



POLAND

Summary of qualitative study among Ukrainian refugees

# Refugees with special needs require more support

Behavioural insights on health service needs and access  
August-December 2022



European Region

# Key findings



**~1.5 million**

refugees registered in Poland as of December 2022

**86%**

of refugees in Poland are women



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**“I came here when the war began, but it was a difficult decision. We stayed in Kharkiv for a little more than a week—with my husband—and then on March 5, my child and I crossed the border alone.**

Woman, age 25

## EMERGING ISSUES

### Long wait times for care

Insufficient **support for some with disabilities**

### Underutilized mental health services

Increasing **access to information**

Increasing **trust in Polish doctors**



## DRIVERS TO ACCESS SERVICES

### High quality services

People express gratitude for high quality, free emergency and tertiary care and share experience with these services with friends online and face-to-face.

### Support from civil society

Organizations such as Patchwork and the Order of Malta in Krakow provide strong support for children with disabilities; the Health4Ukraine programme helps pay for prescription medications.



## BARRIERS TO ACCESS SERVICES

### Wait times

Long wait times for appointments, particularly for specialist care, discourage people from seeking needed services.



### Family doctors

Some Polish family doctors are reluctant to sign agreements with Ukrainians.



### Emergency services

Participants report fear of being fined if they call an ambulance and do not know how to use appropriately.



### Language

Although some knew Polish before the war, language continues to be a barrier for many.



## BEHAVIOURS & ATTITUDES

### People trust people

The most trusted source of information is real people sharing their experiences in person or online.

### Travel to Ukraine

Some refugees consult Ukrainian doctors online or return to Ukraine to purchase medicines.

### Refugee fatigue

Despite a warm welcome, several participants note more negative attitudes towards refugees among doctors and social service workers

### People with disabilities

Many came to Poland expecting quality care for disabilities but some struggle to access certificates and services.

# Background and next steps

## BACKGROUND



### Ongoing war drives people away

War in Ukraine has resulted in the largest movement of people across Europe since WW2. Neighbouring countries opened borders and offered services, but refugee perspectives are essential for planning appropriate interventions and policies.

## METHOD

**Qualitative study** on perceived health service needs as well as drivers and barriers to access these services

### 35 in-depth online interviews conducted between 25 August and 7 September 2022:

- 34 were women and 1 was a man
- 23 aged 18-49; 12 over 50
- 13 mothers of children with special needs

**Recruitment via social media channels,** personal networks and Statistics Poland survey staff.

**Follow up interviews** with 18 refugees in December 2022 to understand changes in the situation.



## PROPOSED ACTION

### 1 Consider innovative approaches to sharing information

Tailor communication about referrals, wait times and other access issues to those with disabilities, chronic disease, and low health literacy; focus on prevention services, specialized care, and vaccination.



### 2 Advocate for civil society organizations

Emphasize the contribution of local organizations that provide services to those with disabilities or help manage costs of medications.



### 3 Review provision of mental health services

Engage refugees to design services in acceptable ways with a focus on adolescents and elderly; take into account barriers such as lack of childcare, locations and stigma as a mental barrier.



### 4 Support the most vulnerable

Provide enhanced services for children and adults with special needs, streamlining the disability certificate process and supporting caregivers.



## “

**My daughter's health is always the first priority, the reason we left. We understood that if war came to Ukraine, there would be no medicine, nothing at all, and we could not keep her safe.**

Woman, age 42, mother of a child with disability

## Learn more

This briefing note is part of a qualitative study among Ukrainian refugees in Poland. For more information contact:

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### Photo on the cover:

The Rzeszow main train station in southeastern Poland was converted into a reception centre for refugees, where families, including elderly women, new mothers and their babies could receive health services.

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