

PROTECTION MONITORING BRIEF #1

Poland

Operational Context & Analysis

Protection monitoring aims to promote evidence-based protection interventions through the documentation of needs, intentions, and protection considerations in a **harmonized way**. One of the main objectives of protection monitoring in Poland is to **strengthen the active identification of persons with specific needs** at heightened risk, facilitate timely information provision and referral for assistance and services, as well as to facilitate a better understanding of protection risks faced by refugees. The protection monitoring in Poland contributes to the regional protection monitoring, launched in response to the Ukrainian refugee influx to neighboring Ukraine countries, due to the international armed conflict in Ukraine since 24 February 2022.

While protection monitoring is conducted regularly, this report reflects on findings from 2,632 interviews carried out in Warsaw, Krakow and Wroclaw from **22 June 2022 to 22 August 2022**. Data is collected in accordance with UNHCR data protection principles.

Statistics used in this report are based on information from refugees **identified and counselled** by UNHCR Protection Monitors in Warsaw, Krakow and Wroclaw. Therefore, the data differs from data used in other reports, such as joint UNHCR and REACH Profiling Updates, which follow a different methodology.



Protection Monitoring brief in graphics

 **10%**

of respondents reported having one or more family members with a disability

 **2,632**

protection monitoring interviews carried out in Poland between **22 June and 22 August 2022**

 **83%**

of respondents were separated from their immediate family members

 **78%**

of respondents were women

 **46%**

of respondents reported having at least one family member with a disability or medical condition, or elderly or single parent

 **11%**

of respondents reported having one or more family members over 65 years old who face specific protection risks

 **5%**

respondents travel with a child not directly related to them

 **7%**

respondents report having relatives in Poland. Those staying in collective accommodation are less likely to have relatives in Poland (only 2%).

 **44**

unaccompanied and separated children identified

 **7.5%**

respondents have at least one family member with serious medical condition

Protection issues

1. Access to health services

- Elderly persons interviewed indicated the need to be supported and accompanied to help them navigate a health system as they are **unfamiliar with the procedures** in place.
- The **inability to communicate in Polish** and the limited availability of interpretation services in health facilities is reported as the main barrier.
- In July, a decrease in the number of organizations providing pro bono translation hindered the access of refugees with medical needs to health services.
- Lack of timely access to public health services for urgent cases, such as oncological treatments and requests for insulin medical queries, is reported due to long waiting periods. In Poland, to access health services, a patient must register with a general practitioner prior to being redirected to a specialized doctor. However, **waiting periods** to see a general practitioner in public hospitals are long, and alternatives reported include either seeing a private doctor or, on some occasions, travelling back to Ukraine to see a doctor there, security situation permits.
- Persons with chronic diseases, including HIV patients and elderly with diabetes, reported the **limited availability of regular medical checkups** as a great concern.
- Some private clinics, providing specialized medical care to Ukrainian refugees, are reportedly introducing new procedures that would affect access to medical care, such as the need to provide a proof of entering Poland after 24 February and a proof of identity. The latter is not always available particularly in view of the profile of recent arrivals from occupied territories.

“From Ukraine I went to Georgia, where they did an operation on my arm, and put a spine disc. I will need to replace it soon. I do not know how.”

(Woman, 65+)



2. Support for persons with disabilities



- Refugees with disabilities who were displaced from Ukraine after 24 February are entitled for specialized services. However, access has proven difficult mostly due to the **length of the verification procedures**. Difficulties faced by refugees vary depending on the group of disability they belong to, as the classification of these groups varies between Ukraine and Poland.
- Translation of disability documents and mismatches in the required information, including names, nomenclature and group classifications have led to **delays in obtaining necessary documentation**, which also led to delays in accessing the specialized services. The impact is aggravated on those requiring urgent care.

- Findings from the protection monitoring show the need for public health providers to prioritize obtaining hearing-aid materials, purchasing medical equipment and accompaniments for the visually impaired persons and those with Parkinson's and dementia. In kind support from humanitarian actors has been requested both by the individuals themselves as well as their family members.
- Delays in obtaining support for persons

"I need to register for disability, but do not know how."



"My child was diagnosed with autism and requires specialized care."



assistance or access labour opportunities.

- The **risk of eviction** is reportedly higher for families with children with disabilities from small collective centres that were vacated at the peak of influx. On a different note, families with children with disabilities staying in collective accommodation or temporary hostels require special support when relocating to alternative accommodations; whether through providing assistive materials or adaptation of homes to ensure those with specific needs can move in a dignified manner (such as adding wheelchair ramps or equipping homes for the winter).

"My child needs Ukrainian speech therapist."



3. Accommodation-related risks

"We have run out of financial assistance and have not yet found official work. I worked on the side but the employer did not pay me."



"We need money for rent. We are already retired. We are without money since April."



- The solidarity of the Polish families and civil society has been unprecedented; over 30% of respondents continue relying mostly on host families. The government has been providing cash benefits to any Polish family providing accommodation to refugees at its own expense and for a period that does not exceed 120 days¹. However, waiting to receive the cash benefits has reportedly caused inconvenience among the hosted refugee population. Furthermore, with the upcoming winter and rising utility costs, refugees have expressed concerns that this may have an impact on their hosting arrangements. It is worth noting that as of July, **support to host families was discontinued** except for those hosting persons with specific needs, triggering concerns over evictions due to inability of refugees to pay for rent, limited availability of spaces at reception/collective centres, and the increased rent prices in the real estate market, particularly in the main cities. Families with children and pets, have noted **difficulties signing lease agreements** due to their family composition, in addition to **a lack of guarantors**.

¹ The government has adopted a special act on assistance for refugees from Ukraine - Ministry of the Interior and Administration - Gov.pl website (www.gov.pl)

“We are from Mariupol. For some time we lived as internally displaced in Kyiv. A Polish family is letting us stay with them for a minimal fee, but we do not know how we will be able to cover utilities bill. All the income is currently spent on medication.”



Families with children considering moving to collective centres reported concerns about the ability to enrol their children in Polish schools without having a formal/legal residence.

Out of 2,632 respondents, two cases reported abuse of power by the host families. In one of the cases, the refugees were asked to share all the financial assistance they receive with the host family in exchange for accommodation. In the second case the host family requested a refugee woman to do domestic work in exchange for accommodation. Persons did not report the incidents to police due to fear of eviction.

4. Access to legal documentation

9.6%



respondents report having both passport and birth certificate

3.7%



respondents report having passport, birth certificate and ID

“Translation of all the official documents cost me 2,000 zł.”



“I do not have any physical documents and cannot access services.”



- Protection monitoring has identified the need to support issuance, renewal, and translation of documentation, including passports.
- Persons previously residing in Donetsk, Luhansk and Crimea have requested assistance in translating documents from Russian to Ukrainian, including for children born in those territories.
- In some cases, recent arrivals reported crossing the border undocumented and require support to access temporary protection status and/or asylum in Poland.
- Those refugees who have arrived to Poland without passports and lack proof of entry have been denied humanitarian aid by volunteer organizations who are overstretched and have introduced various verification procedures to prioritize those in most need.

Calls to Action

RECOMMENDATIONS

UNHCR stresses the key role that volunteer organizations, civil society organizations and the Ukrainian diaspora have on supporting refugees navigating the national Polish services, including health, education and social protection. Mentoring and interpretation services are crucial to facilitate access, particularly in the initial phases of displacement.

UNHCR recommends that authorities exercise flexibility on the requirements (i.e. accepting non-official translations, copies of documentation proving disability), particularly given the obstacles encountered by the refugee population when trying to obtain new documentation to replace the previous ones that they couldn't carry with them during the flight from areas of hostilities; and introduce procedural steps to confirm disability along with ensuring appropriate referrals to service providers if additional specialized services are needed.

UNHCR welcomes the extension of financial support for families hosting vulnerable refugees, particularly given the upcoming winter, which would mitigate the risk of evictions of those vulnerable families. Expedited procedures for confirming vulnerability and disbursement of the cash benefits to the host families is strongly encouraged.

When relocation from collective centres takes place, prior identification of alternative accommodation is recommended to be facilitated, particularly for persons with disabilities, persons with medical condition and other groups at heightened risk. This can be done jointly by humanitarian organizations and state representatives.

For more information:

Lorena Isla Rodriguez, Senior Protection Officer, Email: isla@UNHCR.ORG

Andrii Mazurenko, Senior Information Management Officer, Email: mazurenko@UNHCR.ORG