SITUATION OVERVIEW

Getting by, not moving up: Labour Market Integration of Ukrainian Women Refugees in Poland

Longitudinal Survey of Ukrainian Refugees, Round 32 — May 2025

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

1 **REFUGEE EMPLOYMENT IN POLAND HAS STOPPED INCREASING IN TERMS OF BOTH PARTICIPATION AND THE LEVEL OF OCCUPATIONS HELD.** After consistent growth in previous periods, the increase in employment levels has slowed, with a slight decline recorded in the most recent survey round. From August 2024 to May 2025, the employment-to-population ratio of surveyed respondents remained relatively flat, ranging from 77% to 80%. In qualitative terms, no occupational movement was observed too. Most respondents remained in the same low-skilled segments of the labour market, with the share employed in elementary roles fluctuating only slightly, between 50% and 52% throughout the last 1.5 years (Dec 2023 to May 2025).

2 **THE INCOMES AND PURCHASING POWER OF SURVEYED REFUGEES HAVE IMPROVED. THIS PROGRESS WAS LIKELY DRIVEN BY INCREASES TO STATUTORY MINIMUM WAGE RATHER THAN UPWARD OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY OR BETTER EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS.** Over a year and a half of surveys, the real (inflation-adjusted) income of the household per person increased by 24% (from 391 to 483 euros), indicating an improvement in financial well-being. However, these increases co-occurred with statutory minimum wage changes, pointing to policy-driven adjustments rather than progress due to individual career improvements. The co-occurrence of income growth and increases in statutory wages underscores the continued concentration of refugees in the low-paid sector. While the income rise alone indicates positive shifts, this improvement does not reflect greater economic agency or empowerment, but rather developments largely outside individual control. As a result of their fragile economic position, refugees remain highly susceptible to external labour market pressures, such as layoffs, wage stagnation, or reduced demand.

3 **REFUGEES PERCEIVE JOB SECURITY AS SIMPLY THE ABILITY TO MAINTAIN REGULAR WORK AND PREDICTABLE INCOME. HOWEVER, THIS "STABILITY" WAS OFTEN ACCOMPANIED BY DIFFICULT WORKING CONDITIONS, LIMITED LABOUR RIGHTS, AND PERCEIVED PAY DISPARITIES WITH THEIR POLISH PEERS.** According to the results of a survey (April–May 2025), about half (48%) of all respondents reported challenges related to their employment conditions. The most frequently mentioned were physically demanding and exhausting jobs (29%), inability to take vacation or sick leave (13%), and overtime work or extended shifts (12%). Survey data also showed that 24% of respondents reported earning less than Polish workers in similar positions, pointing to persistent inequality in labour market outcomes. These findings were reinforced by in-depth interviews with Ukrainian women working in Poland, many of whom described a significant intensification of their workloads. This included taking on more physically demanding roles, working long hours or juggling multiple jobs — strategies often adopted to compensate for low incomes in the absence of alternative solutions. While a majority of respondents characterised their jobs as “stable” and expressed general satisfaction, this perception of stability typically referred to the ability to maintain regular work and predictable income to cover basic needs, rather than decent working conditions.

4 **LIMITED POLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY REMAINS A SIGNIFICANT BARRIER TO USING PRE-DISPLACEMENT SKILLS, PARTICULARLY FOR OLDER PEOPLE.** Most surveyed refugees reported either poor (29%) or fair (52%) Polish language proficiency. The share assessing their skills as “good” had barely increased over 1.5 years of surveys (17% →19%). Meanwhile, 41% of employed working-age respondents feel overqualified for their jobs — a perception more common among older adults (48%) than younger ones (30%), revealing worse opportunities for better-matched employment for older people. Qualitative data confirm these findings. Most interviewed women cited insufficient language proficiency as a key barrier to improving job quality, noting that even recognised qualifications are of little use without language fluency. Several described a “vicious circle”: needing language for career advancement but lacking time to learn due to work demands. Other barriers include the lack of intermediate and advanced courses and the financial cost of language training. Nevertheless, many participants expressed a clear willingness to start learning the language if suitable options were available, indicating a continuing unmet demand for structured language support enabling better job opportunities.

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5 **CARE RESPONSIBILITIES CONSTRAIN THE LABOUR MARKET PARTICIPATION OF UKRAINIAN REFUGEE WOMEN WITH CHILDREN.** According to the survey's results, Ukrainian women with children aged 0–5 had lower employment levels (54%) compared to the national average in Poland (69%), suggesting that care responsibilities played a role in reducing their participation in the labour market. In contrast, Ukrainian women without children were more employed than the average indicator for women in Poland in the same group (77% versus 69%), indicating higher labour market participation for this group in the absence of care-related constraints. This discrepancy suggests possible structural problems with access to childcare options, such as kindergartens, nurseries, or babysitters, as well as a lack of job opportunities with flexible hours. Moreover, a fifth of single caregiver households headed by women received help from their family or friends in Ukraine, compared to just 4% among others.

6 **AS DISPLACEMENT PROLONGS, INTENTIONS TO RETURN WEAKEN, THOUGH OLDER REFUGEES MAY CONSIDER RETURNING TO UKRAINE AND LEAVING THEIR CHILDREN IN POLAND ONCE THEY ARE OLD ENOUGH TO LIVE INDEPENDENTLY.** While intentions to return to Ukraine remain relatively high (60%), they have declined over the past 1.5 years, from 71% in late 2023 to 60% in May 2025. The share of those unlikely to return has remained stable (8–12%), with growing uncertainty accounting for the drop in positive intentions. While overall intentions to return somewhat declined, older refugees remained more likely to express a desire to return. Among refugees aged 18–30, only 48% intended to return, compared to 74% among those aged 51 and older. This suggests that a significant share of older refugees, particularly women nearing retirement age, may eventually return. During in-depth interviews, several women mentioned that they'll consider returning once their children are grown enough to stay abroad independently. Longitudinal data from late 2024 supports this statement: 10% of returnees aged 51+ had left older children abroad when returning to Ukraine, a figure that may rise over time as children grow abroad. The potential return of this demographic group requires careful consideration in Ukraine's recovery planning. While they bring valuable experience and skills, they also may face specific age-related challenges hindering them from reintegration into the labour market.

ABOUT THIS SITUATION OVERVIEW

Most Ukrainian refugees in Poland are women.[1] Many of them navigate overlapping challenges, facing double, triple or even quadruple disadvantage - as refugees, as women, often caregivers, often caring for their children alone. This demographic reality shapes every aspect of refugees' economic integration. This situation overview was developed to examine these dynamics in depth. It looks at the statistics and the everyday working lives and conditions of employed refugees, many of whom are concentrated in low-skilled sectors, with particular attention to deskilling and the structural factors that influence job quality.

The analysis of this situation overview consists of ***quantitative*** (surveys of the same people over time) and ***qualitative*** (semi-structured in-depth interviews) data.

Quantitative data is based on an indicative sample of all respondents living in Poland and aims to identify trends. While the quantitative component covers all refugees surveyed in Poland, the majority of respondents are women,[2] meaning that the general trends reflect predominantly female experiences, shaped not only by refugee status but also by caregiving responsibilities and other gender-specific constraints. The qualitative data is based exclusively on interviews with women of working age[3] employed in Poland.

Qualitative data is intended to play a complementary role, enriching and contextualising the quantitative data by adding a gender perspective to issues of labour market participation. The details on methodology are presented at the end of this output (see section **Methodology**).

1. More details on the gender-age breakdown of people who have received temporary protection in Poland can be found in Eurostat data.

2. More details on the methodology, sample characteristics, and limitations can be found at the end of this report.

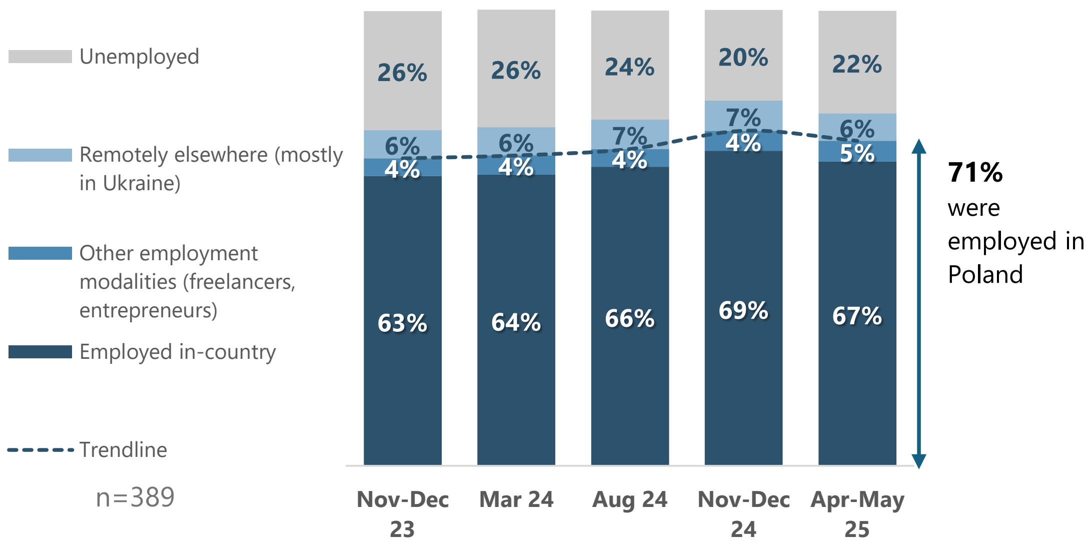
3. In this study, working age is defined as 18-64 years.

EMPLOYMENT SITUATION

General trends

The employment situation of Ukrainian respondents in Poland shows signs of a plateau. Over 3 years of surveying the same respondents in Poland, the employment-to-population ratio[4] among working-age respondents consistently increased.[5] However, over the past 1.5 years, this growth has slowed, with a slight decline noted in the most recent round of surveys conducted in May 2025 (Figure 1[6],[7]). While at the end of 2023 and into 2024, the employment level was still gradually increasing (63%->69%)[8], by mid-2025, there was no upward change for the first time since the surveys began. This suggests that the employment levels have stopped rising and stabilised, possibly reaching a plateau.[9]

Figure 1. Employment-to-population ratio of the same refugee respondents of working age in Poland interviewed over 1,5 years (November 2023 to May 2025)



Underemployment of women with children under school age

Ukrainian women with children aged 0–5 were less likely to work than the average for Polish women with children of the same age. In contrast, Ukrainian women without children were more likely to work than the average for Polish women without children.

Among working-age Ukrainian refugee women surveyed in Poland, 74%[6] of those with children were employed in some capacity. By comparison, 85%[6] of women without children were employed, 11 percentage points higher than their counterparts with children. If accounting for the age of the children, this discrepancy increased (Table 1).

Overall data for female residents in Poland, which also includes Ukrainian refugee women,[10] provides the basis for comparison with the longitudinal study of Ukrainian women. This comparison shows that refugees without children were more likely to be employed than women in Poland in the same category. In contrast, Ukrainian women with the youngest child of 0-5 years were employed less frequently compared to the same group of Polish residents. However, the overall rate of employment for both groups of women was either similar or slightly higher for Ukrainian women (depending on the data collection methods).

4. The employment-to-population ratio is defined as the proportion of the working-age population that is employed.

5. For example, during 2023, among participants of a longitudinal study who were in Poland, the employment-to-population ratio rose by 13 percentage points from an initial 49% in January to 62% in December. Detailed information can be found in the "Economic integration of Ukrainians in Poland by the end of 2023: insights and challenges" Situation Overview.

6. This calculation excludes some respondents who preferred not to answer and respondents who retired before the age of 65.

7. In all non-multiple-choice graphs and tables, percentages add up to 100%, If the sum does not add up (e.g., 99%, 101%), this is due to rounding of data.

8. According to UNHCR/Deloitte, during a similar observation period, the employment of Ukrainian refugees in Poland rose from 61% to 69%: Document - Poland: Analysis of the impact of refugees from Ukraine on the economy of Poland — 2nd edition (June 2025)

9. The Personnel Service Barometer (H1 2025) reports that only 28% of Polish employers now hire Ukrainian workers, down from 43% in 2024 (–15 percentage points).

10. Considering that the Eurostat data (EU-LFS), which was used for the comparative analysis, includes Ukrainian refugees, the gap between the Longitudinal Study data and the Eurostat data may be wider.

Table 1. Employment of Ukrainian female refugee respondents (18-64 years) in Poland[11] compared to female Polish residents

Categories of respondents	Female refugees from Ukraine[12] (May 2025, Longitudinal Study)			All female residents in Poland (2024[13], Eurostat)
	In-country	Other employment modalities[14]	Total	
With the youngest child of 0-5 years in the household	48%	6%	**54%**	**69%**
Without children in the household	68%	10%	**77%**	**69%**
All female respondents	67%	8%	**75%**	**71%**

The observed difference in employment levels between female Ukrainian refugees and the general female population in Poland may point to structural barriers, such as limited access to childcare facilities—including kindergartens, nurseries, or babysitters—and a shortage of flexible job opportunities, such as part-time work. These challenges may be rooted in, or further intensified by differences in household structures between the two groups. Moreover, refugee households might have fewer support networks, such as extended family or community help, that can assist with childcare.

LIVELIHOOD SITUATION

Income

An analysis of the median income per household member among the same surveyed Ukrainian refugees in Poland between the end of 2023 and mid-2025 shows a steady upward trend in both nominal and real terms (Table 2). When adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI), ***real income still increased (Table 2, column 4), suggesting an increase in purchasing power.***

Table 2. Change in income of surveyed Ukrainian refugee households compared to minimum wage growth in Poland (Nov 2023–May 2025)

Date (Round)	Nominal median income per HH member of the surveyed refugees in Poland[15], euros[16]	CPI Index (Dec 2023 = 1)	Real median income per HH member of the surveyed refugees in Poland, euros[17]	% Δ Increase of real income per HH member of the surveyed refugees in Poland, euro (compared to the previous period)	Minimum wage in Poland (gross), euros[18]	% Δ Increase of minimum wage, euro (compared to the previous period)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Nov-Dec 23	**391**	1	391	-	828	-
Mar 24	**444**	1.009	440	**13%**	986	**19%**
Aug 24	**457**	1.030	444	**1%**	1005	**2%**
Nov-Dec 24	**468**	1.039	451	**2%**	1006	**0%**
Apr-May 25	**510**	1.056	483	**7%**	1098	**9%**

11. For comparison purposes, all respondents who retired before the age of 65, as well as students, were included back in the analysis.

12. For comparability with Polish statistics, different employment indicators are more appropriate depending on household composition. For women with children aged 0–5, in-country employment (48% vs. 69%) better captures actual labour market integration, as this group is most affected by local childcare access. For women without children, total employment (77% vs. 69%) is more meaningful, as childcare is not a limiting factor.

13. Eurostat (EU-LFS), Data for: Women with the youngest child of 0-5 years; Women with no children; Overall share of employed women. In the Eurostat data, the term employment rate refers to "the number of employed persons as a percentage of the total population" (in this case, 18 to 64 years old); the same subsample of respondents from the longitudinal study was presented in the comparison table.

14. Such as freelancers, those employed remotely (mostly in Ukraine) or entrepreneurs.

15. Income of the household of the same surveyed Ukrainian refugees in Poland during the 5 rounds throughout the 1,5 years divided by the number of members in the household at the moment of the survey.

16. All values in euros are approximate and converted from zloty for the period under assessment (rounds).

17. Inflation-adjusted income, which reflects the purchasing power in constant prices of the base period (here, December 2023). It is calculated by dividing nominal income (median household income per person) by the CPI.

18. Approximate value in euros converted from zloty as per the last day of the month, sourced from Narodowy Bank Polski.

Most of the income growth among Ukrainian refugees between late 2023 and mid-2025 seems to result not from moving into better jobs or receiving higher individual salaries, but from minimum wage increases at the lower end of the labour market. Since around half of the Ukrainian refugee population is estimated to be earning at or near minimum wage,[19] regular adjustments to the statutory minimum wage likely played a central role in lifting household incomes during this period.

Between December 2023 and May 2025, Poland's gross minimum wage increased by 33% from 828 to 1,098 euros. Over the same period, the median nominal income per household member rose by 31%, while real (inflation-adjusted) income increased by 24%. This trend is closely aligned with official wage adjustments. Across the five periods captured in the longitudinal survey, changes in household income per person consistently correlated with official increases to the minimum wage, as shown in the side-by-side comparison of % change in real income vs. % change in minimum wage (Table 2, columns 5,7).

Combined with the fact that respondents did not shift into higher-paid sectors during this time (see section **Deskilling**), this suggests that minimum wage adjustments were the main driver of income growth, particularly in low-wage sectors, where Ukrainian refugees in Poland often work. As a result, many refugees remain economically dependent on broader wage-setting decisions, with limited control over improving their financial situation through career advancement.

Remittances

As of April-May 2025, 15% of longitudinal survey participants residing in Poland reported sending money or other aid to Ukraine. In contrast, 9% indicated that receiving money from Ukraine was one of their main income sources. The latter were predominantly women with children, particularly single caregivers[20]: ***20% of single caregiver households headed by women received help from their family or friends in Ukraine, compared to just 4% among others.*** The situation when refugees living in a higher-income host country rely on support from relatives in a lower-income and war-affected context highlights the continued financial vulnerability of certain subgroups, in particular single caregiver households.

Expenses and savings on needs

The overall picture points to a reliance on non-monetary coping strategies and constrained spending patterns. According to the longitudinal survey data, the most frequently adjusted areas of spending included clothing and shoes (30%), leisure (29%), food consumption (25%) and healthcare (10%). The scale of reported cutbacks on food and healthcare highlights underlying vulnerabilities in meeting basic needs, raising questions around food security and access to essential medical care.

The share of Ukrainian refugee respondents in Poland reporting their household compromises on specific needs due to insufficient income:

50%, each second household reported compromising their needs due to insufficient income.

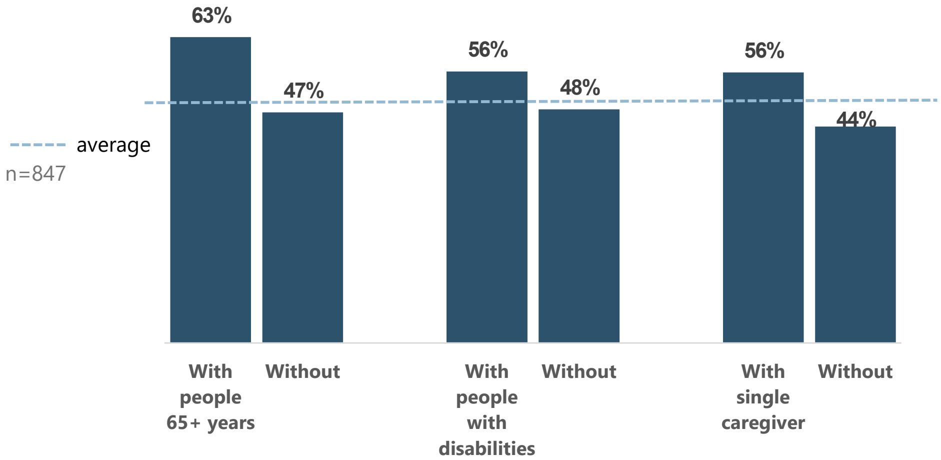
25%, one in four reported compromising on food.

10% reported compromising on healthcare.

More vulnerable households reported having to cut back more, with results varying by household structure and gender (Figure 2). In particular, women who are single caregivers bear a disproportionate financial burden, as confirmed by both quantitative and qualitative data (in-depth interviews). Although formally integrated into the labour market, they frequently carry the dual burden of earning and caregiving, which places them under continuous pressure and leaves limited flexibility in managing expenses or seeking better job opportunities.

19. Narodowy Bank Polski, The living and economic situation of Ukrainian migrants in Poland in 2023, 2023
20. *A single caregiver* household is defined as a household with 1 adult (18+) and 1 or more children.

Figure 2. Ukrainian refugee households in Poland reporting to compromise on needs due to insufficient income, by type of vulnerable households (April–May 2025)



During interviews, several women from single-adult households described living under constant financial strain, with no room to build savings or absorb unexpected costs. As one respondent explained:

> **As soon as I get my salary, I immediately rush to pay the utility bills because I fear that there might not be enough money left for the rest of the month.**

In contrast, women who either shared financial responsibility with another adult or managed to work multiple jobs described feeling more financially stable. As one woman put it:

> **Almost one salary goes on housing, and we actually live on the other.**

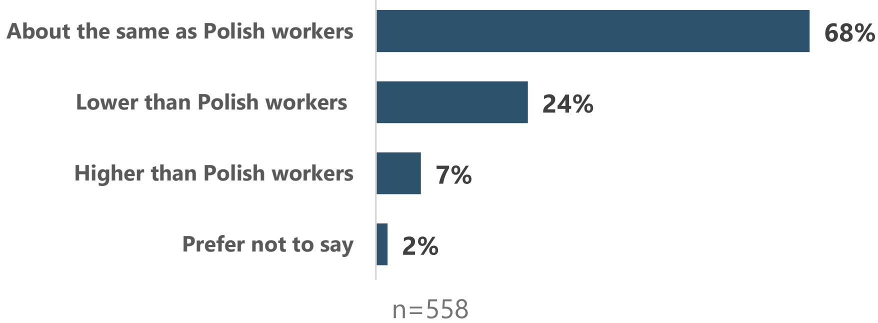
Housing costs were another recurring source of financial strain. Several respondents identified rent[21] as the main driver of household budget pressure, with only a few reporting they were able to manage it comfortably, all of whom shared housing expenses with another adult.

> **Those who have moved to Poland as couples or have already started a family here have the opportunity to take a break to look for something better [better job]. I do not have that option.**

Pay parity with Polish workers

Most respondents (68%) perceived their wages to be on par with those of Polish workers in similar roles (Figure 3). However, almost a fourth (24%) reported earning less, indicating that a considerable number of Ukrainian refugees perceive themselves as experiencing unequal treatment compared to their Polish peers.

Figure 3. Ukrainian refugee respondents' self-evaluation of their salary in relation to Polish workers in equivalent positions, as of April-May 2025



21. According to UNHCR's 2025 poverty assessment, high rental costs are a significant driver of financial vulnerability among Ukrainian refugee households. After adjusting for housing expenses, the poverty rate among refugees rises to around 40%, more than three times higher than among the host population.

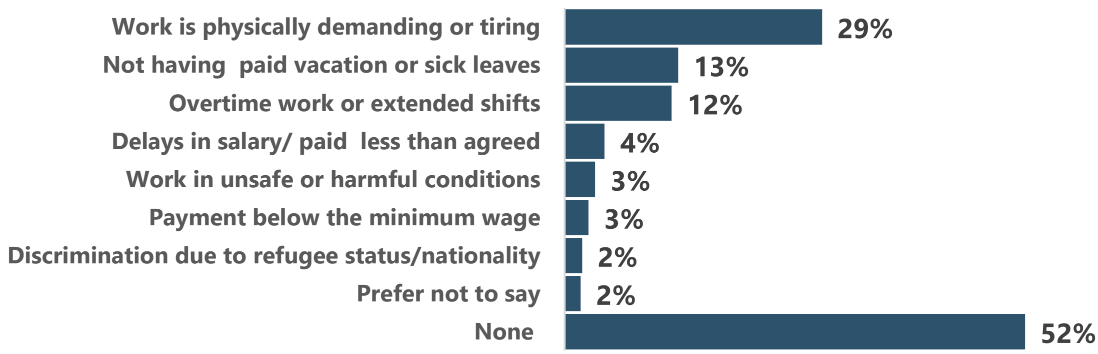
This topic also came up during the in-depth interviews with longitudinal study respondents. The qualitative findings suggest that, even when pay levels are equal, many women still face unequal outcomes due to factors beyond wages. ***Those who reported earning the same as their Polish colleagues often emphasised that this formal parity does not translate into equal living conditions.*** Respondents pointed out that the main issue lies not in wage differences, but in significantly higher living expenses, particularly rent. As one respondent explained:

> **My salary is the same as that of other employees; it's standard, with the same rate for everyone. [...] The difference isn't in the salary, but in the expenses. [...] Many of my colleagues own their own homes [...] I rent—and that certainly has a noticeable impact on the budget. "**

WORKING CONDITIONS

According to the results of the recent round of the longitudinal survey (April-May 2025), ***about half (48%) of all respondents reported challenges in their employment conditions,*** indicating particular workplace risks and constraints (Figure 4). The most frequently mentioned were physical exhaustion from work (29%), inability to take vacation or sick leave (13%) and overtime work/extended shifts (12%). Households with a median income per person above the average reported facing challenges related to workload and exhaustion somewhat more frequently than those with below-average incomes. Specifically, they reported experiencing physical exhaustion at rates of 34% compared to 27% for lower-income households, working in dangerous or harmful conditions at 6% versus 2%, and overtime work at 15% compared to 12%. ***This suggests that intensification of labour can potentially serve as a means of alleviating low incomes for some respondents.***

Figure 4. The distribution of challenges in the workplace reported by Ukrainian refugee respondents in Poland, as of April-May 2025



multiple-choice question; n=558

These findings were echoed in in-depth interviews with Ukrainian women working in Poland. Respondents frequently described their jobs as physically demanding and exhausting, with some combining multiple jobs or working beyond standard hours, including weekends. Most of these women were employed in low-skilled positions. However, such hardships were rarely mentioned spontaneously and often emerged only when directly asked, ***suggesting that physical exhaustion, long hours, or work intensification may be underreported in quantitative surveys.*** Some women downplayed exhaustion, comparing it to the hardships faced by people in Ukraine. Others framed physically demanding work in a positive light.

> **I cannot complain to people living in Ukraine about my exhaustion, on one hand. I am not allowed to say this, but I am truly worn out.**

> It's hard, 14 hours on my feet, so I do feel tired [about full-time job]. The work in the hotel [cleaner, second part-time job] is more physically active, which I like, because it engages my whole body: I squat, bend down, and go up and down the stairs. For me, it's like a warm-up; I call it free fitness.

Work intensification, through longer hours, physically harder jobs, or taking on multiple roles, was often viewed as a necessary strategy to compensate for low incomes. Several respondents explicitly weighed the physical burden of their work against financial necessity when thinking about changing to a physically easier job. As one woman explained:

> I have been offered many jobs that would be physically easier, so I wouldn't have to work as hard, as they say, 'to toil.' I say: 'Fine, but what about financially? Financially?' Then it would just be swapping one problem for another.

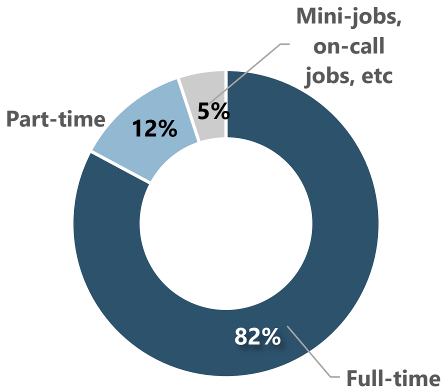
Despite these hardships, many respondents reported feeling stable in their employment and expressed general satisfaction with their working conditions. They mostly defined employment conditions in terms of having steady work that covers their basic needs and maintaining good relationships with co-workers or management. At the same time, their accounts described working conditions marked by excessive hours, physical exhaustion, and financial pressure.

Employment arrangements

The majority of respondents working in Poland worked full-time (82%). The rest (17%) worked either part-time (12%) or had mini-time jobs (without fixed working hours) - 5%.

In-depth interviews provide further insight into the types of employment arrangements displaced women seek. Many women, when choosing a place of work, prioritised the availability of a full social package, including paid holidays and sick leave, offered under *umowa o pracę*[22] legal grounds. For some, the lack of such guarantees in previous jobs (*umowa zlecenie*[23]) was a key reason for changing employment. Beyond legal protection, other practical considerations strongly influenced job choices. For women combining work and childcare, proximity to home and flexible hours were also important. Some of the employed women mentioned prioritising work arrangements that provided the flexibility to return home during the day for caregiving tasks, such as preparing meals or picking up children from school. ***These findings point to a preference of Ukrainian women in Poland for employment that offers both legal security and the flexibility needed to reconcile paid work with care responsibilities.***

Figure 5. Employment arrangement of surveyed Ukrainians employed in Poland, as of April-May 2025



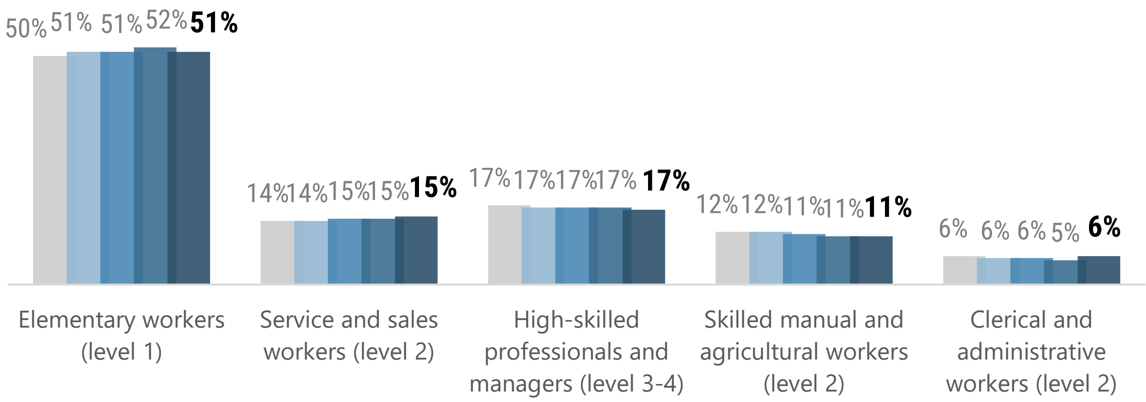
n=553

22. **U mowa o pracę** is a **Polish employment contract** regulated by the Labour Code.
23. **Umowa zlecenie** is a **civil law contract in Poland** used for specific services or tasks, not regular employment.

DESKILLING

There was no significant occupational mobility or transition to higher-skilled roles among the participants of the longitudinal survey interviewed throughout 1.5 years (Figure 6). Most of the respondents consistently stayed in lower-skilled roles.

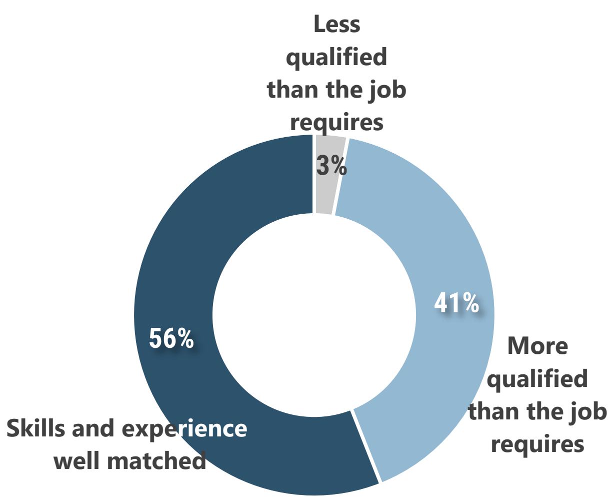
Figure 6. Professional categories among the same refugee-respondents of working age who has been living in Poland from November 2023 to May 2025, grouped by level of qualification and nature of work performed



Formal in-person employment in Poland; n=206

Among working-age Ukrainian refugees in Poland (ages 18–64), a significant level of occupational deskilling has been observed when comparing their pre-displacement employment with their current jobs in Poland (Figure 8,9). The share of those working in *elementary occupations*[24] increased sharply from 5% before displacement to 48% after. Conversely, the share of *professionals* fell from 36% to 10%, while the proportion of *service and sales workers* remained relatively stable (23% before displacement vs. 21% currently). This trend is also reflected in refugees' self-perception: around 41% considered themselves overqualified for their current job, while 56% believed their skills were more or less aligned with the job requirements (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Self-assessed alignment of skills and qualifications compared to the current position held by surveyed Ukrainian refugees in Poland, as of April-May 2025



n=546

24. In this section, employment categories are classified according to the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08). In Figure 6, for simplicity, managers, professionals, technicians, and associate professionals have been combined into one group of *high-skilled professionals* and *managers;* whereas Plant and Machine Operators, and Assemblers, as well as Skilled Agricultural, Forestry, and Fishery Workers, Craft and Related Trades Workers have been combined into *Skilled manual and agricultural workers.*

Figure 8. The top 5 most frequently reported *pre-displacement occupations* of surveyed Ukrainian refugees in Poland

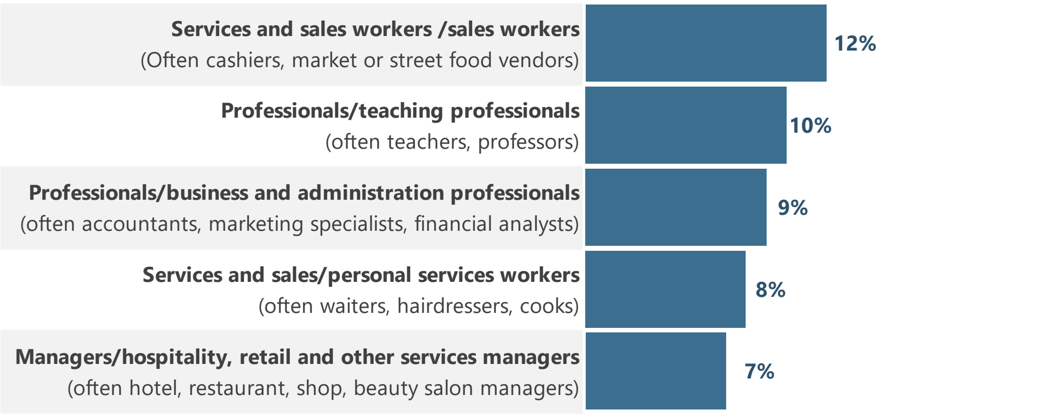


Figure 9. The top 5 most frequently reported occupations of surveyed Ukrainian refugees in Poland, *as of April-May 2025* (formal in-person employment)

Younger refugees (18–30 years) reported the highest job-skill match compared to other age groups, with 66% feeling well-matched to their jobs (Table 3). As age increases, the perception of mismatch also grows: the share of overqualified respondents rises from 30% to 48%, while those reporting a good match drops from 66% to 49%. This suggests that older people face greater challenges in securing jobs that reflect their qualifications. In addition to age-related factors that may contribute to this lower alignment, their comparatively lower language skills may also play a significant role (see section **Language acquisition and training**).

Table 3. Self-assessed alignment of respondents' qualifications in regard to their current job in Poland, broken down by their age (April-May 2025)

Age	*More qualified than the job requires*	*Skills and experience well-matched to the current job*	*Less qualified than the job requires*	*Prefer not to say*	*Number of respondents*
18 to 30	**30%**	**66%**	1%	3%	73
31 to 40	**40%**	**55%**	3%	2%	210
41 to 50	**42%**	**52%**	3%	3%	189
51 to 64	**48%**	**49%**	3%	0%	75

When looking specifically at respondents with a bachelor's degree or higher currently working in elementary occupations (n=112), 51% reported feeling overqualified, only 10 percentage points above the overall average. This relatively small difference suggests that not all respondents were previously employed in their field of study, pointing out that formal education alone does not fully determine how individuals assess the match between their skills and current jobs. This was also reflected in qualitative interviews: while many key informants before the displacement had worked in roles broadly aligned with their educational background, others had little or no experience in positions commensurate with their education. ***Although not all refugees may have previously worked in their profession, many of them have nevertheless experienced a clear decline in job complexity or required skills, pointing to significant deskilling in practice, regardless of formal qualifications.***

It also underscores the need for a broader understanding of deskilling, one that goes beyond educational levels alone. To assess refugees' employment potential more accurately, it is essential to consider their skill set and experience.

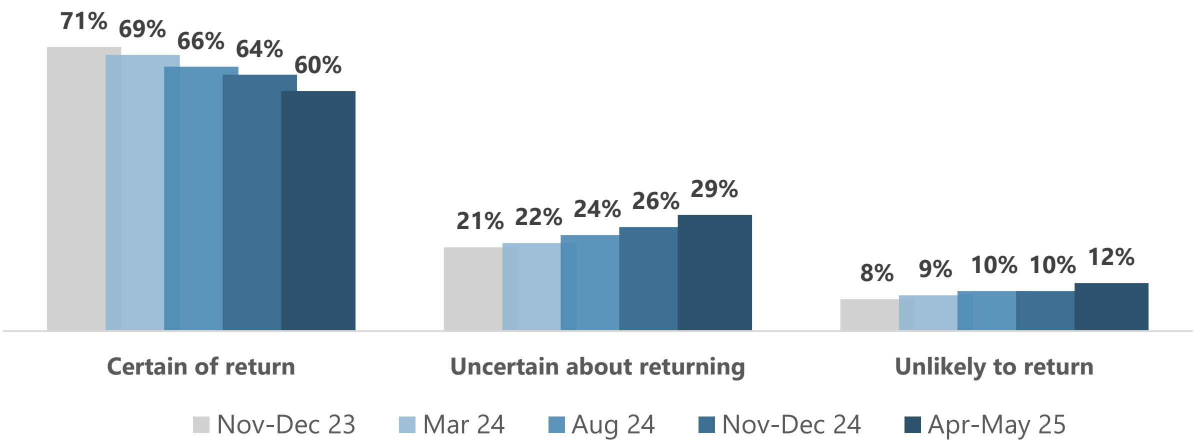
While degree recognition can be important in regulated professions, it is not universally relevant: many refugees bring valuable competencies developed outside their formal educational attainment. Institutionalised skills-based validation tools, such as practical assessments, documentation of work experience, or portfolio reviews, could complement existing systems and support more inclusive access to the labour market, particularly for those whose career paths do not align with host-country certification structures.

In qualitative interviews, only a few respondents reported having submitted their Ukrainian diplomas for formal recognition (i.e. nostrification), typically to continue working in their profession, either currently or with that goal in the future. The majority, however, had not pursued recognition, often believing that without strong command of Polish, a recognised diploma alone would not significantly improve their job prospects.

Language acquisition and training

Over 1.5 years of surveying the same respondents, there has been only a minimal increase in the share of Ukrainian refugees in Poland who report having "good" or "very good" Polish language skills. This category has remained nearly flat, rising from just 17% in late 2023 to 19% by mid-2025 (Figure 10). In contrast, the percentage of respondents with "poor" or "very poor" Polish has declined from 38% to 29%, while the "fair" (sufficient for basic communication) category grew only from 46% to 52%. This suggests that most language improvement is concentrated in the transition from poor to functional, rather than in the transition from functional to fluent.

Figure 10. Polish language command of the same refugee respondents interviewed over 1,5 years (November 2023 to May 2025)



n=427

Insights from in-depth interviews confirm these trends. During conversations, most reported having attended language courses only briefly, often early in their displacement and primarily through non-governmental initiatives. A few had participated in the courses for an extended period, and, notably, these were also the people who worked in more skilled jobs compared to other interviewees. Several respondents also indicated that they were unable to find free courses beyond the basic level, pointing to both a lack of funds and a lack of more advanced courses.

Given the relatively low and decreasing share of respondents who reported participating in language courses during this time (from 16% in the late 2023 to 12% in mid-2025), it is likely that the shift in language command was partially derived from gradual, informal language acquisition through daily life and work rather than the result of structured learning. Interviewed participants repeatedly described being caught in a "vicious circle": the need to know the language for career advancement, and the lack of time and energy to learn it due to employment demands. As one person explained:

> **No, first of all, I just don't have time right now. There's physically no time to attend courses, even online ones. I'm constantly at work. I get half a day off, maybe 4–5 days off a month at most. But during that time, I have to go grocery shopping, cook meals for my child for the next two days. And then, for example, I'll be working at the restaurant from morning until night for the next two days."**

One woman highlighted that attending courses was only feasible if facilitated or paid for by the employer during working hours, pointing to the importance of work-integrated or employer-supported language training models.
Without targeted language learning support, Ukrainian refugees may remain stuck at a basic language level that is good enough for everyday communication, such as shopping or simple conversations at work, but insufficient for accessing better employment opportunities.

Importantly, despite these limitations, many women expressed a desire to return to language training, clearly defining that language proficiency is a key to their future career advancement. This points to an unmet demand for language training, driven not by a lack of motivation, but by a lack of accessible opportunities.

The age-disaggregated data (Table 4) further unfold these limitations. Among respondents aged 51 to 64, nearly a third (31%) still report "poor" or "very poor" Polish as opposed to only 19% among 18 to 30-year-old individuals. In contrast, the youngest group (18–30) was far more likely to report high proficiency (36%).
These differences suggest that older refugees face greater challenges in language acquisition and may require additional support to overcome persistent barriers to learning.

Table 4. Self-assessed level of the respondents' Polish language command, broken down by their age (April-May 2025)

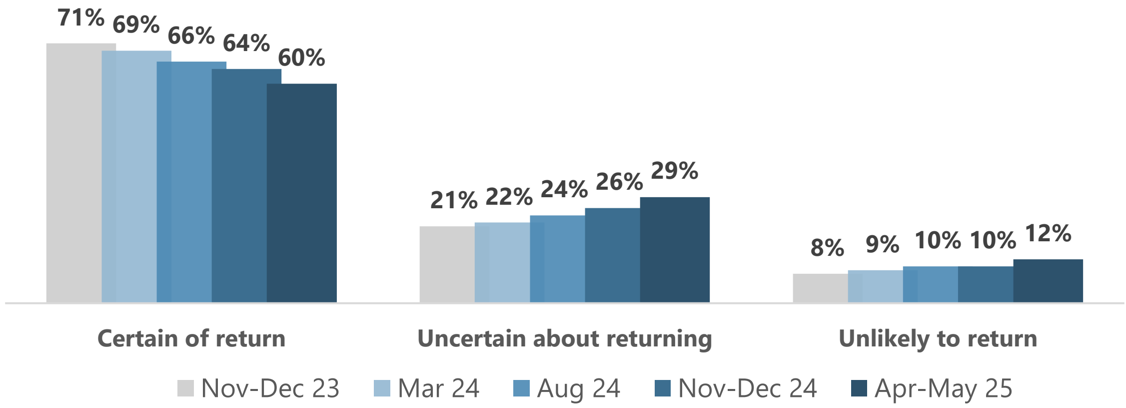
Age	*Poor or very poor*	*Fair (sufficient for basic communication)*	*Good or very good*	*Number of respondents*
18 to 30	**19%**	**45%**	**36%**	111
31 to 40	**26%**	**56%**	**19%**	317
41 to 50	**26%**	**55%**	**20%**	243
51 to 64	**31%**	**53%**	**16%**	134

INTENTIONS AND RETURN TO UKRAINE

General trends

Over the last 1,5 years of surveys of the same people, there has been a growing uncertainty regarding the return to Ukraine among Ukrainians in Poland (Figure 11). As of April-May 2025, 60% indicated confidence in returning. However, the proportion of those reporting unlikely to return has not changed much during this period.

Figure 11. Return intentions of the same refugee respondents in Poland interviewed over 1,5 years (November 2023 to May 2025)



n=427

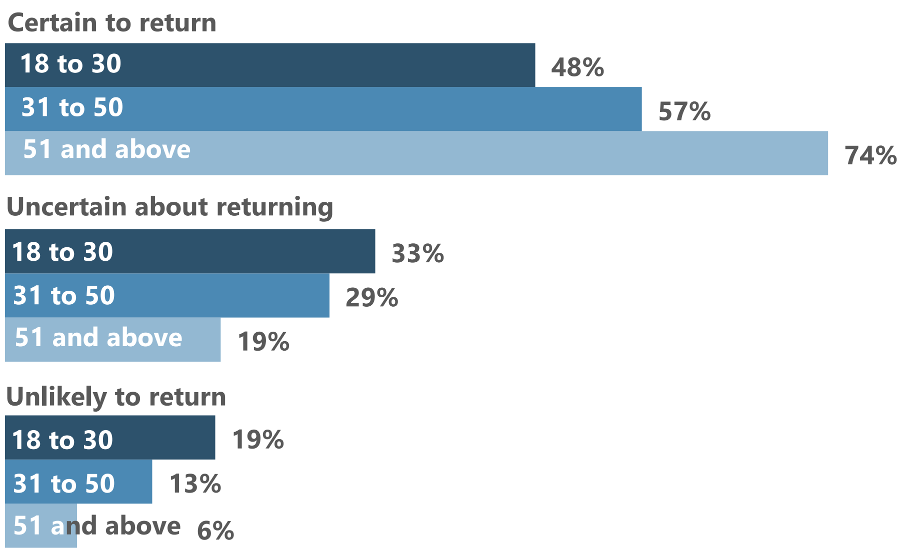
Various factors influenced both the intention to return and the actual returns. As indicated in earlier reporting,[25] *the **actual return rates were generally higher among those more vulnerable*** – people who were unemployed, lived in temporary housing, or had lower income. Additionally, those who worked remotely for Ukrainian employers, or had previously resided in certain areas of Ukraine, returned somewhat more often than others.

The section below turns to additional gender dynamics that further shape return patterns, particularly in relation to age and family composition.

Age vs. Intentions for Return

Older refugees nearing retirement age report a higher likelihood of returning to Ukraine: from 48% for respondents aged 18-30 to 74% for those 51 and above (Figure 12). The potential returns of women of pre-retirement age pose challenges for their reintegration into the Ukrainian labour market. While planning the post-war recovery, it is important to account for these demographics' characteristics to ensure effective use of human capital, skills and experience. As many of these women gradually approach retirement, increased pressure on the social protection system may also be expected. Questions around ageing and economic participation, already prominent in many countries, including Ukraine, are likely to become even more pressing for Ukraine in the near future.

Figure 12. Return intentions of refugee respondents in Poland, per age, as of April-May 2025



n=839

The findings were further supported by in-depth interviews. ***Some older women with teenage children mentioned a higher possibility of returning to Ukraine when their children became more independent and no longer needed care.*** For these respondents, decisions about return were closely tied to their children's stage of life: as teenagers approached adulthood and became old enough to enter tertiary education or employment, mothers felt freer to consider going back. This perspective highlights a distinction between the intentions of adult refugees, who usually represent their households' voice in the surveys, and those of their children, youth and teenagers, which do not necessarily align.

25. Return reasons were explored in greater detail in the "Predictors of Return" report, which compares those who returned to Ukraine while still being a refugee, at the moment before their return, to those who remained abroad, to identify the key factors prompting their return. While the report covers data only until the end of 2023, the findings remain broadly applicable, as most returnees had returned within the first years of displacement.

> **I have such conversations with my daughter: that I would return, and she would stay here. I feel like a stranger here, that's clear [...] My daughter has already been accepted — she feels at home [...] She wants me to stay, but I tell her, "I am needed here for a couple more years, and when you turn 18, it will be you who no longer want to live with me, then I can return to Ukraine peacefully".**

So far, as of October-November 2024, only 5% of all returnee respondents, or 10% among those aged 51 and older, said they had left their older children abroad when returning to Ukraine. However, this share may increase over time as younger children abroad grow.

Separation from Partner vs. Returns

Family ties in Ukraine, particularly the presence of a partner there, appear to play a significant role in decisions to return, especially during the early stages of displacement. Among current refugee respondents, 20% report being separated from a partner (usually the other parent of their child). Among those who returned to Ukraine, this figure was twice as high: 42% had experienced such separation before going back, suggesting that partner separation strongly influenced early returns.

Over time, however, this link may have weakened. According to the results of the May 2025 round, 69% of those separated from a partner in Ukraine expressed a positive intention to return, only 9 percentage points above the overall average of 60%. This likely reflects that many two-parent families have already reunited in Ukraine, leaving abroad a growing proportion of single caregivers who were already raising their children alone before fleeing.

In fact, as of May 2025, 30% of refugee households in Poland were headed by single mothers, and almost half of them (13% of all refugee households) had been single-mother families before displacement (Table 5). This is more than five times the share in Ukraine before displacement (3%), which may reflect both the higher likelihood of single mothers leaving Ukraine initially and subsequent reunifications of two-parent families in Ukraine, which increased the share of single-caregiver households among those still abroad.

Table 5. Comparison of single-caregiver households of Ukrainian refugees in Poland (May 2025) and in Ukraine (prior to displacement, 2021)

Single-caregiver households	*Refugee households in Poland* (May 2025, Longitudinal Study)	*Households in Ukraine* (2021, State Statistics)
Among ***all households*** (% of the group):	30%	3%[26]
Became single caregivers after leaving Ukraine	17%	-
Were single caregivers before leaving Ukraine	13%	-

26. State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 'Social and Demographic Characteristics of Households of Ukraine', 2021.Calculated manually as 7.6% (households with children where there is only 1 adult) of 37.8% (total number of households with children); rounded to 3%.

METHODOLOGY

This report of the longitudinal survey is based on ***quantitative and qualitative data***, and includes ***three distinct sample types*** in the analysis:

- All respondents who participated in Round 32 of the survey (14 April-12 May 2025).
- All respondents who took part in each of the five selected survey rounds over the past 1.5 years (Round 19 - November-December 2023; Round 23 - March 2024; Round 27 - August 2024; Round 31- November-December 2024; Round 32 - April-May 2025).
- Key informants who participated in in-depth interviews in May 2025.

The basic age-gender data of the samples are presented below:

- ***As of Round 32,*** the sample included 847 respondents in Poland, representing 2,362 household members. The average household size was 2.71, with a median of 3. Household composition was as follows: 54% adults aged 18–64 (42% women, 13% men); 40% children (2% aged 0-2, 6% aged 3-5, 19% aged 6-12, 13% aged 13-17); 6% older adults aged 65 and above (5% women, 1% men). Respondents were primarily represented by women (96%).
- ***The cohort of respondents who participated in five selected rounds*** comprises 442 respondents who resided in Poland in each of the rounds, with a gender and age distribution similar to that of the Round 32 sample.
- ***Key informants' data*** included 9 women of 30–51 years old living and working in Poland, 8 of whom had children, and 6 were sole caregivers. Most of the children were teenagers, with only one aged 7. Of the interviewed women, 7 reported holding a university degree. In terms of their work in Poland, 5 were employed in *elementary* roles, 2 worked as *plant and machine operators*, 1 as a *clerical and administrative worker*, and 1 as a *professional* (according to the ISCO-08 occupational classification). All key informants are the ongoing participants in the longitudinal study.

Quantitative sampling campaigns

Since the end of February 2022, IMPACT Initiatives has been surveying people who fled the escalation of hostilities in Ukraine to understand their mobility patterns, needs, integration trajectories, and intentions to return, and how these change over time. Respondents were first interviewed after they crossed the border out of Ukraine from 28 February onwards in Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Moldova at border crossings, transit sites, and reception centres, in partnership with UNHCR and have since been followed up by IMPACT's team, which conducts phone interviews with the same pool of respondents. From October 2022 onwards, IMPACT began to diversify sources of consent and has complemented the existing sample through Viber, Facebook, and Kyivstar dissemination campaigns. From January 2024 onwards, the consent collection extended to train stations in Ukraine.

Bias and limitations

Quantitative study: Given the non-random sampling strategy, findings are not representative and should be considered as indicative. Respondent-level data predominantly reflects the experiences of women, which introduces a bias towards female perspectives, particularly regarding income and employment-related vulnerabilities. In contrast, household-level responses are likely to provide a more balanced gender representation.

In-depth interviews: While in-depth interviews focus on employed women in Poland, it does not capture the full diversity of refugee experiences across all employment aspects. Some employment-related issues, especially gender-sensitive ones, can only be identified within the subgroup of unemployed women; similarly, employment challenges faced by mothers, particularly the main barriers to entering the labour force or the problems of combining childcare and work, can be better observed in the subgroup of unemployed women or those holding mini-jobs, being absent in the sample. As most children in the household were of teenage age, the topic of balancing work and childcare emerged less frequently and was discussed on a limited scope.