ukrainian women who are surprised by Poland's regulations on women's freedom and reproductive health rights. Moreover, as the article points out, even before 2022, it was Poland that was going to Ukraine for affordable abortion services.

Although journalists' attention shifted to Ukrainians in Poland or those fighting for freedom in their country, they did not forget the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border.

Refugees fleeing Belarus, including Iraqi and African families, experience tense pushback. In some cases, border guards use violence and violate the law on access to international protection. It has been repeatedly argued that the availability of assistance offered by Poland is determined by the skin colour of migrants - while Ukrainians are culturally closer to Poles, those arriving through the border with Belarus tend to come from different cultural or religious backgrounds.

Refugee health status and vaccination rates

In one article, much attention was paid to the challenge of low vaccination rates among Ukrainians, especially children. The doctors quoted raised the challenge posed by the large disparity in vaccination rates against basic childhood diseases in Ukraine and Poland. They predict that in the future this could mean, in extreme situations, the return of old infectious diseases.

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