

# COUNTRY FICHE

## POLAND



1,563,386 Refugees from Ukraine on January 23, 2023

### Housing policy in Poland

In Poland, as in the other New Member States, much housing is privately owned because of privatisation (in Poland, 85%). The share of municipal housing is slightly larger than in the other New Member States (8%) (2016). Although informal renting is widespread, the private rental sector is underdeveloped (3-4%). Poland has a severe housing shortage problem, with the smallest number of dwellings per 1,000 inhabitants (406), but the stability of the economy and the housing finance system has allowed housing construction to exceed the European average (4-6 units per 1,000 inhabitants after 2011).

#### Key features

- ✓ From 2016 onwards, housing policy has been geared towards expanding the affordable rental housing sector to counteract unilateral home-ownership programs.
- ✓ The new “apartment plus” program has several innovative features (intergovernmental cooperation, public-private partnership, targeted subsidies), but it needs to be scaled up.

#### Challenges

- ⚠ Municipalities are under political pressure due to a shortage of social housing; more than 150,000 households are on the waiting list.
- ⚠ It is not only the housing shortage that is a problem but also the significant number of obsolete, poor-quality dwellings (5.3 million in 2011).
- ⚠ Despite the housing subsidy system, there are significant housing affordability problems in bigger cities, even for middle-income groups.
- ⚠ The tenancy law needs to be reformed; the rights and responsibilities of landlords and tenants should be more balanced.
- ⚠ Supply in the private rental market should be increased, partly by strengthening social rental agencies and supporting housing investment in the rental sector.

### Main legal regulations concerning migrants and refugees

The 2001 EU Temporary Protection Directive was transposed into national law by an act on 13 June 2003. The **Act on Assistance to Ukrainian Citizens** in connection with the armed conflict on the territory of Ukraine came into effect in Poland on 12 March 2022. The Act on Assistance to Ukrainian Nationals defines specific rules related to permitting the legal stay of Ukrainian citizens and **assigns voivodes (counties) and local governments to assist** people fleeing Ukraine. It also **sets up an Aid Fund** to sponsor efforts to respond to their needs. People fleeing Russia’s war on Ukraine may also be eligible for accommodation, food, and non-food items. When Ukrainian citizens legally staying on the territory of the Republic of Poland in connection with the war in Ukraine, they can be assigned a PESEL number, and become **beneficiaries of temporary protection and access different public services**. In the amendments, the act regularizes the status of minors born in Poland from Ukrainian refugee mothers and the organization of and financial resources for Polish language lessons for Ukrainian pupils. In addition, language training and the recognition of professional qualifications for specific medical professionals are also covered by the amendments, as well as the social services and welfare benefits available to Ukrainian refugees, including job seekers and those who start a company in Poland.

## Current refugee situation

Between 24 February and 15 According to the UNHCR, 1.564 million people registered for temporary protection or similar national protection schemes by 23 January 2023. By 21 November 2022, there had been 1.465 million applications for the PESEL number (“UKR status”). Poland had a 627 thousand pre-war Ukrainian migrant population who came for labour, but over 60% would stay permanently or for a few years. **About 20 to 23% of newer refugees found shelter and support with family members or acquaintances already living in Poland.** Many Ukrainians are still supported by families, volunteering Poles, and companies; more than 20% are renting flats and homes, paying the market price.

The **high cost of renting**, partly fuelled by the “40 złoty a day” benefit that contributed to the sharp increase in demand in the private rental market **affects both the domestic population and the refugees** and results in young people not leaving their parents’ houses and refugees not being able to move out of temporary shelters. According to all surveys and data from the PESEL register, of the 1.465 million thousand applications (as of 21.11.2022), **slightly more than 40% of Ukrainian refugees are under 18 years** old, and there are almost equal numbers of boys and girls in this group; 46.9% of women are aged 18-65, and only 9% men; and there are 2.9% women and 0.9% men over 65 years old. **Nearly half** (45 to 50%) of adults declared in a survey that they had a **university degree and a readiness to work** in Poland. Within two months of arrival, about 19% of Ukrainian refugees were already working, 10% had a job promised to them in Poland, and only about 22% said they were not working in Poland at that moment. \*

## Accommodation and social services

International and local organisations created the **Refugee Coordination Forum**, now led by UNHCR. The crisis management system involved regional representatives of the central government (voivodes). Accommodation was coordinated by local authorities and city officers with the help of many volunteers. Local reception centres and small accommodation units were financed by local governments (*samorząd*) using resources for crisis management (funded through the city budgets without any additional contribution from the central government). Bigger accommodation centres and places contracted in hotels and other locations were financed from the central budget.

### Immediate-response programs

Immediate accommodation was organised in Poland by citizen volunteers who started to **organise reception points**, and local authorities followed very quickly, providing places in sports halls, event-hosting buildings, and local community centres. It was common practice at these reception points to coordinate lists of the accommodation offered by private people, often as solidarity housing. After some months, **solidarity housing offers ran out almost entirely**. Among those staying in Poland, only about 10% used the accommodation provided by authorities at the reception centres. These centres are usually provided by **international organisations** (for example, IOM and UNICEF) in cooperation with local and usually small NGOs. Also, **private companies** provided places. Short-stay housing for individuals was also financed by international organisations (e.g., an Airbnb programme encouraged hosts to offer stays for refugees, and full or partial financing was available from IOM funds). In March, a special fund was established to provide for accommodation, **“40 złotys a day” benefits**, and more recently, **language lessons** for schoolchildren and adults and support with **job-searching**.

### Long-term solutions

After more than half a year, the local governments are **transforming** the nature of refugee help from crisis management to (usually) **more standard forms of homelessness prevention and support**, employing **family and social care** structures, now still funded by resources of international organizations. With national authorities' consent, local governments cooperate with UNICEF to provide **education** services. Additional **health services and medication** provided in accommodation centres have been financed from different sources, mainly UN Agencies and international NGOs.

## Gaps

- ⚠️ **Locational problems and mismatches:** refugees typically seek to settle in large cities where housing and education/health services are available. As a result, the cost of renting in cities has risen significantly, adding to the pre-existing housing affordability problem. However, the relocation of refugees to smaller settlements reduces their labour market opportunities.
- ⚠️ **Legislative system:** the period of eligibility for financial support ends after 120 days, and many refugees no longer receive this benefit, which will cause them financial hardship. Tenancy law results in unbalanced tenant-landlord relationships.
- ⚠️ **Financial framework:** A significant number of Ukrainian refugees who fled Ukraine after the outbreak of the war have found work in the Polish labour market. This will allow the welfare system to better target financial assistance to groups in need.
- ⚠️ **Main housing regime framework and feasibility of long-term solutions:** The surplus demand in the Polish housing market (also fuelled by EU funds) has led to price increases, especially in urban housing markets. Housing affordability is a serious issue.
- ⚠️ **Inadequacy of the physical composition of the housing stock:** Poland has a significant housing shortage, and a very low vacancy rate. In addition, between 20% and 25% of the housing stock is associated with serious quality problems.
- ⚠️ **Cultural acceptance issues:** There are several elements of the programmes that only benefit refugees, the social background of whom (education, income, wealth) is more favourable, and are perceived to harm the non-refugee population in need. Some groups were served with more hesitation: Roma from Ukraine were initially not welcomed in reception centres and other places of accommodation. However, after the intervention of NGOs and even members of parliament, places for them to stay were found.
- ⚠️ **Lack of needed social assistance and other services:** Social assistance is very important for older people without family support and for people and families with special needs, such as the disabled, and people requiring personal assistance or permanent care, especially with mental health issues. The legal framework puts the costs of providing such support on the shoulders of local governments, but the latter may not be able to sustain this.
- ⚠️ **Information gaps related to effective decision-making:** Exchanging information among different levels of government and international and Polish organisations with different management capacities is a significant challenge. Without knowledge of the diverse needs and aspirations of refugee groups, it is very difficult to develop a longer-term strategy.

## Future perspectives

Poland is the **leading destination** for Ukrainian refugees, with 1.5 million refugees. In the short term, it will need to house around half a million families, and in the long term (if 20% of households decide to stay permanently in Poland), it will need to provide housing for around 100,000 households (roughly equivalent to the number of households already on the municipal waiting list for social housing). This surplus housing will need to be **provided in the rental sector, where serious reforms are needed**. The “apartment plus” programme has already started to move in this direction but needs to be significantly scaled up. In the longer term, the housing of refugees in Poland will require an **expansion** of the rental housing sector, both market and subsidised. The greatest challenge is **changing tenancy law** to increase security for landlords and tenants. Without this, institutional investors will not enter the market, and individual landlords will not be able to deliver lasting solutions. EU funds and international organisations based programmes should support longer-term solutions that involve the institutional changes.

## Lessons and Recommendations

It is a great success that Poland has taken in 1.5 million refugees, essentially without significant conflict. Additional demand for housing, especially in the urban housing market, has led to a rise in rents, increasing affordability problems. Polish families took in refugees, e.g. in unoccupied housing, which mitigated pressure. Poland is pro-actively exploring housing opportunities, with flats, houses, offices and schools, other buildings, and buildable plots of land easing demand pressure, particularly in urban areas. A flexible integration policy should be applied, which anticipates acceptance of the norms of the different communities and promotes national identity, leaving room for national cultural and religious institutions and ensuring language education – moving towards a multicultural Poland. To support this long-term integration vision, the following recommendations are made:

### Develop a National Refugee Integration Strategy

- Based on the central government's forming migration policy develop a strategy for long-term integration of refugees.
- The strategy should have significant focus on education and measures to provide long-term housing solutions for refugees who are unable to secure housing on the private rental market.
- A more even distribution system should be created in which there are effective incentives for refugees to move middle-sized cities with lower rents, access to jobs, good quality education and day-care facilities for children and social support measures.

### Increase the supply of affordable housing in cities

- Stimulate the better use of existing unoccupied housing and new construction both in the private and in the municipal sector, largely based on the current housing policy schemes, in order to mainstream refugee housing programs within national programs.
- There should be room for more NGOs in setting up social rental agencies.
- A “renovate to rent” programme should be launched to mobilise the existing vacant residential and non-residential buildings, and improve the quality of private and municipal rental housing, including through deep renovation and renewable energy sources for heating.

### Improve the regulation of the private rental sector and increase housing security for refugees

- Simplification of tenancy law is needed to make the private rental sector more secure both for landlords and tenants, and to allow institutional investors to enter the market, and individual landlords to deliver sustainable solutions.
- The legal/court procedure of eviction process should be shortened. In return, strong financial and social service measures and well-targeted means-tested rent supplement should be put in place to prevent the loss of housing and homelessness of refugees and the host population.

### Increase the capacity and quality of temporary accommodation solutions

- Repurposing unused buildings to temporary accommodation should be expanded and quality should be monitored to decrease the number of households who need institutional solutions.

### Increase the capacity of social and other services

- It is necessary to increase the capacity and financing of social service providers that help refugees on the long-term.
- A more effective education coordination system should be developed between Poland and Ukraine to monitor refugee children's participation in Ukrainian online schooling while facilitating the shift and plug-in to the Polish education system.
- Simple and more rapid acknowledgment of diplomas and qualifications are needed to increase the income for many.

### Use of EU funds for successful integration of refugees

- EU funds and international organisations should support longer-term solutions that involve the institutional changes described above.

\*Source: [Registered applications for the UKR status due to the conflict in Ukraine - Otwarte Dane](#)