

New Voices in the City. Refugee Participation in Warsaw, Gdynia, Wrocław, and Lublin

Review of Mechanisms,
Best Practices,
and Recommendations

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Executive Summary

In some Polish cities, the percentage of refugees among residents has exceeded 20%. Many of them will remain in Poland permanently. Although refugees do not have voting rights, other avenues exist for them to influence decisions made within their new local communities by officials, school principals, or city mayors. Yet many are unaware of the tools at their disposal or how to use them effectively. With the increasing presence of displaced persons among Polish urban populations, it seems timely to consider how refugees should be included in local decision-making processes.

There are, at the least, two important reasons for this. Firstly, **the idealistic reason** – in a democratic society, all residents irrespective of citizenship should have the right to shape the principles on which it functions. This right is inalienable even if many refugees do not feel the need for deepened participation in their local community as it is frequently the case with Polish citizens. This attitude is explained by the circumstances they are in. Many of them focus on family members remaining in Ukraine and on securing income under new circumstances in Poland. **Secondly, the practical reason** – not including new residents in the processes of shaping urban communities is likely to generate future social conflicts. Promotion of active participation with an aim to better integrate people with refugee experience thus becomes a tool for bolstering social cohesion.

Refugee Participation

The report discusses the participation of refugees with particular emphasis on refugees from Ukraine who arrived in Poland after the Russian Federation military offensive launched on 24 February 2022. This participation is primarily understood as the influence of individuals on decisions concerning the communities they belong to, be

it refugee and local communities or other groups. These decisions can concern issues both at the micro level (e.g., rules and codes of conduct in temporary accommodation facilities, activities available at a cultural center) and macro level (e.g., development of foreigner integration policies at a local or national level). The report examines the mechanisms of inclusion, their accessibility and openness towards people with refugee experience and to what extent refugees use them. Although the focus is on refugees from Ukraine, most of the recommendations presented in this report are universal in character and thus may also apply to other refugee and migrant groups.

Accountability to affected populations and sustainable integration underpins the rationale for this research. Integration covers a very broad spectrum of activities from learning a second language, finding a job and navigating the bureaucratic systems to becoming involved in the life of the local community and having an impact on it. In the report, the term ‘integration’ is used in that broad sense and understood to encompass participation. In practice, distinguishing between mechanisms, processes, and actions serving *solely* integration objectives and those focused on participation can be difficult. The choices described here are not seen as indisputable – in searching for examples of refugee participation or mechanisms that could potentially serve such participation, we preferred to err on the side of applying the concept too broadly rather than too narrowly.

This is one of the first studies in Poland, commissioned by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), devoted specifically to the issue of Ukrainian refugees’ participation in Poland. It aims to gather insights that could inform the debate about durable solutions for refugees and lay the groundwork for further research. The informants provided valuable information on the participatory barriers encountered by refugees in selected cities (Gdynia, Lublin, Warsaw, and Wrocław) from both the host society’s and the refugees’

perspectives. However, this method's limitations must be acknowledged. The perspectives of professionals, experts and NGO leaders although informed, are inevitably shaped by their roles and experiences. Moreover, their insights are likely to be influenced by institutional objectives, potentially leading to a partial view of the situation. The collected material was scrutinized critically to provide additional support for the key findings, but the study is marked with subjectivity. Thus, the opinions expressed in this report do not reflect official positions neither of DRC nor Stocznia.

For the purposes of this study, a list of participatory mechanisms available in the studied locations has been created and is available at apps.stocznia.org.pl/nowe_glosy.

Participation in Poland and Disadvantaged Groups

Refugees, just like Polish citizens, are diverse in terms of their level of social engagement, sense of influence on the world around them, and personal capacities that enable such influence. In the first months after the escalation of the war in Ukraine, local refugee community leaders naturally emerged in many Polish towns – some of them later found employment in NGOs or municipal institutions. Refugee participation also occurs within dedicated mechanisms such as grant programs or leadership development programs with new organizations run or co-run by people with refugee experience also emerging in some cities.

The least useful for refugees seem to be the procedural participatory mechanisms used in Poland and which are popular with Polish citizens such as civic budgets, public consultations, referendums, or local initiatives. The participation of refugees is not systematically monitored, but our interlocutors agree that the new residents of Polish cities practically do not use these tools. Reading the projects for civic budgets or topics of public consultations

from the last two years, one can completely overlook the fact that about a million refugees from Ukraine have appeared in Poland. Their presence is not revealed either by the topics of the projects or by the identity of the authors and participants.

When starting the study, an assumption was made that it was possible to make slight adjustments to these mechanisms to make them inclusive of the needs refugee and migrant groups who – in the coming years – will become new residents. After conducting in-depth interviews with people working daily with or on behalf of refugees, a conclusion was reached that it is necessary to rethink the model of participation used in Poland and its components.

The arrival of a new group of refugees has revealed the shortcomings of this model for refugees in general (including migrants from Ukraine living in Poland before February 2022, of whom there were about 1.3 million in Poland at the beginning of 2023¹) and other underprivileged groups who do not participate in theoretically universally accessible participatory mechanisms or do so only marginally. These mechanisms seem to have a strong class bias – both in terms of who participates in them and what problems they address. This bias limits their use by economically or socially disenfranchised persons or those with fewer resources. The spike in refugee numbers since February 2022 serves to highlight the fact that the lack of participation of these groups (including refugees) has been overlooked, if not normalized, in popular procedural participatory processes.

It is worth noting here that among refugees from Ukraine there are people with different social, cultural, and economic capacities, different life experiences, and different professional and class positions. They are not all representatives of disadvantaged groups. Presumably, this form of exclusion from the life of their new communities may eventually be identified by them as a problem. Therefore, it is worth ensuring greater inclusiveness of Polish participatory mechanisms in advance.

¹ Estimates by analysts from Picodi based on data from the Office for Foreigners and the PESEL registry. Source: <https://www.picodi.com/pl/mozna-taniej/ilu-ukraincow-mieszka-w-polsce>

Recommendations

General remarks

It is worth **combining integration and participatory activities**. Participation should be treated as an integral element of including refugees in the life of the Polish society and an important integration tool. On a practical level, it can involve embedding participatory tools in integration activities. An example could be jointly deciding on the theme of integration workshops or the offer of extracurricular activities for refugee children at a cultural center or neighborhood house. Another example would be working on projects for the civic budget as part of Polish language instruction, acquiring competencies useful in the Polish labor market, or learning about the principles of local government.

It is necessary to **create spaces and meeting places**; mechanisms and programs alone are not enough. It is extremely important to create physical spaces – ideally gathering under one roof a variety of actors offering diverse services and activities from integratory, through cultural to participatory. Such spaces offer the opportunity for meetings between social activists, officials, refugees, and local residents. Notable examples of such spaces are large service hubs such as the Wrocław Wromigrant, the Lublin Baobab, or the Warsaw Support Coordination Center (*Centrum Wsparcia Koordynacji*). Due to the high costs of operating such spaces – especially in terms of overheads such as rent and maintenance – local governments, with their real estate stock, have an important role to play in their creation.

The effective communality of such places is manifested not only by their openness to representatives of various groups but also by allowing these groups to shape them from the bottom up, for example, by being involved in the decisions about their offer of activities and appearance. Such participatory spaces inclusive of refugees and migrants can also be created within existing institutions (e.g., in schools, collective accommodation facilities, libraries, cultural centers, and local activity places).

The challenge is still to **meet the basic needs** of refugees and integrate them into the Polish society. For those fleeing war, the priorities are: regularizing their situation in Poland, learning the language, finding work, and in many cases also receiving necessary mental health and psychosocial support. Most of the time, meeting those needs is a precondition for participation. Some refugees quickly start to engage socially despite difficult living conditions and professional situation, but they most often act on behalf of the groups or institutions they represent.

Refugee participation cannot be a requirement or immediate expectation. Refugees cannot be expected to participate and engage as **building a culture of participation and engagement in local community affairs takes time**. Their Polish host communities themselves are still learning it. It also requires the commitment from both sides – the host community (expressing their openness, encouraging the participation of refugees, adjusting mechanisms) and the refugee community (building mutual trust and dialogue).

Participation should not serve to relieve cities and the government of their obligations or replace professional, systematic research on the needs and circumstances of people with refugee experience, which is still lacking in Poland. Nor should it replace the creation of migration policies and the inclusion of multiculturalism in public policymaking. All these processes and related outputs, however, should be created with participation and consideration for the voices of refugees in mind.

Engaging refugees in local decision making should take into account their specific socio-economic situation. Long-term involvement in such processes may clash with their income-generating activities. As a result of their displacement situation and challenges in official recognition of their professional qualifications, many refugees work below their qualifications, and thus have to work more to satisfy the same needs. Offering compensation to refugees for their participatory effort not only has practical financial significance for them but also shows appreciation for their self-expertise, potentially engaging more diverse groups of informants and enhancing the quality of received feedback.

Blind Spots of Participation in Poland

Existing forms of participation need to change to respond to the needs of disadvantaged groups more effectively. The model of participation used in Poland – consisting of mechanisms such as civic budgets, social consultations, legislative initiatives, and local referendums – despite being formally open to all residents, is not particularly user-friendly or easy to understand for refugees, migrants, and other disadvantaged groups. Engaging in such participation mechanisms often requires time, strength, specific cultural and social competencies, and determination.

Polish participatory mechanisms should not be exclusively adapted to the needs of refugees – such actions could raise valid questions as to why similar efforts are not made for other underprivileged groups. It is essential to open these mechanisms to the needs of a broader group of people outside the core urban middle class. This could involve reforming existing mechanisms or creating new, more inclusive ones that reflect the realities of a multicultural and diverse society.

A critical view of the model of participation used in Poland should not underplay its value. Above mentioned tools can be effective and genuinely enhance the agency of specific groups – refugees, migrants, the elderly, the young – but only under certain conditions. Sometimes it is sufficient to find appropriate allies in the consultative process with authority in a particular stakeholder group or organize consultation points in places where refugees and migrants meet during dedicated activities (i.e., the right choice of method for conducting social consultations).

Support for School Participation and Opening Schools to Extracurricular Activities

A key area of social life where participation of new residents can occur is school, offering opportunities for contact between Polish and refugee students, parents, teachers, cultural assistants, and local decision-makers. This can be facilitated through: micro-grant programs, school participatory budgets, creation of spaces for art and sports activities, project work, empowerment of student councils, and support from non-governmental organizations that have long aided Polish schools in developing school participation. It is important to develop participation among students, parents, guardians with refugee experience in the Polish school environment as school is a place where people with refugee experience and those from the host society naturally coexist and communicate, often sharing similar needs and expectations. Participating in decision-making processes should thus be a natural consequence of this coexistence (which significantly changed for Polish schools after February 24, 2022).

Cross-sector Cooperation

Cross-sector Cooperation Mechanism Benefit from Goal Setting

Cross-sector bodies² (councils, commissions, plenipotentiaries) function best when they work towards solving a specific problem – this could involve designing a service center, developing a city integration strategy, or addressing more modest but specific concerns. When cross-sector bodies become dysfunctional, setting a realistic goal that the government and organizations can jointly achieve might be a way out of the impasse. They also have an important role as spaces for dialogue and exchange of views. Refugees should be given platforms in cross-sector bodies that do not deal with only refugee-specific issues. Their representatives should have the opportunity

² “Cross-sector bodies” refer to organizations or groups that encompass representatives or members from different sectors of society, such as the public sector, private sector, and non-profit sector. These bodies often aim to address issues that span across these various sectors, requiring collaboration and coordination among diverse groups with different backgrounds, expertise, and interests.

to present their perspective on general issues or issues of specific demographic groups such as the youth, the elderly and others.

The reaction to the inefficiency of cross-sector cooperation mechanisms often involves trying to replace a commission with a council, a council with a commission, or moving a given body to a higher or lower level in the city hierarchy. In reality, the problems faced by such bodies are similar, regardless of the specifics of their legal setup. It is not about forming such a body, but about the need to listen to its opinions and the willingness to implement the proposed solutions.

Cross-Sector Cooperation Should Be Maximally Inclusive

Maximum inclusiveness of cross-sector bodies is crucial, as they often struggle with credibility issues and claims that they represent only their members and not the refugee community. By maximum inclusiveness means that these bodies should be open to a broad range of actors representing refugee or migrant communities. Bodies that do not follow this inclusive policy tend to risk alienating, at the least, some members of these communities and may struggle with their legitimacy.

Residents' Panel

So-called citizens' panels or similar decision-making formats ("consultations," "assemblies," etc.) are being discussed and implemented at various levels of governance – from local council to the European Union level.³

Panels are based on the selection of a representative group of residents from a given area who are provided with conditions for in-depth discussion on socially significant topics. Panel participants engage in moderated debates and workshops, have access to experts, and are compensated for their time. Their diversity minimizes the risk that the interests of any group will be overlooked.

In the context of Polish cities that have welcomed hundreds of thousands of refugees from Ukraine, panels offer the opportunity to create a democratic structure whose composition reflects the actual demographic structure of cities in Poland post-February 2022. Panels do not offer preferential treatment of refugees but give them a voice proportionate to their actual share in the local population. This form of participation also allows for the inclusion of the broader migrant community, which in many Polish cities altered the local social fabric long before the escalation of the war in Ukraine.

³ There are numerous studies on citizen or resident panels. To read more about the specific experience of Stocznia please see the forthcoming guide prepared by the Stocznia Foundation, set to be published in the first months of 2024, and the website (<https://naradaoenergii.pl/>) of the citizens' consultation on energy costs.

Methodology

- The report summarizes information collected during a research project, which consisted of four research modules.
- The first stage involved the creation of a database of participatory mechanisms understood as tools available to residents to enable participation in decision-making in their city and immediate surroundings for Gdynia, Lublin, Warsaw, and Wrocław.
- The database was developed based on existing data available online and later supplemented with information obtained during individual and group interviews.
- 69 mechanisms were described and compiled into a table, including information on the description of operation, formal accessibility for refugee persons, practical accessibility, target group, and barriers. The mechanisms described in the database are analyzed throughout this report, and the table itself is available at: https://apps.stocznia.org.pl/nowe_glosy/.
- In describing the mechanisms, special focus was placed on their openness to residents who are not Polish citizens by verifying the formal requirements to use them (having a PESEL number, citizenship, registration, etc.) and their accessibility to speakers of other languages.
- The prime reason why the four cities included in the study were chosen was because DRC either partnered with local NGOs or implemented projects directly there. In addition:
 - Warsaw was chosen because it is the capital and has received the largest number of Ukrainian refugees among all Polish cities.⁴ Also, Warsaw has been the destination for the vast majority of all non-Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers living in Poland for many years.
 - Gdynia was also considered due to its developed participatory activities conducted by the Social Innovation Laboratory and its proximity to Gdańsk, a leader in integration policies development and implementation, which after the escalation of the war in Ukraine, received a large number of refugees. Gdynia's case also shows how hubs like Gdańsk affect the situation of refugees in neighboring cities.
 - Wrocław and Lublin were included in the study due to their long history of cooperation between migrant communities and NGO's and the municipality.
 - In the case of Lublin, the proximity to the Polish-Ukrainian border and the large – relative to the city's size – number of non-Polish residents were significant factors. Additionally, Lublin created an efficient system of cross-sectoral cooperation in the face of the humanitarian crisis (Lublin Social Committee to Aid Ukraine).
 - The second stage of the study included in-depth individual interviews (IDI). A total of 20 interviews were conducted (5 per city) with representatives of:
 - local governments (municipal offices and institutions),
 - Polish non-governmental organizations supporting refugees and migrants,

⁴ Current number of refugees in Warsaw can be tracked using an interactive dashboard created by the municipality. It is available at: <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrljoiZmZiOGVhZWQzMjM5ZS00YmQwLWWEyMzctMGMyMjAyZDc5ZjQ2liwidCI6IjEwZTRkN2E3LTQ1MmYtNDk3YS04NjlmLWwzOTlkZjhhkNDU0MCIsImMiOiJ9>

- international NGOs supporting refugees,
- refugee and migrant organizations,
- expert communities.
- Based on the first two stages, four case studies were selected (one per city) that present good practices in creating refugee participation mechanisms. Each case study included three additional interviews (12 in total) with people directly involved in the implementation of the mechanisms.
- Gdynia's Przystanie is a network of small cultural centers accessible to all residents of Gdynia. Immediately after the escalation of the war, they provided shelter to refugees arriving in the city. Currently, they have returned to their more traditional role as cultural centers. The institution quickly evolved in response to the needs of refugees arriving in the city and continues to shape its cultural offer in response to new needs as they emerge. Importantly, part of this offer is created by the refugees themselves: both Ukrainian refugees fleeing the war and refugees from other regions who lived in Gdynia before the escalation of the war.
- Warsaw Coordination Support Center. It is both an institution and a physical space in Warsaw, operated by the Inna Przestrzeń Foundation. It runs a wide range of activities, from those strictly related to integration to those focused on civic activity. They provide support to activists from the refugee community in Warsaw and support newly established non-governmental organizations, facilitate meetings of non-governmental organizations, and run a micro-grant program. It is not a single "mechanism" – rather a center for various forms of civic activity. Refugees and migrants who come for integration activities (such as Polish language classes and career advisors) are also given the opportunity for deeper engagement in local community activities.
- A municipal program in Wrocław known as Microgrants supports local initiatives allowing residents to implement their ideas for social activities for city residents. The program has three paths for non-governmental organizations, informal groups, and youth respectively. Popularity of microgrants for informal groups is growing among migrants and refugees living in Wrocław; participation in events funded or organized through these microgrants is increasing. The number of funded projects submitted independently or in teams including Polish-speaking persons is also on the rise. One of the factors contributing to the success of this mechanism among migrants and refugees is the involvement of WroMigrant – an information and support point for migrants and refugees run by the Wrocław City Hall. WroMigrant supports new residents in organizing their stay in Poland, provides information about opportunities for social engagement, and helps translate microgrant applications. In the case study, we looked at what makes the mechanism increasingly effective as a tool for integrating refugees into city life and the role of the City Hall and WroMigrant in refugee participation through microgrants.
- School Civic Budgets grant program in Lublin allows financing projects created by the city's school-going youth. Each of the winning schools receives PLN 4,000 and substantive organizational support in implementing the School Civic Budget on its premises. The first edition of the School Civic Budget (SBO) started in 2021. The initiative attracts not only students but entire school communities, namely, the teaching, administrative, and service staff as well as the students' parents including those with refugee and migration experience. Although School Budgets also are available in other Polish cities, Lublin strongly emphasizes youth participation. This is evidenced by the fact that the city currently holds the title of the European Youth Capital and not so long ago developed its own youth strategy.

- Finally, the preliminary conclusions and observations were confronted with participatory practices during two workshops. The meetings were attended by representatives of local governments and non-governmental organizations who deal with participatory activities and have experience working with refugees and including them in decision-making processes in cities. A total of seven experts participated in the workshops.
- This report summarizes the information gathered at all the stages of the study.

Limitations

- The report does not provide a quantitative estimation of the scale or effectiveness of individual participation methods. Indicators that would allow a quantitative assessment of the level of participation in each city have not been yet established. The researchers could only qualitatively assess which mechanisms have mass potential and which do not.
- The report is primarily a representation of the views of the key informants (experts and NGO leaders) interviewed for this research. It is not a study of the awareness and needs of refugee groups in Poland. The lack of such systematic studies is one of the weaknesses of the Polish refugee support system. To support some key findings and recommendations, reference to available quantitative data was made. However, such data are scarce and practically unavailable at the level of individual cities.
- The report does not describe two leader cities in the area of integration policies and refugee participation – Krakow and Gdansk. Gdansk has its own comprehensive refugee integration strategy⁵ and Krakow introduced the “Open Krakow” program⁶ in 2016 which created “space and tools for the integration of foreigners coming to Krakow”. Krakow is currently also developing a region-level strategy. The reasons for this decision are explained in the methodology section.
- The best practices under scrutiny are limited to the locations included in the study; nevertheless, the conclusions and recommendations are also applicable to other medium and large cities.
- The participatory and integration activities in the selected cities have strengths and weaknesses; their treatment in this report does not intend to either stigmatize or praise them.
- The report does not take into account the context of small towns which significantly differs from the context of large and medium cities. However, some of the presented recommendations, especially those concerning cooperation with civil society or recognizing the needs of the local migrant community, may be transferrable, especially in relation to non-refugee migrant groups.
- The main focus of the report is limited to refugees from Ukraine (mainly those who arrived in Poland after the escalation of the war in Ukraine in February 2022).

⁵ Document describing Gdansk's integration strategy (*Model of Immigrant Integration*) is available at: <https://download.cloudgdansk.pl/gdansk-pl/d/20170183702/model-integracji-imigrantow.pdf>

⁶ Source: https://www.bip.krakow.pl/?dok_id=66323

The Migrant and Refugee Situation in Warsaw, Gdynia, Wrocław, and Lublin

- According to the data published by Eurostat, the number of refugees from Ukraine in Poland exceeded 955,000 in November 2023.⁷
- A significant obstacle for city authorities and other local government institutions working with and for refugees is the lack of reliable statistics. While the total number of refugees from Ukraine in Poland can be estimated based on active PESEL registration figures, it is neither exact nor does it show what these numbers look like in individual cities. The figures below are an attempt to estimate this number for each of the analyzed cities:
 - Warsaw: 260,000 (13% of residents)
 - Lublin: 66,000 (approx. 20% of residents)
 - Wrocław: 200,000 (approx. 20% of residents)
 - Gdynia: We do not know how many refugees and migrants are in Gdynia. A year ago, in the entire Tricity (*Trójmiasto*) metropolitan area, there were over 220,000 refugees from Ukraine, with 70% in Gdańsk. The remainder were scattered across several dozen surrounding municipalities.⁸
 - In Poland, Gdansk was a precursor in participatory programming of local integration policies. As early as 2016, in cooperation with social organizations, experts, and residents, it developed the “Model of Immigrant Integration” – the first municipal refugee integration strategy in Poland.
- It is noteworthy that the development of the Gdańsk integration model was instigated by a crisis situation related to the Romanian Roma community and in the wake of the way in which the city approached the situation.⁹
- Lublin and Wrocław are working on their own integration strategies which are yet to be implemented, although Wrocław has prepared the Wrocław Strategy for Intercultural Dialogue (2018-2022).¹⁰ At the initiative of the Nomada Association, in cooperation with the Migration Research Center and the city, funded by DRC, a model for including migrants in city life was created which is to serve as the basis for a city strategy and local policies.¹¹ Warsaw, according to our informants, does not plan to work on such a strategy in the near future. Gdynia also does not have a document that would operationalize the approach to working with people with migrant and refugee experience at the municipal level.
- Another factor complicating the development of coherent local integration strategies is the uncertainty on the part of local decision-makers related to the government’s position and its subsequent moves.

⁷ Source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Temporary_protection_for_persons_fleeing_Ukraine_-_monthly_statistics

⁸ All data on the number of refugees presented above comes from: Union of Polish Metropolises, *Miejska gościnność: wielki wzrost, wyzwania i szanse. Raport o uchodźcach z Ukrainy w największych polskich miastach (Urban Hospitality: Big Increase, Challenges, and Opportunities. Report on Refugees from Ukraine in the Largest Polish Cities)*, 2022

⁹ In the allotment gardens belonging to the city, a Romanian Roma group built a campsite. The city reacted in a violent manner – the campsite was demolished with the involvement of the police and heavy equipment. The people staying there were ordered to leave immediately. Children were present at the campsite, and their safety was not ensured in any way.

¹⁰ Available at: <https://wielokultury.wroclaw.pl/strategia/>.

¹¹ Available online: <https://nomada.info.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/ModelpolitykiwlaczniamigrantowFIN.pdf>

- Few Polish decision makers are used to thinking in terms of a multicultural society, even though as a result of migration movements, Poland was becoming one even before the escalation of the war in Ukraine. The war only exacerbated problems that migration organizations and researchers have been signaling for years. As a result of the dominance of a mono-national ideology under the communist system, and a prolonged process of granting rights to foreigners in Poland, as evidenced by the interviews with key informants, decision-makers, politicians, and local government officials lack sufficient intercultural competencies.
- In light of the above, the participation of refugees in civic and social life is seen by decision makers as an addition to basic activities such as language learning or finding housing and work rather than an integral part of integration into community life in Poland.

Types of Refugee Participation

- Refugees, their representatives, and stakeholders engaged in advocacy on their behalf influence the decision-making processes in a number of ways. For the purpose of this study, four types of refugee participation have been distinguished by the research team, differentiated by the purpose and theme of the activities undertaken, their forms, target group, typical participant profile.
- **Procedural Participation:** A set of coordinated mechanisms managed by local government. These include civic budgets, legislative initiatives, social consultations, and others. In this report, it is referred to as *procedural* because its format is usually defined by national or local law. Most of these mechanisms remain formally open to refugees, but in reality, refugees and migrants rarely participate in them, partly due to the nature and functioning of these mechanisms, which we describe below.
- **Embedded Participation:** Participation mechanisms embedded in social life institutions such as schools, workplaces, and temporary accommodation places. They concern the functioning of these areas and institutions. They may be implemented by trade unions, parent-teacher bodies such as the so-called *class troikas*, school councils, etc.
- **Dedicated Participation:** A relatively wide range of activities dedicated to refugees, migrants, foreigners, or topics particularly important to these groups. These may include microgrants, competence-building programs, or spontaneous grassroots initiatives.
- **Intersectoral Cooperation:** Formats of cooperation between the local government and social organizations which, most often, take place within commissions and councils attached to various local government bodies.

TABLE 1. Types of participation available to refugees and their key characteristics

Type of Participation	Typical Participant	Typical Goals / Topics	Forms	Target Group
Procedural Participation	City resident; often middle class or with background in activism	Public space design; infrastructural investments; greenery; transport	Civic budgets; social consultations; participation in community life institutions like schools or workplaces	All residents
Embedded Participation	City resident; more often middle class	Related to the area/institution where they are embedded: education, work conditions, rules and codes of conduct in temporary accommodation facilities	Parent class representatives; school council, parent-teacher association; trade union at workplace	All residents
Dedicated Participation	Refugee or migrant; non-governmental organizations	Refugee integration; access to information, public services; psychological support	Microgrants; all activities of refugee and allied organizations	Primarily other refugees and migrants
Intersectoral Cooperation	Non-governmental organizations and their representatives; local and refugee activists and leaders; municipal administration	Shaping city policies; coordinating actions of entities from different sectors	Dialogue Commissions, Councils, informal consultations and meetings	City officials and decision-makers; non-governmental organizations; refugee and migrant activists

Main Barriers

- The list below presents a list of the most important and frequent barriers to refugee participation identified on the basis of interviews with key informants. These barriers apply to almost all types of participation discussed in the report. Specific barriers for each type of participation are discussed in the respective sections of the report.
- Language barriers;
- Lack of translation of official communications by offices and municipal units into Ukrainian or other relevant languages;
- Mechanical translations that do not take into account cultural differences between Polish and non-Polish recipients of the message and the prin-

ciples of plain language. Non-Polish recipients may not understand words related to the local institutional or legal context.

- Legal limitations – certain forms and documents must be created in Polish according to statutory regulations (which does not change the fact that they can be accompanied by instructions in languages other than Polish).
- Many refugees are still struggling to meet basic needs such as food or shelter/accommodation. It is difficult to expect them to further engage in various forms of civic participation in areas that do not directly lead to the improvement of their situation.
- The sense of temporariness and uncertainty among refugees;
- Temporariness of stay – a significant portion of refugees from Ukraine do not plan to stay in Poland permanently. They want to return to their country or move to other states. According to a study conducted by the National Bank of Poland in the summer of 2023, 19% of refugees who arrived in Poland in 2022 and 21% of those who arrived in 2023 declared their intention to stay in Poland permanently. About half of the respondents in both groups answered “hard to say” to the question about further plans¹².
- Temporariness of legal status (Ukrainian refugees access temporary protection in Poland mainly based on the so-called Special Act¹³ – thus their legal status differs from that of other persons with a refugee status¹⁴. Usually, the latter opens the way to obtaining the right to permanent residence and Polish citizenship. The legal protection resulting from the Special Act expires in March 2024 (or later for people attending Polish schools or kindergartens and their guardians).¹⁵ Ukrainian refugees will still be covered by the EU Temporary Protection Directive and thus will not lose the right to legal residence in Poland; however, they will have to adjust to a new legal situation and may no longer be eligible for some social benefits and services.
- Uncertainty about whether to integrate more deeply into Polish society (e.g., through the education system, or to remain in the Ukrainian system).
- Trauma and concern for relatives who remained in Ukraine;
- Lack of experience in public participation in the country of origin;
- Low level of social participation among Poles;
- According to the key informants interviewed, in Poland, participation embedded in basic social life institutions such as work, school, or housing community is particularly poor. The small number of good examples of such participation means that foreign (refugee or migrant) individuals may be even less motivated to engage in such participatory mechanisms.
- Lack of trust in public institutions on the part of refugees, which translates into distrust and reluctance to participate in any processes initiated by offices, especially those in which one must express their opinion on a topic. This sometimes stems from a general lack of trust in public institutions in their country of origin (in Ukraine), as well as a lack of trust in Polish institutions in particular, which -

¹² National Bank of Poland, *Life and Economic Situation of Migrants from Ukraine in Poland in 2023: Report from a Survey*. Link to the report: https://nbp.pl/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/raport_migranci_z-Ukrainy_2023.pdf

¹³ Ustawa z dnia 12 marca 2022 r. o pomocy obywatelom Ukrainy w związku z konfliktem zbrojnym na terytorium tego państwa (Act of March 12, 2022 on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine in Connection with the Armed Conflict on the Territory of that State)

¹⁴ Granted based on the Law on granting protection to foreigners on the territory of the Republic of Poland which also opens the way to obtaining the right to permanent residence and Polish citizenship (Ustawa o udzieleniu cudzoziemcom ochrony na terytorium Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej).

¹⁵ The report reflects the legal situation at the time of its writing.

at some point in the aid process - proved to be inefficient or unfriendly to them.

- The lack of trust of Ukrainian refugees in public institutions identified by our informants is reflected in data on trust in Ukrainian central institutions. According to data from the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation¹⁶, even before the escalation of the war (in 2021), Ukrainian public institutions - except for the armed forces - had negative trust indicators (meaning a prevalence of people who did not trust them over those who did). Studies from 2015 showed that the level of trust in local authorities was higher than in central ones, but still remained low.¹⁷ The picture of trust in local institutions is more complicated. Some studies show an increase in recent years in areas covered by decentralization reforms, but this is an increase from very low starting levels.¹⁸
- A lack of inclusion of displacement and migration related perspectives in public policies.
- A lack of a national migration policy.
- A lack of a system monitoring the movement of refugees within Poland and the European Union; a lack of systematically collected data on their participation in the education system, labor market, place of residence; nascent systematic sociological research;
- A sense of temporariness and uncertainty on the part of aid organizations and local governments;
- The danger of limiting or cutting off funding as a result of fatigue from the prolonged “crisis” or evolving humanitarian needs in other parts of the world;
- A marathon of elections in Poland: parliamentary elections in October 2023, local elections in spring 2024, and European elections in summer 2024.

Procedural Participation

- The model of participation used in Poland is most often associated with a set of tools for engaging citizens in decision-making processes at various levels – the most extensive set of such tools is aimed at actions at the city level. Typically, these are **civic budgets, social consultations, and local referenda**.
- In addition to these, all people living in Poland also have access to **petitions**, which – according to constitutional provisions – can be submitted by “anyone”¹⁹ to any public authority institutions as well as social organizations and institutions (in connection with their delegated public administration tasks).
- A form of civic control over the work of public institutions can also be exercised through the **right to public information**²⁰.
- All these forms are available in the cities included in the study.
- All these forms are characterized by a certain level of formalization.
- Participatory budgets, local referenda, social consultations, and local legislative initiatives are managed by local government which is responsible for organizing the process and ensuring its effective implementation. These participatory mechanisms rely on the initiative, creativity, en-

¹⁶ Source: <https://dif.org.ua/en/article/state-and-social-institutions-who-do-ukrainians-trust-and-who-dont>

¹⁷ Source: <https://www.kiis.com.ua/materials/news/20162001corruption/corruption-en.pdf>

¹⁸ Arends et al., Decentralization and trust in government: Quasi-experimental evidence from Ukraine, *Journal of Comparative Economics*

¹⁹ <https://trybunal.gov.pl/en/about-the-tribunal/legal-basis/the-constitution-of-the-republic-of-poland#:~:text=Article%2063,specified%20by%20statute.>

²⁰ <https://trybunal.gov.pl/en/about-the-tribunal/legal-basis/the-constitution-of-the-republic-of-poland#:~:text=Article%2061,rules%20of%20procedure.>

gement, and judgment of residents, but they are not fully grassroots processes – they have a defined format and are legally regulated. In the case of civic budgets, this is defined – to a limited extent and only for major cities – by the national law. The same applies to local referenda, which must be organized according to the rules described in the law and whose results are binding only under certain conditions (a turnout threshold of 30% must be exceeded²¹).

- The regulations, on the one hand, force municipal administration to implement the aforementioned tools; on the other hand, they limit the ability to adapt them to the local context.
- While these limitations restrict what local governments are able to do, they may also be cited to absolve them from responsibility to amend the participatory mechanisms.
- Citizen panels are also organized in Poland at the local and national level.
- An example of such an event combining both local and national consultations is the National Citizens' Council on Energy Costs conducted by the Stocznia Foundation in 2023.
- Unlike the other tools discussed in this section, citizen panels and consultations are not regulated by law and can be organized by any actors – non-governmental organizations, local governments, or other entities. However, it is important that local decision-makers commit in advance to taking the panel's decisions into account.
- This is quality driven participation – participants pool is a representative²² sample of the population, participants have access to experts, specialized knowledge, their meetings and debates are moderated, and the costs of participating in the panel are covered by the organizers.
- High quality also means higher costs and additional logistical challenges related to, for example, providing translation or interpretation services for groups speaking different languages.
- Panels organized by the Stocznia Foundation – as admitted by their organizers – did not include the voice of refugee or migrant communities. There were two reasons for this:
 1. The panel was aimed at citizens of Poland, and a prerequisite of participation was having passive voting rights.
 2. The local panels were aimed at residents of a particular city and did not require them to have passive voting rights. However, due to financial and technical limitations related to provision of language related services, the inclusion of refugees was not possible.

Civic Budget

- In Poland, a popular tool for participation at the city level is the civic (or participatory) budget. Its popularity soared after the city of Sopot introduced the mechanism in 2011. By 2015, 171 cities introduced civic budgets²³. In 2020, 31% of cities organized a civic budget. This successful and thus popular tool is analyzed in detail below.
- The popularity of the civic budgets led to their legal institutionalization in 2018. According to the introduced law²⁴, the civic budget is mandatory in cities with county rights, and the minimum

²¹ This practically means that they are usually not binding.

²² In practice, it is very difficult to gather a fully representative sample.

²³ Sobol Agnieszka, *_Budżet obywatelski jako narzędzie rozwoju lokalnego_* (Civic Budget as a Tool for Local Development), p. 175.

²⁴ <https://eli.gov.pl/api/acts/DU/2018/130/text/T/D20180130L.pdf>

amount of funds to be allocated is 0.5% of the municipality's expenditures.

- According to estimates by the Observatory of Urban Policy, one in ten residents of cities where this mechanism is used participated in civic budgets by casting their votes for civic budget projects.²⁵
- Submitting projects as part of civic budgets is a relatively niche activity.
- Formal requirements for participation in civic budgets are not restrictive – in the cities included in the study, officials strive to open them to as wide a group of residents as possible. For example, in Warsaw, a PESEL number (including PESEL UKR) entitles one to vote. To submit a project, having a PESEL number is not necessary anymore. Conversely, Gdynia only requires a national identity document number from the country of origin (e.g., a passport) to vote.
- In Warsaw, the verification of votes cast in the procedure is based on trust. All votes cast by people registered in Warsaw (based on the PESEL number) or declaring that they live in Warsaw are considered valid.
- In the cities included in the study, all residents, regardless of age, can participate in the procedure.
- The cities included in the report do not differ significantly in terms of how civic budgets are implemented. There are small differences in specific actions supporting or hindering refugee participation which are described in subsequent sections.
- In a formal sense, the civic budget is a mechanism open to refugee persons. Barriers to access to this mechanism are of a different nature and are described below.

Barriers

- Procedural participation mechanisms, including civic budgets, are not naturally embedded in the functioning of institutions where refugees participate daily (school, workplace, housing community, social assistance institutions). One needs to actively learn about them, understand what they involve, and decide to participate.
- For some asylum seekers and migrants, the barrier to voting in the civic budget may be the lack of a PESEL number. There are few such people in Poland (the exact number is unknown) and for those with a regularized legal status obtaining a PESEL number is relatively simple. Some cities, like Gdynia, allow the use of an identification number other than PESEL.
- Some cities, although the formal requirements for participation in civic budgets are minimal, do not clearly communicate this fact in informational materials. For example, Warsaw allows people without a PESEL number to submit projects, but this information is not provided on the city's websites.
- Access to civic budgets is also limited by language barriers. The requirement to describe the project in Polish is a significant challenge. Project application forms are available only in Polish.
- According to studies conducted by the Homo Faber Association from Lublin²⁶, the word “civic” can be interpreted by refugees as “for Polish citizens.” A better solution seems to be calling budgets “participatory” or inventing another more inclusive name (e.g., “residents’ budget”). Some officials claim that the term “civic” is imposed by law and cannot be changed. However, there is no reason not to use other, more inclusive terms in communication directed at residents, especially since the terms “civic” and “participatory” are already used

²⁵ Obserwatorium Polityki Miejskiej, Barometr Budżetu Obywatelskiego. Edycja 2022 (Citizen's Budget Barometer. 2022 Edition.)

²⁶ Internal research results of Homo Faber communicated to the research team by key informants.

interchangeably in numerous documents, informational materials, and academic publications.

- Civic budgets processes are becoming professionalized, which can be an entry barrier for refugees (and new participants in general, regardless of origin) who are less familiar with the tool and its rules. The Stocznia Foundation has data for Warsaw for 2022 which shows that “[a] clear majority of project authors created their accounts in the system for submitting projects before 2019. This does not mean that all of them submitted projects at that time, but it can be assumed that many of them had more than three years of experience with the civic budget. Additionally, some veterans of the civic budget may have submitted projects under new ID numbers in the system. We estimate that they constitute about one-third of all project submitters”.²⁷ It is veterans who submit the highest numbers of projects (one person can submit more than one project).
- Both nationwide studies²⁸ and our informants prove that civic budgets are often used by institutions such as schools, kindergartens, libraries, or clinics to conduct renovations or purchase equipment.
- Civic budgets suffer from an infrastructural bias. For years, projects related to urban greenery, squares, playgrounds, and cycling infrastructure, etc., have been very popular (as per the data available for Warsaw²⁹). Very similar conclusions at the national level are presented by the Urban Policy Observatory.³⁰ The interviews informants confirm this.
- Expanding or beautifying local infrastructure is not a vital need for refugees living in cities as they often see their situation as uncertain and temporary.
- Issues related to the quality of local infrastructure do not take precedence when compared to the challenges faced by many refugees living in Poland and their loved ones in their country of origin.
- Topics important to refugees could include “soft projects” – workshops, activities, meetings integrating with the local community, or psychological support. An unpublished content analysis of Warsaw’s civic budget projects for 2022 shows that projects categorized as “soft,” such as “meetings and workshops” and “cultural events,” are among the least frequently submitted. Our informants from the Warsaw city office confirm this conclusion.
- In practice, therefore, civic budgets are a class-biased tool which favours people with higher education and free time, have previous experience with the budget, and have previously benefitted from it (i.e., submitted projects which were successful). They know how to avoid pitfalls and maximize their project’s chances of success. There are few refugees who are in such position.
- City officials themselves admit that projects outside the set of most popular topics have little chance of success. In some cities, as assessed by the officials with whom we spoke, projects clearly focused on the needs of refugee groups have little chance of success.
- The civic budget is also not a tool for quick response to social crises – even those affecting all residents of a given city. In the year of the COVID-19 pandemic, health-related projects were practically absent in Warsaw. This may be partly related to the professionalization of this tool as mentioned earlier.

²⁷ Quote from an unpublished report of the Stocznia Foundation for the Social Communication Center of the city of Warsaw.

²⁸ Obserwatorium Polityki Miejskiej, Barometr Budżetu Obywatelskiego. Edycja 2022 (Citizen’s Budget Barometer. 2022 Edition.)

²⁹ Source: https://um.warszawa.pl/documents/57254/20148109/RAPORT-z-konsultacji-BO2022_fin.pdf/5498bb29-893b-08c7-6154-58ab3f03d730?t=1634497637894, s. 10

³⁰ Obserwatorium Polityki Miejskiej, Barometr Budżetu Obywatelskiego. Edycja 2022 (Citizen’s Budget Barometer. 2022 Edition.)

- Data on the legal status or origin of persons submitting projects in civic budgets are not collected. This makes a precise assessment of the number of projects submitted by persons with refugee experience or other foreigners impossible. Our interlocutors estimate that projects addressing the specific needs of refugees are practically absent in Warsaw and Gdynia. We know that such projects appear in Lublin and Wrocław – partly due to a pro-active stance of the local governments which organize workshops on drafting civic budget project proposals also those directed at non-Polish persons and taking into account their needs.
- Civic budgets are subject to the majority rule. The number of votes is the only criterion determining the success or failure of projects (as long as they meet formal requirements). The social utility of the projects for the most needy groups is not considered nor are there any built-in mechanisms that allow for proportional consideration of weaker or minority groups. Consequently, projects aimed at refugee communities or focused on integration activities for both Polish and refugee communities may not exceed the required threshold of social support to be implemented. This may lead to frustration among members of such groups as decisions as outcomes favor majority groups over minorities.
- The civic budget is, therefore, a potential tool in the hands of refugees and migrants, but only if the topics of their projects align with trending topics. Within the current mechanism, it is unlikely that it will be possible to implement a project that could solve the problems of refugee communities or any other underprivileged groups within this framework. In the sections below, we write about what can be done to adapt civic budgets to the needs of these groups.

Opportunities

- The civic budget is a tool that existed also in Ukraine before the escalation of the war and was partly based on Polish solutions. At least some Ukrainian refugees have already heard of it and understand how it works. However, according to the key informants, most refugees – including those from Ukraine – are not familiar with this tool.
- Nevertheless, the civic budget is a mechanism with a relatively low entry threshold.
- Voting in the civic budget is an act of engagement in local community affairs and gives at least a minimal sense of agency to people who feel deprived of it.
- The civic budget is a relatively simple and transparent procedure. Especially in terms of success criteria (voting) and in comparison with such tools as social consultations and legislative initiatives whose criteria for decision-making are less transparent and thus less understandable for refugees who are encountering them for the first time. The lack of a clear translation of the participatory process into outcomes can also discourage persons from participating in the long term.

Recommendations and Best Practices

- Local government offices and NGOs should continue their efforts to make civic budgets more accessible to refugees and migrants. It is also necessary to clearly explain the functioning of the civic budget. This requires communication in line with the principles of plain language (including Ukrainian) and emphasis on the fact that it is a tool for the “new” and “old” residents.

- The personnel responsible for management and client assistance related to the civic budget should be trained to prepare them for communication with non-Polish speakers.
- NGOs should promote participation in the civic budget, provide information about its rules, and organize workshops and consultative assistance in writing applications.
- It is worthwhile to consider creation of hybrid models of procedural and dedicated participation. It is possible to combine procedural participation aimed at everyone with dedicated participatory mechanisms for refugees and migrants. Some NGOs conduct campaigns to support refugees in writing projects that take advantage of the civic budget tool to cater to minority group interests. A good example is the WroMigrant center in Wrocław, which encourages and facilitates submission of projects within the municipal participatory budget as part of a general integration package including language instruction or legal assistance. However, it is also advisable to consider the risk of frustration associated with potential failure as such projects may not garner enough votes.
- Cities could establish quotas for projects, for example, addressing the needs of disadvantaged groups or dedicated to priorities of displaced persons.
- Lublin already runs a thematic variant of the civic budget (known as the Green Budget³¹). It is worth considering introducing similar mechanisms in areas of building social relations, intercultural dialogue, or the rights of disadvantaged groups.
- The civic budget can be supplemented with deliberative mechanisms allowing selection and promotion of socially valuable projects through

moderated discussions. Deliberation allows participants of the civic budget to reflect on the needs of different residents thus increasing the chances of selecting projects related to marginalized groups' needs. This could mean that among the selected projects, there will be initiatives aimed at building dialogue and a multicultural society.

Other Forms of Procedural Participation

- These include social consultations³², legislative initiatives³³, neighborhood funds, and others.
- Social consultations: Consultations with residents on various topics, from engagement and empowerment of seniors to road investment planning. Opinions can be expressed at meetings, workshops, or through online consultations. The results of the consultations, although not binding, should be taken into account when making decisions by city decision-makers.
- Legislative initiatives: The right to submit draft resolutions to local government authorities, provided a sufficient number of signatures is obtained from the city's residents.
- Neighborhood funds: A competition for grassroots initiatives of residents supporting the revitalization process and the integration of local communities.

Barriers

- A sense of uncertainty and temporariness may give refugees a sense of disconnection from their place of residence preventing them from participating in these relatively demanding forms of participation.

³¹ <https://decyduje.lublin.eu/pl/zielony-budzet/aktualnosci/>

³² http://encyklopediaap.uw.edu.pl/index.php?title=Social_consultations&oldid=2905

³³ http://encyklopediaap.uw.edu.pl/index.php?title=Legislative_initiative_of_residents&oldid=11668

- Anti-Ukrainian sentiments present among some of the Polish society.³⁴ This applies particularly to forms of participation like social consultations, which often involve clashes of interests between different groups and the resulting decisions do not have as strong democratic legitimacy as those made in civic budgets or referendums.
- Social consultations sometimes occur in a very antagonistic atmosphere and primarily mobilize dissatisfied groups.
- In some cities, groups known for their anti-Ukrainian attitudes have already become active in local participatory processes – e.g., the case of Confederation³⁵ in Warsaw.
- Poorly conducted social consultations or invalid referenda can permanently discourage participation especially of those who participate for the first time.
- Theoretically, local authorities have fewer reasons to listen to the opinions of refugee groups, as refugees do not have the right to vote. Ignoring the voice of this group has no direct political consequences i.e. does not affect the success in elections.
- The advantages of these forms of participation (dialogue, conversation, meetings) unfortunately also increase the financial and organizational costs of adapting them to the needs of refugees who do not speak Polish (e.g., by involving translators or interpreters).

Opportunities

- Theoretically, social consultations are not affected by the problem of the majority rule. Therefore, they can be used by minority groups, which is already happening. Social consultations are often dominated by relatively small but active interest groups.
- The confrontational nature of certain forms of procedural participation is not inherently bad. However, it must address real problems (not just serve as a manifestation of dislike for another group), be professionally moderated, and the rules of procedure and compromise must be known and transparent to all.

Recommendations and Best Practices

- The arrival of a group of new residents from Ukraine reveals weaknesses in the model of participation used in Poland which tends to exclude disadvantaged groups. The current crisis is an opportunity to rethink this model.
- The fact that local governments, due to a lack of financial and human resources, are unable to adapt all mechanisms of procedural participation to the needs of refugees does not mean they should not do it at all. It would be advisable to identify the most important decisions for refugee and migrant groups subject to social consultations and focus on including them in those.

³⁴ Complicated attitudes of Poles towards Ukrainian refugees and migrants are described in numerous publications and public surveys. Report on anti-Ukrainian hate-speech on Twitter (X): Helsińska Fundacja Praw Człowieka, *Przyjdą i zabiorą: antyukraińska mowa nienawiści na polskim Twitterze* (They will come, and they will take [things away]: anti-Ukrainian hate speech on Polish Twitter); in-dept qualitative look at Polish sentiments towards Ukrainians: Sadura, Sierakowski, *Polacy za Ukrainą, ale przeciw Ukraińcom* (Poles: For Ukraine But Against Ukrainians), *Krytyka Polityczna*; comparison of public opinion polls on the attitudes of Poles towards accepting refugees from Ukraine can be found at: https://www.cbos.pl/PL/publikacje/news/newsletter_ver3.php?news_r=2023&news_nr=14

³⁵ A right-wing Polish political party whose leading politicians are known for publicly expressing strong anti-Ukrainian views. For some additional information see the report by Helsińska Fundacja Praw Człowieka in the footnote above or this report by Amnesty International: <https://www.amnesty.org.pl/antyukrainska-propaganda-szerzy-sie-w-internecie-rzad-ma-obowiazek-reagowac/>

Embedded Participation

- Embedded participation refers to the involvement within the institutions and spaces where refugees belong, such as workplaces, schools, kindergartens, social assistance centers, and temporary accommodation facilities.

Temporary Accommodation Places

- **Temporary Accommodation Places.** These are places where many refugees gain their first experiences in Poland. Tens of thousands of Ukrainian refugees still stay in such places. It's crucial to embed participatory mechanisms by, for example, allowing them to jointly shape regulations, elect leaders and representatives among those staying.
- The accommodation centers for refugees regulated by the Special Act as well as the Centers for Foreigners hosting asylum seekers during their refugee status determination process should operate on participatory principles. However, for Guarded Detention Centers for Foreigners (SOC), a desirable starting point would be to ensure compliance with respect for human rights.³⁶
- After the escalation of the war and the influx of refugees to Poland, some institutions and spaces that operate under different rules became temporary accommodation for Ukrainian refugees (for example cultural and community centers, day care centers etc.). This change created an opportunity to employ dialogue-based mechanisms to shape of how these places function. However, the success varied across locations.

Barriers

- Officials are often unprepared in terms of necessary skills, procedures, and attitudes towards supporting recipients and participatory management of such places.
- There is no sufficient awareness of the existing standards³⁷ that define how such places should operate and the minimum level of participation they should create for refugees. However, there are ongoing efforts to promote these standards and train the managing staff.

Opportunities

- Many Ukrainian refugees still reside in temporary accommodation, an investment in creating or enhancing participation mechanisms in such places is worthwhile.
- There are ongoing projects and solutions, also in the cities researched, on how to make such places more participatory. An example is presented below in the section on recommendations and best practices.

Recommendations and Best Practices

- In Dąbrowa Górnicza, a collaborative effort with Ukrainian refugees led to the creation of regulations for a group accommodation facility called *Azyl* (Asylum). Initially, the local government identified the need for development of a set of rules governing residents' behavior. The refugees expected these rules to be imposed top-down rather than be allowed for such set to emerge as a result

³⁶ A concise description of the problems occurring in the Guarded Centers for Foreigners (SOCs) can be found on the pages of the Association for Legal Intervention: <https://interwencjaprawna.pl/granice-goscinnosci/>. A detailed description of the reality in SOCs in 2022 is provided in the document Joint Submission to the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture in Preparation for its 2022 Visit to Poland, available at: <https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/CPT-Mar-2022-Poland-Joint-SIP-GDP-submission-v2.pdf>

³⁷ Guidelines for collective accommodation have been developed by UNHCR and NGOs in 2023 and can be found here: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/102414>. Unfortunately, these have not become mandatory standards in Poland.

of a bottom-up approach. An intercultural instructor helped explain the Polish expectations and the Ukrainian residents' perspective. Eventually, leaders emerged who, together with officials and residents, developed the rules for *Azyl*. Consequently, the residents started to identify with these rules and respect them because they were not seen as imposed unilaterally by the Polish side. The effort proved worthwhile despite the challenges it posed on the stakeholders.

Schools

- According to the data from the Ministry of Education reported by the *Rzeczpospolita* journal, as of November 2023, there were 183,461 Ukrainian students with refugee status, who arrived in Poland after the escalation of the war, studying in Polish schools. Additionally, there were 103,073 Ukrainian citizens enrolled without such status. In total, 286,534 Ukrainian students were studying in Polish schools.³⁸
- Estimates from the Center for Civic Education and Amnesty International suggest that between 170,000 to 200,000 school-age Ukrainians remain unenrolled as students in Polish schools. In theory, they study remotely in Ukrainian schools, but this is not monitored by relevant Polish authorities.³⁹
- The obligation to educate Ukrainian children within the Polish system of education is a sensitive political issue contested by Ukrainian authorities. To some, it is reminiscent of historical attempts at *Polonization* of the Ukrainian population by Poles and seen as reducing the chances that students educated in the Polish system will return to Ukraine after the war with Russia.
- Polish schools were unprepared for such a large number of foreign students. Teachers lack the skills to work with multi-cultural classes, and the Polish curriculum includes almost no elements of multicultural education.
- Despite the enormous effort of schools, teachers, local governments, and NGOs, the situation of Ukrainian children in Polish schools remains difficult. A comprehensive picture of the Ukrainian student population in Polish schools is presented in a November 2023 UNICEF report.⁴⁰
- Besides identity-related or political reasons for opting out from the Polish education system, leaving a significant number of Ukrainian students outside the system reduces the burden on it, which is already high. This, as some informants interviewed for the report claimed, disincentivizes the authorities to take decisive action on the introduction of compulsory schooling for school-aged Ukrainians.
- Integrating and empowering young Ukrainians in Poland is a key challenge for the Polish education system. Ensuring the wellbeing of this social group within the system, regardless of difficult circumstances and war experiences, will determine the potential of Polish and Ukrainian societies to positively affect the relations between the two countries.
- The darkest scenario presented by the study's key informants envisions a "lost generation" of older students who fail to integrate into the host society,

³⁸ Rzeczpospolita, "Ile dzieci z Ukrainy jest w polskich szkołach i przedszkolach. Poznaliśmy dane (How many children from Ukraine are in Polish schools and kindergartens? We have the data)", <https://www.rp.pl/edukacja/art39462041-ile-dzieci-z-ukrainy-jest-w-polskich-szkolach-i-przedszkolach-poznalismy-dane>

³⁹ *ibid.*; Data from Amnesty International Poland, "Jesteśmy tutaj razem. Uczniowie i uczennice z Ukrainy w polskich szkołach" (We Are Here Together. Pupils from Ukraine in Polish schools, January 2023), <https://www.amnesty.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Jestesmy-tutaj-razem.-Uczniowie-i-uczennice-z-Ukrainy-w-polskich-szkolach-2.pdf>

⁴⁰ UNICEF, "Bez wątplenia jest tu fajnie; ale prawdziwy dom, to własny dom. Badanie subiektywnego dobrostanu dzieci i młodzieży mieszkających w Polsce w obliczu wojny w Ukrainie" (No doubt it's cool here, but the real home is one's own home. A study on the subjective well-being of children and youth living in Poland in the face of the war in Ukraine), <https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/32336/file/Raport%20%E2%80%9EBez%20w%C4%85tpienia%20jest%20tu%20fajnie;%20ale%20prawdziwy%20dom,%20to%20w%C5%82asny%20dom...%E2%80%9D.pdf>.

do not feel connected to Poland, and cannot adapt to the Polish education system and labor market. This may lead to the emergence of a frustrated subclass of residents in Poland who cannot find their place in the society.

Barriers

- Endeavors toward democratization of schools have been made for years primarily by non-governmental organizations. A good example of such endeavor is the *CEO School of Democracy* program which aims to train teachers to better motivate young people to take a more pro-active stance and strengthen their voice in school governance. However, in general this remains an area demanding further substantial work. A discernible trend in bottom-up promotion of engagement in school life has yet to be established among parents, teachers, and students. Mechanisms supposed to ensure that educational institutions (especially schools, but also kindergartens) are co-created by students and parents, like parent class representatives, parent councils⁴¹, and student governments⁴² may sometimes be perceived as having limited practical effectiveness. More often than not, the selection of members for these groups is seen as a formal requirement that needs to be fulfilled rather than an opportunity to get pro-actively involved in the working of the institution. Few parents want to be part of these councils or troikas, and engagement in student government is not seen by most students as an attractive opportunity to develop important skill sets. If the minority group lacks good examples from the majority group (which also faces other major challenges and problems), it is difficult to expect that their level of engagement will significantly increase over time.
- The Polish school was seen by many informants as primarily serving to impart knowledge. It rarely provides professional psychological support and does not treat students holistically by considering their psychological, emotional, and social development. These systemic weaknesses, existing for years, undermine its ability to include refugee students who have to deal with uncertainty and war trauma.
- Most Polish teachers are unprepared to work with students from other ethnic backgrounds. They were not trained for a multicultural school environment and preventing discrimination. Intercultural education is practically non-existent in Polish schools. This prevents teachers from encouraging Polish and Ukrainian students to engage in joint activities that could serve integrational purposes.
- The profession of the intercultural assistant does not exist within the formal framework of the education system. Such members of a school's teaching staff can only be hired as administrative or maintenance staff.

Opportunities

- To increase the engagement of refugees and migrants in participatory activities, emphasis should be placed on working with children and youth. The idea aptly expressed by the proverb “what a child learns in youth, they carry into old age” holds true. Children taught from an early age that their voice matters, their opinion counts, and they can influence the activities and infrastructure of their kindergarten, school, or even playground would result in them being more engaged citizens or residents in the future. Children, in general, are an effective channel for conveying knowledge

⁴¹ Parent Council (or Parent Committee) is a school body elected among the parents of students at a given school. It can, among other things, submit proposals to the school, comment on its activities, co-create educational programs, or collect funds. Source: <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja/rady-rodzicow>

⁴² Student government is an association of students of a given school (class) established to solve tasks related to the school life of students. The school-wide student government usually consists of class governments (class leader, deputy leader, class secretary, treasurer); it also oversees various initiatives: interest clubs, peer tutoring in studies, school savings bank, and student cooperative. (source: wikipedia.pl)

and information to parents. If their awareness of their participatory potential is raised, they can exert pressure on adults and persuade them, for example, to participate in consultations on a playground's design or vote for a project submitted by their teacher. More and more local governments and social institutions recognize this fact and try to introduce various programs aimed at promoting such attitudes.

- School-age youth adapts fastest to new realities and learns languages quickest.
- There are many organizations in Poland that have been supporting Polish schools in developing participatory attitudes and skills for years. There is, therefore, substantial expertise that can be tapped into.

Recommendations and Good Practices

- Funding schools, ensuring a sufficient number of intercultural assistants and additional language classes to facilitate integration processes and enable the creation of a friendly multicultural environment in schools.
- Developing and popularizing participatory mechanisms that engage the entire school community, such as participatory school budgets. Special attention should be paid to the accessibility of these mechanisms for the refugee and migrant children's community and their modification to enable participation of these communities.
- Supporting students (both Ukrainian and Polish) to feel safe and comfortable in their new school. It is important to provide psychological support for both Polish and Ukrainian students and implement programs to deal with trauma through art or sports for both groups (ideally together). A school

that is friendly to all students, open to their needs and opinions, where everyone feels comfortable has a better chance of familiarizing students with participatory activities and developing a habit of participation.

- Continuously supporting the presence of NGOs in schools to encourage increased attention to the emergence of a multicultural character of the student population.
- Emphasizing curricular and extracurricular project activities related to the local context (preferably focused on improving the functioning of the local community) which would allow Polish and Ukrainian students to collaborate to achieve common goals.
- Creating inclusive spaces on school premises which young Poles and Ukrainians can use to engage in community-building activities. Such spaces should be designed by participation specialists with active student involvement.

Feedback Mechanisms

- Collecting feedback from refugees on the effectiveness of the participatory shaping elements of support programs are common practice among humanitarian organizations (part of the *Accountability to Affected Population* policy⁴³). With the arrival of many international humanitarian organizations in Poland, this practice has been and is being implemented in the functioning of Polish organizations and institutions. A standard practice for humanitarian support programs is the collection of feedback from beneficiaries through various channels – boxes at service locations, standardized online tools, or other electronic and conventional feedback options. Coupled with mechanisms involving refugees in creating support programs,

⁴³ See for example: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-revised-aap-commitments-2017-including-guidance-note-and-resource-list>

such feedback can increase the effectiveness of programs aimed at increasing participation.

- The above section refers to mechanisms used by international organizations and international NGOs. Such approach to feedback collection is not standard practice in the design of local government actions and hence leaves room for actions aiming at improvement in this area.

Barriers

- There is a fundamental imbalance of power between donors and aid recipients. Refugees often feel internally obligated to report only positive information upon receiving aid.
- Some refugees also refrain from pointing out weaknesses in support due to cultural factors or lack of experience with constructive criticism.
- Some refugees perceive requests for feedback with suspicion and withhold critical comments.
- The support system is not always prepared for feedback. The personnel involved, especially on the public institutions' side, often lack the necessary competencies, habits, attitudes, and awareness of its importance.

Opportunities

- The importance of collecting feedback on the needs of refugees is undeniable, especially when there is a lack of systematic, repeatable, comparable, and professional studies of this group. Polish academia and research institutions should be encouraged and supported to take a lead role in promoting such practice.
- The second equally important step is participatory planning and design of services based on feedback. In Poland, there is substantial potential in

the promotion of collecting information that could feed back into programming actions of *local grassroots organizations* which work closely with refugees and migrants.

Recommendations

- It is important to rely on the expertise of social organizations working with refugees and migrants and to take advantage of their competencies, social networks, and their ability to monitor the changing needs of refugees.
- There is a need to distinguish between organizations operating strictly in the emergency response mode and those whose activities are more oriented towards integration. The actions of the latter naturally lead to the formation of refugee communities and the development of bonds between them and the organizations working for them. This means that such organizations have natural channels for collecting feedback from refugee communities and monitoring their needs.
- It is important to introduce certain feedback standards for humanitarian and integrational actions. Encouraging and teaching support institutions how to do this effectively is crucial. For example, when seeking feedback from aid beneficiaries, it is crucial to be mindful of how questions are phrased. Specifically, questions that sound like promises should be avoided if there is a low probability of fulfilling these promises; questions about shoe size or preferred times for free Polish language classes can inadvertently sound like commitments. By ensuring that questions are realistic and aligned with the available resources and capabilities, organizations can maintain trust and credibility among the refugee community and manage expectations and communications to avoid misunderstandings or false hopes. This points to the need for dissemination of specialist know-how in collaboration relevant sectors of academia. relevant sectors of academia.

- Investment should be made to prepare wide range of local actors to work with refugees: social organizations, schools, government offices, welfare institutions, etc. This applies to training in the provision of assistance and creation of spaces for feedback. This might also involve flexibility on the part of the organizations providing such know-how. Some of our interlocutors emphasized that in critical moments of the large-scale arrival of refugees, short online trainings focused solely on relevant practical aspects were most effective for certain groups, such as school staff, working on the front line of refugee reception.

Dedicated Participation

- The term “dedicated participation” encompasses mechanisms primarily targeted at refugees and migrants or related to refugee and migration issues (integration, intercultural dialogue, social diversity, etc.).
- This type of participation is defined by its subject matter and target group rather than its form. However, it’s worth noting that the most common forms include:
 - Competence-building programs for future and current leaders of refugee communities.
 - Grant programs for individuals, informal groups, or NGOs.
 - Tasks commissioned by the city or other public entities.
 - Spontaneous, grassroots activities for other refugees.
- Dedicated participation also serves as a way to reciprocate for the support received from the host society by helping other refugees in need. Barriers

in other participation types – concern for loved ones in Ukraine, uncertainty, the feeling of temporariness of one’s stay in Poland – can motivate refugees to engage in dedicated participation, as it provides an opportunity to take action for their group in the host country (helping newly arrived refugees) or in Ukraine (material aid, participation in fundraisers).

Barriers

- Limited resources of public institutions; limited number of programs, grants, places.
- Low wage rates. Lack of compensation for those engaging in dedicated participation and its small scale effectively prevent many Ukrainian refugees from participating.

Opportunities

- Creating hubs that combine various services for migrants seems particularly effective. Such places, as long as they are *physical spaces*, create opportunities for numerous informal relationships, honest communication (important for needs analysis), and spontaneous collaboration between various organizations and individuals. Financial aspects are important in creating such spaces, as additional funding or a grant system dedicated for covering overheads such as rent is needed because renting space at market prices remains unaffordable for most organizations.
- Participation in dedicated activities can facilitate entry into the labor market through creating networking opportunities, acquiring useful skills and knowledge about institutions.
- Provision of a wide variety of support forms, from very demanding and expensive to relatively simple and low-cost, allows to involve a diverse group of

refugees in terms of cultural capital, degree of settlement in Poland, and fulfillment of basic needs. For example, Warsaw's Coordination Support Center activities are mainly aimed at those thinking of starting an NGO or those who have already done so, while Wrocław's WroMigrant facilitates taking first steps in procedural participation (e.g., helping prepare a proposal for the civic budget).

Recommendations and Best Practices

- Programs and mechanisms are not enough. It is necessary to create physical spaces that support participation. Such places existed before the escalation of the war in Ukraine (for example The Warsaw Multicultural Center); however, it is important to note that a holistic offer for a much larger number of refugee individuals requires significantly more financial and spatial resources than the operation mode before the war escalation.
- They should offer a range of services and activities from those that help meet basic integrational needs (language lessons, career advice, information point) through cultural and artistic events, to participatory activities (social innovation catalysts, micro-grant programs, advice on starting an NGO, leadership development workshops, civic budget or petition writing marathons, etc.).
- Due to a large number of women with children among the refugees from Ukraine, such places should include a separate area where children can be left under supervision.
- It's important to create authentic reasons for city officials to also appear in such spaces and meet their users, for example, by inviting public institution representatives to share their experiences in areas relevant to refugees.
- There are several places whose activity may serve as a source of best practices in refugee engagement and participation. Such community centers operate in each of the analyzed cities. These include but are not limited to:
 - Wrocław's Wromigrant,
 - Warsaw's Coordination Support Center (CWK),
 - Lublin's Baobab.
- It's worthwhile to develop the potential of dedicated participation as a career path. Refugee or refugee-supporting organizations can also be places where refugees find employment or at least acquire skills, in the course of their participation in a center's activities, which are key for a successful entry into the Polish labor market.
- Support should be extended to existing institutions specialized in providing expertise and assistance to other non-government organizations such as the Warsaw Center for NGO Support⁴⁴. There is also a need to inform refugees and their supporters more effectively about the services of such institutions which would make it easier for them to conduct activities dedicated to refugee and migrant organizations.
- In dedicated participation, it's crucial not to forget about Ukrainian men, boys, and seniors, who – are in Poland. Our informants noted that many programs and activities almost completely overlook this group.

⁴⁴ SCWO in English - Warszawa - ngo.pl

Third Places

- The concept of “third place” in sociology refers to “informal public spaces where people can meet for purely social, friendly purposes, make contacts, and enjoy each other’s company”.⁴⁵ These can be cultural centers, libraries, spaces provided by private or public actors for refugees, and many other places where people meet to spend time together.
- Spaces like the CWK (described in the previous section) can be considered examples of third places.
- Spontaneously emerging third places should be approached with caution. Some have a very informal character and their users value their independence. Local governments should be careful in their attempts to support them because such attempts may be seen as an encroachment on their independent character in order to regulate them.
- The Warsaw Office for International Cooperation provides financial support for selected Ph.D. research projects devoted to issues relevant to refugees and migrants living in Warsaw. The studies financed by them may be a source of good models or practices to follow for creation of third places as one of the projects focuses on such third places in Warsaw.

Cross-Sector Collaboration

- Unlike in the case of other forms of participation, the intensity and forms of cross-sector collaboration vary significantly depending on their location. This makes it different from other participation types which seem to be more uniform. Procedural participation mechanisms are often regulated at the legislative level, with local differences being merely in implementation details; in embedded participation, variables other than location (such as type of school, socio-demographic characteristics of parents, workplace type) are decisive; and in dedicated participation, although there are differences between cities, the toolkit is relatively similar with microgrants, competence development programs, and capacity building present throughout.
- Among the cities covered by this research, Warsaw stands out due to the strength, size, and professionalism of migrant or refugee organizations and those working for these groups. Lublin and Wrocław also have professional organizations aiding refugees and migrants (e.g., Homo Faber in Lublin, Nomada in Wrocław), but fewer in numbers.

⁴⁵ See: Oldenburg R., *Celebrating the Third Place: Inspiring Stories about the “Great Good Places” at the Heart of Our Communities*, Marlowe & Company, 2000.

TABLE 2. Formats of intra- and cross-sector collaboration related to the situation of refugees, migrants and foreigners in selected cities

City	Formats, Bodies, Mechanisms	Key Features
Warsaw	Sectoral Social Dialogue Commission for Foreigners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Advisory body at the Bureau of International Cooperation- Open to all organizations dealing with migration and foreigner-related issues
	Migrants' Council operating under the Association for Legal Intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Advocacy body, independent of any municipal institution – Established as part of SIP's project- Identifies needs of migrant communities – Members include a diverse group with refugee or migrant experience, not all are affiliated with NGOs
Gdynia	Coalition for Foreigners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Comprised mainly of municipal institutions. There is only one social organization in this coalition but it does not specialize in assistance to foreigners. Regular work primarily involves identifying needs, followed by joint implementation of actions to improve immigrant support processes
Lublin	Civic Dialogue Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Advisory body to the Mayor of Lublin – Civic Dialogue Commission on municipal support systems for integration of migrants – Intended to be open to all refugee organizations, those dealing with migration issues or supporting refugees, migrants, and foreigners.
Wrocław	Commissioner for Residents of Ukrainian Origin Commissioner for Residents of Belarusian Origin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Advisory roles to the Mayor of Wrocław.
	Sector Group for Migration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Only NGOs participate; no municipal representatives involved.
Other Cities	Immigrants' Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Advisory body to the Mayor of Gdańsk.

Barriers

- The problems faced by these bodies are somewhat similar. The most common is the issue is the question of representation – who do the members of each body represent? This is particularly true for formats where the “representatives” are appointed rather than selected in democratic procedures and thus their mandate is often questioned. Even Gdańsk’s Immigrants’ Council, otherwise considered as exemplary, faces similar representation issues. The problem is not as severe in bodies that are maximally open. Warsaw’s Sectoral Social Dialogue Commission or Lublin’s Civic Dialogue Commission which comprise not just Polish NGOs working for people with refugee experience but also include organizations led by refugees.
- The scope of competencies often remains undefined which results in a lack of *de facto* competencies to change anything. Such bodies usually serve only an advisory role.
- The ensuing lack of real impact often turns some of these bodies into façade organizations and their creation into a symbolic albeit somewhat token gesture. This is irrespective of the body’s formal establishment (e.g., Warsaw’s Sectoral Civic Dialogue Commission on Foreigners is attached to the Bureau of International Cooperation, while the Gdańsk Council is attached to the city’s president).
- Voluntary nature of activities. Work in almost all of the listed formats is voluntary. An exception is Warsaw’s Migrants’ Council run by an NGO, the Association for Legal Intervention. From the outset, its creators assumed that at least a symbolic remuneration was necessary.
- Competing for the same pool of resources creates a dynamic of rivalry between refugee and migrant

organizations, especially those relying on municipal funds. This is exacerbated by the fact that many organizations have undiversified income sources and depend on securing municipal funds.

Opportunities

- Such bodies have significant symbolic importance. They highlight the presence of refugees and migrants in city life and communicate that newcomers have their place in the local community.
- Projects like the Migrants’ Council initiated by the Association for Legal Intervention (Stowarzyszenie Interwencji Prawnej) allow tracking the changing needs of refugees through a diverse but not fully representative group of refugees, who not only report their own needs but also actively try to gather them from refugee communities and influence private and public institutions to adapt their offerings to refugees’ needs. A good example can also be the activities of the Social Dialogue Commission on Municipal Support System for the Integration of Migrants.⁴⁶ Its task is the participatory development of urban integration policy, involving all stakeholders.

Key Recommendations

- A crucial condition for successful cross-sector collaboration seems to be openness and willingness to act jointly on the part of city authorities. One manifestation of this is having a city migration policy that should define the character and format of this collaboration for migrants and refugees.
- Cross-sector bodies need specific goals. In Warsaw, this approach – within the Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee on Foreigners – led to the establishment of the Multicultural Center. In Lub-

⁴⁶ <https://lublin.eu/mieszkanicy/partycypacja/organizacje-pozarządowe/komisja-dial/kdo-integracja/opis/>

lin, the Lublin integration strategy for migrants is developed within the Civic Dialogue Commission on migration.

- In cities with where the third sector is allowed to thrive, constructive collaboration is also possible in *ad hoc* formats – when organizations and city officials meet outside of well-established formats to solve a specific problem or discuss a particular issue. Interviews with Warsaw officials suggest that such formats may be more effective than of-

ficial ones.

- It's important to create networking mechanisms and spaces. Resources should be distributed in a way that encourages organizations to cooperate rather than intensify competition among them. For example, it is worth considering rewarding projects submitted in partnerships or involving collaboration between several organizations.

Annex

Case studies

School Participatory Budgets, Lublin

- The School Participatory Budgets (SPB, *Szkolne Budżety Obywatelskie*) in Lublin is a competition which provides funding for projects created by Lublin’s youth attending municipal educational institutions. Participation in the project involves not only students but the entire school community including educational staff, administrative and service staff, and the students’ parents or guardians. Each of the winning schools receives 4,000 PLN as well as organizational and technical support in conducting the SPB on their premises. The technical support for schools implementing SPB involves mentoring and workshops, as well as a series of six training sessions on SPB methodology conducted on behalf of the City Hall by two non-governmental organizations (Teatrion Foundation and Pole Dialogu Foundation). Workshops and training sessions are attended by members of the School Task Force whose task is to organize and coordinate activities related to the SPB at their school. Each school participating in the SPB develops its own set of regulations based on which, the recruitment, voting, and winning project(s) selection processes are conducted. The winning projects’ implementation is then financed from the SPB budget.
- The first edition of the SPB in Lublin took place in 2021. Ten institutions qualified for participation, implementing twenty-six winning projects. Thirty-seven educational units from Lublin participated in the following school year and twenty projects were selected for implementation. In the 2023 edition, forty-one schools applied of which twenty were selected to implement projects during the 2023/2024 school year. The last two editions of the SPB were financed by EEA and Norway Grants.
- The SPB is a tool for integrating the whole school community including students, their parents/guardians, teachers, management, administrative staff. The SPB’s objective is to create democratic frameworks for joint reflection on what the school community’s needs, be it material or otherwise.
- The SPB is not a systemic tool aimed at increasing the participation of refugee children and youth. The participation of this group occurs “by the way”, and its scale and depth depend on the needs and decisions made by individual institutions. However, the SPB’s process induces its participants to think about how to include underrepresented groups. In different schools, different groups are treated as priorities, e.g., school administrative staff, parents, or the Ukrainian community.
- The program does not collect data on whether participants are refugees, only whether they are “of Ukrainian origin.” We assume that some people in this category have refugee experiences.

Local context

- As Lublin was the European Youth Capital in 2023, it undertook many actions dedicated to young

people. One of these was the creation of the Lublin Youth Policy which has a component dedicated to supporting foreign youth and making the city friendly to them by facilitating access to public services and its culture and ensuring language accessibility. The process of applying for the European youth capital was also an important incentive for the development of school participatory budgets in Lublin.

- Lublin (after Krakow) is the second-largest city that approaches the concept of SPBs systematically as it is the city that manages the organization and implementation processes. The SPB methodology adopted in Lublin promotes a bottom-up approach to empower schools in the decision-making processes by giving them a free hand in creating their own internal SPB rules. This provides flexibility and increases the participatory nature of the process.

What facilitates the participation of refugee children? What makes the mechanism friendly?

- In the third edition of the SPB (implemented in 2023), the issue of including refugee students was included in the competition regulations - one of the criteria in the project selection process engagement of diverse groups of students including students from Ukraine.
- The twenty schools selected to implement their SPB projects attempted to engage refugee youth (primarily Ukrainian speaking) in the SPB implementation process. The methods used varied depending on the size of the Ukrainian community in the school and included:
 - individual and/or group conversations with students from Ukraine, during which information about the project was provided;

- organizing consultations during breaks where members of the School Task Force explained the regulations and answered questions;
- assistance from the School Task Force in filling out the application;
- assistance from teachers/educators in understanding the regulations;
- translation of the regulations into Ukrainian and English;
- inclusion of a person from Ukraine in the School Task Force.
- No detailed statistics were kept on the participation of refugees in the SPB, but estimates suggest that:
 - 20% of the School Working Teams had persons of Ukrainian origin as members;
 - In 50% of the schools, persons of Ukrainian origin submitted SPB projects either independently or as members of groups - together with students of Polish origin;
 - In 90% of schools, persons of Ukrainian origin participated in voting on the submitted projects (in the remaining 10% of the schools, there were no students of Ukrainian origin).

Challenges, problems – room for improvement

There are several areas where the SPB could become a tool that could strengthen the participation of refugee children and youth more systematically in the future.

- Thematic SPBs concerning the integration of foreign and refugee students with Polish students and a greater emphasis on soft projects where students submit ideas for joint activities, e.g., a joint overnight stay at school, joint workshops, joint

outings, etc. This helps naturally direct activities towards the integration of the entire school community around a joint action.

- Providing schools with materials in different language versions (at least Polish and Ukrainian) such as templates for best practices, regulations, voting cards, or posters. This would help schools in organizing the preparation of SPB projects and be more inclusive.
- Providing support to individuals who coordinate SPBs in schools and equipping them with tools to include the Ukrainian community. For example, one of the training sessions organized as part of the school support process could be dedicated solely to reflecting on how to strengthen the participation of Ukrainian youth or refugee youth in the design of SPB projects. With the support of a facilitator, the schools themselves would come up with tools that could be introduced.
- Enhancing dissemination of information about the SPB through the communication channels of social organizations and the city dedicated to the Ukrainian community to showcase the SPB as one of the ways to engage in city life.
- Sharing good practices in the area of including refugee children and youth between schools.
- It is worth encouraging the implementation of projects that involve in the life of the school the parents of both Ukrainian and Polish students. Parents (Ukrainian and Polish) usually do not engage much in what happens at school unless problems arise. Therefore, when planning projects, it is worth taking care of including parents, familiarizing them with existing mechanisms, etc. This could help to promote pro-active rather than reactive attitudes among parents/guardians.

Microgrant Program, Wrocław

- Microgrants are a city-wide program supporting grassroots initiatives put forward and implemented by residents of Wrocław in cooperation with the Wrocław Institute of Culture and the Umbrella Foundation.
- The microgrant program has three tracks:
 - Microgrants (for individuals and informal groups; funding for a single project is up to PLN 5,000).
 - Microgrants NGO (for young non-governmental organizations, aimed at organizations which are up to 5 years old and whose revenues in the previous year did not exceed PLN 3,000; funding for a single project is between PLN 5,000 and 10,000).
 - Youth Microgrants (for informal youth groups, aimed at groups of at least 3 people between 13 to 21 years old; funding for a single project is up to PLN 1,000).
- The track for individuals and informal groups is coordinated by the Wrocław Institute of Culture which is the youngest cultural institution in Wrocław, established as an organizational component for the IMPART festival office when Wrocław was the European Capital of Culture (ECoC 2016). The NGO and youth tracks are coordinated by the Umbrella Foundation which runs the Wrocław Center for Supporting Non-Governmental Organizations.

- Microgrants were first introduced on a trial basis in 2014 as part of supporting residents’ activities in preparation for Wrocław’s tenure as the ECoC, and – over time – this formula has been expanded. In 2023, the sixth edition of Microgrants (in their current form) was implemented.
- Each track has three calls for submissions per year: in February, May, and September. Projects are 3-month long.
- To apply for or implement a microgrant proposal, the applicants do not need to be registered or have a residence permit.
- The program accepts initiatives that vary thematically, e.g., in the field of activity animation, recreation, social activation, education, related to all areas of art, or having other culture-creating potential. The program’s intention to engage residents of Wrocław and its districts in joint activities cannot be underestimated as it provides encouragement to those just starting their adventure in social activity .
- The program has the characteristics of a project school. In addition to a specified amount of funding, its participants can count on support in organizational matters, e.g., administrative, legal, logistical, or promotional actions. Money is not transferred to the account of its implementers.
- Participants learn how to create projects in a methodological way, considering project cycle and ways of engaging the local community. These are skills transferable to other areas of social activity.
- Over two years (2022-23) - 50 projects were implemented with the help of Microgrants NGO, of which 6 (approx. 12% of the total) were projects prepared by refugees. Within the informal groups track , about 10 out of 40 projects implemented in 2023 involved migrants and refugees (not necessarily in the role of leaders).

- Microgrant coordinators observe an increase in the number of people of migrant/refugee origin participating in the mechanism although the data is only an estimate as information on the origin of participants is not collected in a systematical way.

What encourages the participation of refugee persons in Microgrants?

- All project documentation for all tracks is in Polish. However, what encourages refugees to participate in Microgrants is the promotion of the mechanism by the program’s partners which is also done in languages other than Polish. Dissemination of information about Microgrants is conducted by organizations and institutions working with refugees. They are well acquainted with their environment and enjoy trust in the refugee and migrant communities, e.g., WroMigrant, Nomada (Open Place), Fundacja Ukraina, Academy of Active Migrant FEPS.
- WroMigrant is part of a municipal unit called the Wrocław Social Development Center which provides free advisory and informational support to migrants and refugees in several languages: Ukrainian, Russian, Belarusian, English.
- The program is widely advertised in public space, e.g., on tram ticket validators, the radio, the internet; or Facebook groups.
- Translation/interpretation services are provided at informational meetings about microgrants.
- The mechanism is relatively simple and support is offered to applicants/implementers.
- There are incentives to submit joint projects by persons of Polish origin and migrants/refugees.
- There are no large scale communications targeting refugees. However, in the September 2023 call,

there were two meetings intended for migrants about the project.

- WroMigrant plays a significant role as it is the first point of contact in the refugee-city relationship. Here, refugees learn about legalization procedures, organization of their stay, etc. Support is provided in several languages. WroMigrant seems to warm up the image of the municipality, as it is perceived as a friendly and open unit, and visually it also does not resemble an office.
- Economic aspect and the fact that the grant can be used to pay remuneration to implementers (even this is directly supported) also encourage refugee participation in Microgrants. Refugees usually have limited financial means, so the financial component of this program is important and encouraging.

Challenges, problems - room for improvement

- A better understanding of the needs of refugees and their preferred ways of communication is needed to improve the awareness of the program among migrant and refugee communities.
- It is worthwhile to note that refugees should not be expected to come forward on their own, but it is necessary to actively reach out to them with the offer taking advantage of the communication chan-

nels available in their places of residence such as all-city and local neighborhood events ensuring that the information is available in places where they function within the general community.

- Refugees often find it hard to understand the microgrant formula. People from Ukraine often reduce the outcomes of the project to conducting a workshop, so the challenge is to explain that it is a broader process that extends beyond successful workshop delivery and the implementer has to the duty to coordinate it accordingly.
- Although more and more refugees speak Polish, language accessibility can be a challenge. This challenge may often be one of the root causes of the one described above as refugees' understanding of the rules of the Microgrant program and the general mechanisms of participation can be determined by their language proficiency. To address the gaps caused by lack of broadly understood cultural awareness, the city is considering introducing a mentor or participation assistant (instead of a translator/interpreter at meetings).
- In Wrocław, the FEPS Foundation for European Studies implemented the project "Participatory Migrant Academy", which aimed to support migrant participation in the city. The difficulty of recruiting migrants and refugees to participate in the project confirmed the barriers to participation of this group of residents described above.

Support Coordination Center, Warsaw

- The Coordination Support Center is a service hub for migrants and refugees established shortly after the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine in 2022.
- Initially, it was involved in supporting volunteers, institutions, and organizations receiving refugees in Warsaw as well as helping to organize the relocation of refugees to other European countries. It created a workspace in Warsaw's city center (the Palace of Culture and Science), mapped entities providing assistance, and cooperated with reception points.
- Over time, it transformed into a comprehensive point providing *strictly* integrative services, cultural activities, support for refugee community leaders, and assistance to young or newly established non-governmental organizations.
- In addition, the Center runs skills development and microgrant programs, e.g., KIWI (Catalyst for Multicultural Innovations) which has been operating for several years. In October 2022, there was a special edition of KIWI funded by UNICEF dedicated to refugee women from Ukraine.
- The Center also supports the establishment of non-governmental organizations supporting refugees, among others, the Foundation for Solidarity Initiatives which – in turn – is home to the Skovoroda Foundation running an international theater where Ukrainian and Belarusian actors perform.
- The space allows informal meetings of representatives of various refugee organizations, Polish organizations, newly arrived refugees, and those already well-established in Warsaw. It is also a place for organizing cross-sectoral meetings with non-governmental organizations, activists, and city authorities. Although the effectiveness of these meetings can be debated, it is one of few opportunities when representatives of Polish refugee-migrant organizations and refugees themselves can meet directly to engage in discussion and work in groups with city representatives.

What encourages the participation of refugee persons?

- The CWK was created by the Inna Przestrzeń Foundation which has extensive experience spanning many years of working with foreigners and refugees in Poland. It also has experience in conducting participatory processes in Poland and abroad.
- In the past, the Inna Przestrzeń Foundation ran the Multicultural Center in Warsaw, which provided a similar set of services to the CWK targeting foreigners living in the capital.
- The CWK is an open space where refugees can learn the language, receive career advice, participate together in classes and workshops.
- The Center provides childcare for class and workshop participants.

Challenges, problems – room for improvement

- Currently, the CWK has a large space in the very center of Warsaw they lease on very favorable terms. This situation is temporary and sooner or later the Center will have to find another location. As having physical space is critical for the diversity of the services and their provision, finding adequate and affordable premises is a key challenge.
- The name “ The Coordination Support Center” seems inappropriate, which both people running

the Center and those using its services seem to be aware of. It brings to mind a managing committee and raises concerns that it might have negative im-

plications for the perception of the independence of other organizations and fails to reflect the nature of the activities carried out by the Center.

Przystanie, Gdynia

- Gdynia’s Przystanie is a network of local cultural centers available to all residents of Gdynia. Przystanie aims to be close to residents and foster neighborly integration. In some of Przystanie’s centers house headquarters of social assistance centers, non-governmental organizations, legal aid points, and one of them even has a preschool point. Immediately after the escalation of the war, they provided shelter to refugees arriving in the city. Currently, they have returned to their more traditional role as cultural centers.
- The large-scale arrival of refugees required Przystanie to completely change their mode of operation. From centers of social activation, they transformed into temporary accommodation places. As they had to suspend their regular services they were closed to residents allowing entry only to local volunteers helping the refugees staying in Przystanie.
- In the first months of 2022, Przystanie gave their new residents a sense of minimal agency (e.g., the ability to cook their own meals, report their needs to a trusted office worker, arranging dentist appointments).
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- Over time, local Ukrainian leaders emerged. The leaders took over some of the responsibilities related to provision of daily care and oversaw the compliance with regulations imposed by city authorities.
- This setup allowed municipal employees to effectively collect feedback regarding the residents’ needs and plans.
- Currently, Przystanie’s centres adapt their activities to the changing needs of the city’s resident refugee population. They conduct classes for refugees, some activities (e.g., artistic or culinary) are conducted *by* refugees, they organize training programs to improve professional qualifications. The offer is shaped based on conversations with refugees and survey results.
- Przystanie’s centers have also started to employ Ukrainian leaders – often these are the same people who were involved in the operation of these places when they served as temporary accommodation facilities.

What encourages the participation of refugee persons?

- The home-like character of Przystanie made them suitable for reception of refugees. It was possible to create relatively comfortable living conditions

Challenges, problems – room for improvement

Turning Przystanie’s centres into temporary accommodation for refugees required an extraordinary effort on the part of their staff, mainly composed of cultural animators who were not prepared for this new role and the challeng-

es they would face. Many of them resigned or went on sick leave as a result. The city did not provide them with any additional training in working with refugees. The employees did not receive any psychological support, although for many, encountering the tragedies of refugees from Ukraine was a traumatic experience.

The process of readapting places like Przystanie's centers to their previous functions is also challenging. It has to take into account the needs of the refugees living in them and the expectations of the local community to have their local cultural centers eventually begin to start providing their original services again.

DRC DANISH
REFUGEE
COUNCIL

Danish Refugee Council (DRC) was founded in Denmark in 1956. We are a leading, international humanitarian displacement organisation, supporting refugees and internally displaced persons during displacement, in exile, when settling and integrating in a new place, or upon return. We provide protection and life-saving humanitarian assistance. We support displaced persons in becoming self-reliant and included into hosting societies - and we work with communities, civil society and responsible authorities to promote protection of rights and peaceful coexistence.



Shipyards Foundation was established in 2009. For over 15 years, we have been creating and supporting effective solutions to social challenges, involving citizens in deciding on public matters and helping organizations and local governments to plan and implement social activities. We develop and disseminate good practices, create tools to simplify facilitation of social activities, conduct social research, we also train and develop educational materials. The effects of our activities are used by e.g.: seniors, students and teachers, citizens, activists and local government officials from all over Poland.

Most of the projects and initiatives taken upon by the Shipyards Foundation concentrate in the areas of civic participation, public engagement, social innovations, research and consulting.



The Klon/Jawor Association has operated at the national level for over 20 years promoting the values of open society, rule of law, helping pro-active citizens organise and act for good causes. Key areas of focus include the ngo.pl portal offering legal and compliance expertise and a space for debating civil society issues; it is recognised by 76% of NGO in Poland, research into civic engagement, including Poland's largest independent survey of the status of NGOs in Poland conducted regularly since 2002 and legal and compliance counselling for activists; about 5,000 consultations per year.