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## Private assistance for Ukrainian refugees and attitudes towards refugee sponsorship in Poland

This issue of CMR Spotlight is devoted to research conducted by prof. Aleksandra Grzymała-Kazłowska [@Kazlowskaa](#), Paweł Downarowicz and Anna Wydra on Poles' actions and attitudes towards helping Ukrainians in response to the arrival of war refugees in Poland. Surprisingly little has changed between the two first waves of the study in May and December 2022, and not in the way you might have expected.



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# Private assistance for Ukrainian refugees and attitudes towards refugee sponsorship in Poland

Aleksandra Grzymała-Kazłowska, Paweł Downarowicz, Anna Wydra

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## Introduction

The full-scale war in Ukraine made sheer numbers of refugees escape their country to Poland. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), only from 24 February 2022 to 23 April 2022 – in the first period of the most intense war-related migration – more than 2.8 million refugees from Ukraine arrived in Poland (UNHCR 2022). Although some refugees have gone on to other countries or returned to Ukraine, the numbers of Ukrainian citizens seeking refuge on the Polish territory remain vast. According to statistics of the Polish government, the cumulative number of registered applicants for temporary protection due to the conflict in Ukraine was 1.5 million (as of 20 February 2023), among whom women under 18 constituted 19.3%, those between 18 and 65 – 47.2%, and over 65 – 3.1%, with respective figures for males being 19.1%, 10%, and 0.9% (Gov.pl 2023a). The current stock of registered Ukrainian refugees in Poland is 985,000 (Gov.pl 2023b).

The abruptness and scale of the phenomenon made the admission and support of Ukrainian refugees, especially in the first months of the war, an enormous challenge. The unprecedented quick response of non-governmental and church organisations, the private sector, and – what

was most vital – countless individuals to a large extent preceded the institutional response, firstly mobilised at the local level and later at the level of central government and international organisations. Cullen Dunn and Kaliszewska (2022) write about distributed humanitarianism based on personal aid networks, donations of money, work and goods, which is not hindered by bureaucratic accountability measures, allowing for greater speed, cost-effectiveness, and resilience compared to large-scale institutionalized aid programs.

We witnessed the joint efforts of governmental institutions, local authorities, statutory services, non-governmental organisations, private companies, and individuals engaged in various forms of assistance. Such a combined endeavour, including the state's financial support of those hosting refugees in their homes and the website integrating assistance and linking helpers with those in need ('I help Ukraine'), resembles the idea of refugee sponsorship (RS) based on a state-private partnership in admitting and supporting refugees. This implies collaboration between the state and other parties, including individuals and civil society organisations (for example, faith-based). As Tan (2021: 1) points out, 'the essence of the concept is shared responsibility between civil society and state for the admission

and/or integration of refugees'. So far, RS has been mainly seen as a complementary way of receiving refugees, where the state enables resettlement and legal admission, while private actors assist refugees in their reception and integration in the host country.

The RS idea originated in Canada in the 1970s to support Indochinese refugees and has recently started to be used in different European countries to find solutions to assist refugees following the crisis in 2015. Short small pilot programmes also took place in some Central and Eastern European countries, including Poland, for the resettlement of Christian refugees. However, unlike the UK, Poland at the outbreak of the war did not have much experience nor developed mechanisms for supporting refugees, particularly through the RS programme.

Although until February 2022, Poland, in general, had not utilised the RS framework, a number of European countries had begun to develop such programmes and the value of RS had been acknowledged by different international organisations and initiatives. The Global Compact on Refugees, ratified by the United Nations in 2018, mentioned it as a complementary pathway for the admission of refugees. In 2018, the European Commission declared its support for establishing or expanding RS in EU member states (EC 2018) and later allocated resources for this purpose (Grzymala-Kazłowska et al. 2022), while the 2020 New

Pact on Migration and Asylum had foreseen the development of a European model of RS.

Since the concept of RS stresses the role of civil society, we can link it to the response to the need to support refugees from Ukraine. After the beginning of the Russian aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, extensive grass-root activity emerged. It has been largely improvised as a humanitarian response to an emergency, with civil society organisations and individuals welcoming refugees from Ukraine into their homes and offering them essential aid. However, the prolonged war requires more long-term systemic solutions, where the potential of civic society should be considered. While the early welcoming and empathic opinions were noticeable in the survey by the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) between 28 March and 7 April, in which 63% of respondents declared their direct or a household member's involvement in supporting Ukrainian refugees, it is essential to analyse how these social attitudes change over time: what is Poles' willingness to help and how, and what is the general public's perception of the possible application of RS in Poland.

## **Method**

Our questions concerning private assistance for refugees and attitudes towards refugee sponsorship were included in two surveys conducted in Poland by the research company Ipsos. Most were asked twice, on 12–16 May 2022 and on 1–7 December

2022. samples included respectively 1020/1010 residents of Poland over 15 years of age, weighted to ensure their representativeness for the population of Poland. The survey measured the scope and forms of help for Ukrainian refugees undertaken by Poles – what forms of assistance the respondents were involved in in the last three months and their plans for future aid\*. Another issue examined was the respondents' opinion on who should be responsible for helping refugees fleeing the war and what they think about the possibility of refugee sponsorship programmes in Poland. During the data collection, the TAPI method was applied – qualified interviewers gathered data in the respondents' homes using tablets.

Our data was analysed in R and SPSS and included distribution and frequency analysis. The measure of engagement was constructed by counting combinations of activities taken by respondents. The frequencies of variables relating to engagement, plans of future actions, attitudes towards RS and responsibility for supporting refugees were further crossed by socio-demographic variables, future help intentions and measures of engagement. To measure the change of engagement, the analysis of measures of central tendencies was also used.

## **Engagement in private assistance for Ukrainian refugees**

### ***Less but more? Changes in support between May and December 2022***

In May 2022, financial support was the most common form of help reported by 42% of respondents. More active types of assistance were less frequent, yet still considerable, with 11% of Poles declaring helping refugees with learning the Polish language and 10% supporting them in administrative affairs. 8% reported spending free time with refugees and assisting them with job search and/or school enrolment, while 7% - providing accommodation (see Chart 1).

Interesting findings stand out when comparing the results from May and December 2022. Although the overall percentage of those helping Ukrainian refugees decreased from 56% to 47% (share of respondents who had been engaged in at least one of six forms of support actions), it was coupled with larger numbers of respondents reporting engagement in almost all forms of assistance, except for financial support (see Chart 1).

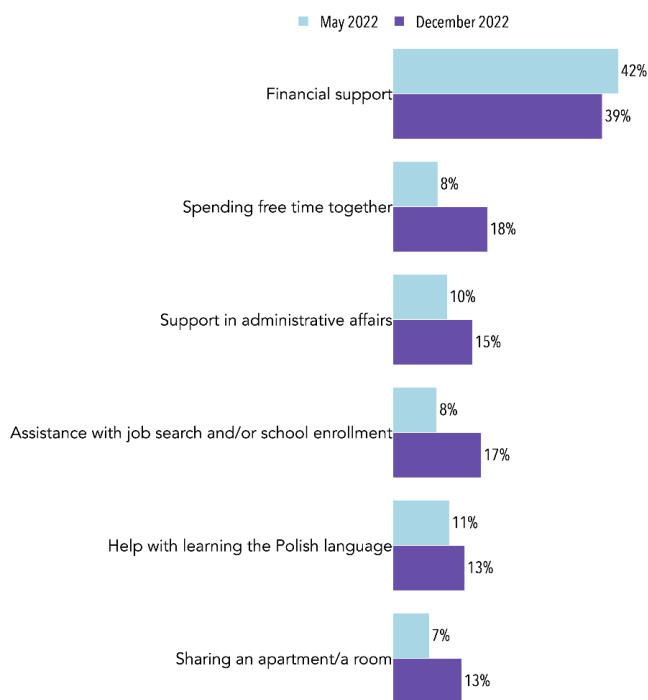


Chart 1. The comparison of involvement in support actions towards refugees from Ukraine in May 2022 and December 2022. Source: TAPI survey by Ipsos on a representative sample of the Polish population aged 15 and above. N=1020/1010.

What is more, the share of respondents claiming to be involved in offering accommodation, helping with job search/school enrolment, and spending free time together doubled. Slightly smaller differences were observed in the case of support in administrative affairs and help with learning Polish, with generally no difference in the case of financial support.

To better understand this spurious contradiction, we looked into the distribution of actions taken by the respondents. The respondents who reported performing at least one out of six forms of help were divided according to the

type of their engagement. As this study focuses on active assistance beyond financial support, which is crucial for the integration of refugees, we distinguished two subgroups: those engaged solely in financial aid and those involved in any active support (regardless of provided financial support).

The share of both subgroups varied between May and December. While in May nearly one in three of all respondents were engaged only in financial support, in December, only one in five was involved in such support only. The share of respondents participating in active support actions remained steady, with circa one in four in both surveys. Therefore, although the overall share of helpers decreased, to a large extent it can be explained by a decrease in the group of people providing only financial aid, rather than those engaged in other (active) types of support.

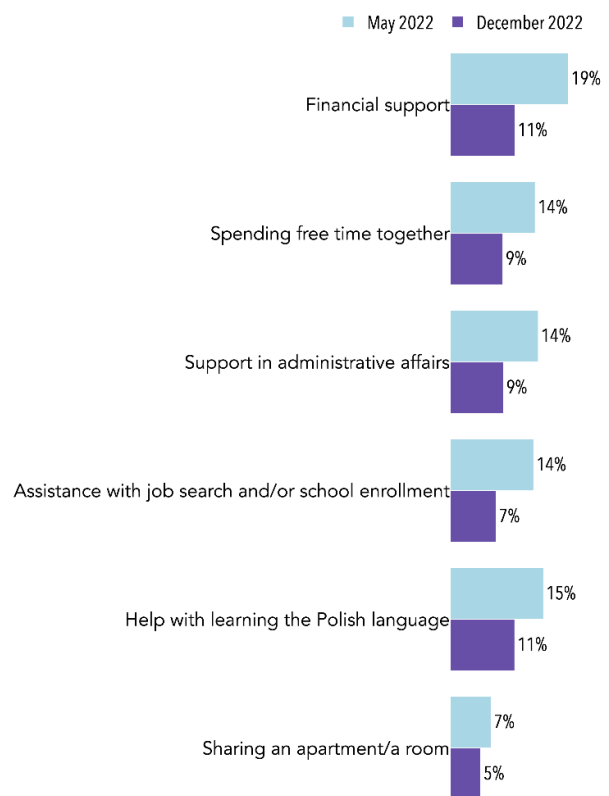
The involvement of private individuals in active forms of assistance not only maintained its prevalence but also gained intensity. Whereas in May, the average active helper took part in 2.2 actions, in December, the number spiked to 3.5. In May, 25% most active respondents had taken at least three forms of action, while in December 25% most active helpers were involved in all six types of action.

Although other studies indicated a fast shrinkage of the help provided to Ukrainian refugees (Chankowska 2022, Rudy 2022, Theus 2022), some even suggesting that “the potential of help towards Ukrainian

refugees has been depleted’ (Helak 2022: 4), our data provide a different picture, showing the continuation but diversification of assistance for Ukrainian refugees between May and December 2022. This incoherence could be explained by the lowering financial engagement of individuals. Additionally, this can be accompanied by the decreasing visibility of private helpers in the public domain in the mass media, social media, and public spaces, while the actual organic support could continue or even gain strength. The longitudinal study of Babińska and collaborators (2022) conducted over a few months until September last year similarly demonstrated that social attitudes towards Ukrainians did not change significantly over time and remained positive.

### **Declarations of help**

In the context of prolonged war, it is important to investigate the relationship between declarations and actual help, and the potential for future assistance. In May 2022, after three months of the war in Ukraine, considerable numbers of Poles were willing to help in the next 6-12 months. In the spring of 2022, financial assistance was the most frequently mentioned form of help in which Poles planned to engage in the future (19%), followed by support in learning Polish (15%), dealing with administrative matters (14%), finding employment (14%) and socialising (14%), with 7% of respondents willing to offer accommodation to refugees (see Chart 2).



*Chart 2. The declarations of future aid for Ukrainian refugees in Poland in May 2022 and December 2022. Source: TAPI survey by Ipsos on a representative sample of the Polish population aged 15 and above. N=1020/1010.*

Interestingly, the declared future financial assistance in May was lower than the reported economic help in the same survey – fewer people declared future support than those involved in the actual help.

Moreover, while comparing the mentioned declaration from May with the reported aid in the next survey in December, more participants (39%) supported refugees financially in December than declared plans to do so in May (19%). Also, providing a flat was reported more often in December (13%) than respondents’ intentions in May (7%). In

other cases of active forms of assistance, the differences between the reported assistance in December and the future aid declared by respondents in May were smaller: spending free time together 18% (vs May declaration 14%), assistance in finding a job 17% (May declaration 14%), support in administrative issues 15% (May declaration 14%), assistance in learning Polish 14% (vs May declaration 15%).

The above data again suggest that the involvement of Poles in helping refugees did not weaken, apart from financial support, between the spring and winter of 2022, and the declarations from May 2022 corresponded with the help the respondents reported in the last months of 2022. In fact, the actual support was slightly larger than anticipated, especially in the area of financial assistance and providing a flat/house.

However, the survey in December may indicate a vaporising potential for help. Respondents asked in the last month of 2022 about the likelihood of involvement in future assistance in the next 6–12 months declared smaller readiness to do so than those asked in May, as Chart 2 illustrates. The most frequent declared forms of future support in

December 2022 were financial help (11%) and assistance in acquiring the Polish language (11%), followed by declarations of spending time together and dealing with administrative matters (both 9%), help in finding a job (7%), and offers of accommodation (5%).

The emerging downward trend related to the readiness of private individuals to help may be explained by the shrinkage of personal, financial, emotional, mental and time resources. It may also be linked to lower demand for assistance resulting from smaller numbers of refugees, especially new arrivals, their better self-sufficiency within Ukrainian networks, the more significant institutional help provided by state and non-governmental institutions, with contributing factors such as the deteriorating economic situation in Poland.

### ***Who is most involved in helping?***

The perception of one's own financial situation differentiated the involvement in help. The higher the assessment of one's own economic status, the larger percentage of people engaged not only in financial aid but also in active forms of assistance (see Chart 3).

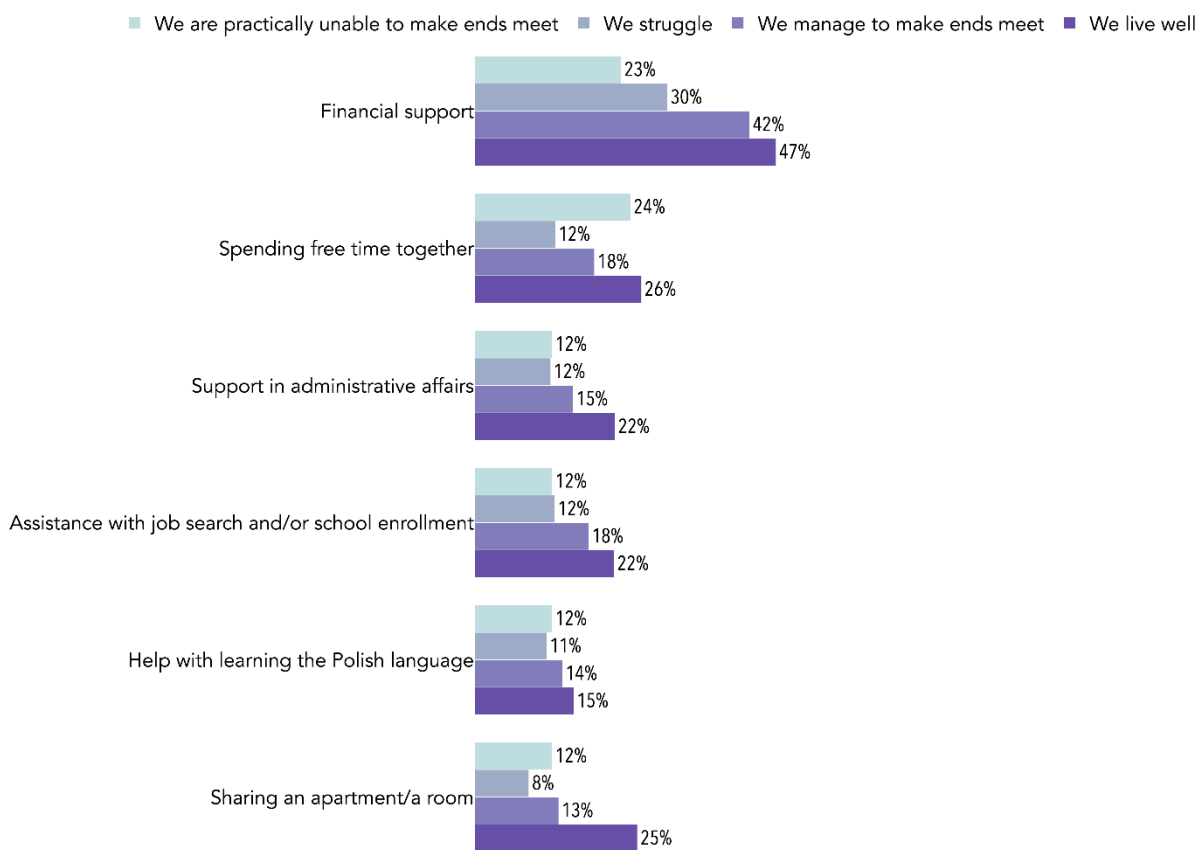


Chart 3. Engagement in support of refugees from Ukraine by household financial situation in December 2022. Source: TAPI survey by Ipsos on a representative sample of the Polish population aged 15 and above. N=1010.

The other variable differentiating the involvement in helping refugees from Ukraine was the level of education (see Chart 4). People with higher education more often than others financially supported refugees, which could also be linked to their economic situation. Economic aid was the only form of assistance in which people with higher education were involved more often than others. Comparing results from May

and December, in the case of all forms of support, the engagement of those with primary and vocational education fell the most. Financial support decreased only among respondents with elementary and vocational education, while people with secondary and tertiary education reported the same levels as those declared during the May survey.



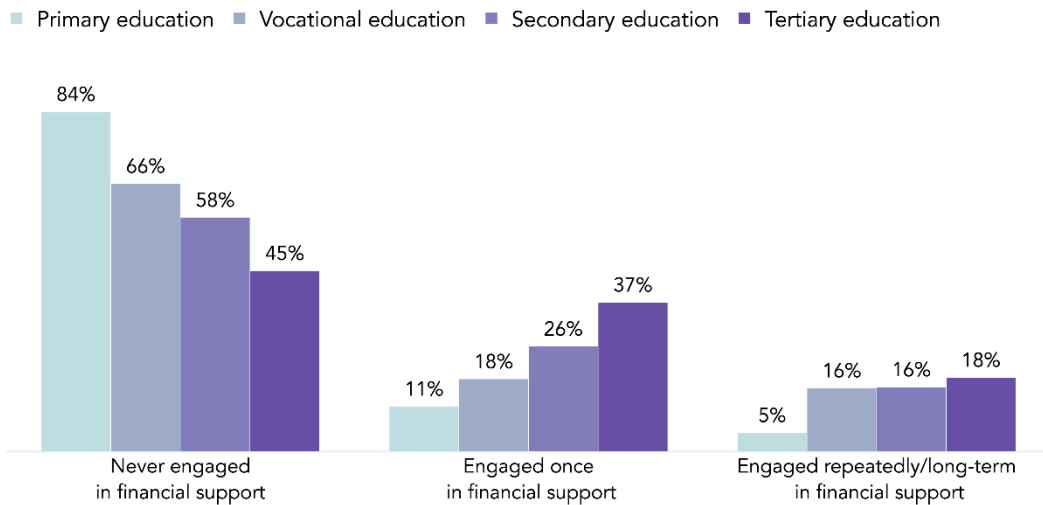


Chart 4. Involvement in financial support for Ukrainian refugees in Poland by education level in December 2022. Source: TAPI survey by Ipsos on a representative sample of the Polish population aged 15 and above. N=1010.

Residents from the largest cities significantly more often than others helped refugees find a job once, while people from rural areas more often engaged in this form of assistance many times, which can be linked to the specificity of seasonal farm work.

#### Attitudes towards refugee sponsorship and perceived responsibility for it

Although the already substantial support of refugee sponsorship was maintained – 72% in May and 70% in December rather or definitely supported it, the share of the latter decreased from 17% to 11% (see Chart 5). The overall support varied across those engaged in active support, engaged only in financial aid and not engaged at all. As much as 87% of those who provided only financial support rated refugee sponsorship positively, while at the same time, 73% of

active helpers and 63% of those not engaged in any form of help shared this view. Interestingly, the more actions taken, the less favourable the attitude towards refugee sponsorship, with only 68% support among the most active individuals participating in all six forms of assistance. While the lowest level of support of refugee sponsorship among those not involved in help can be explained by their general disengagement, a less positive assessment of refugee sponsorship by those actively supporting Ukrainian refugees requires more explanation. Possible reasons might be their tiredness and awareness of burdens and difficulties in providing long-term multidimensional assistance by individuals and non-governmental organisations. But also a lack of faith in the state’s capacity to secure sufficient foundations for RS could

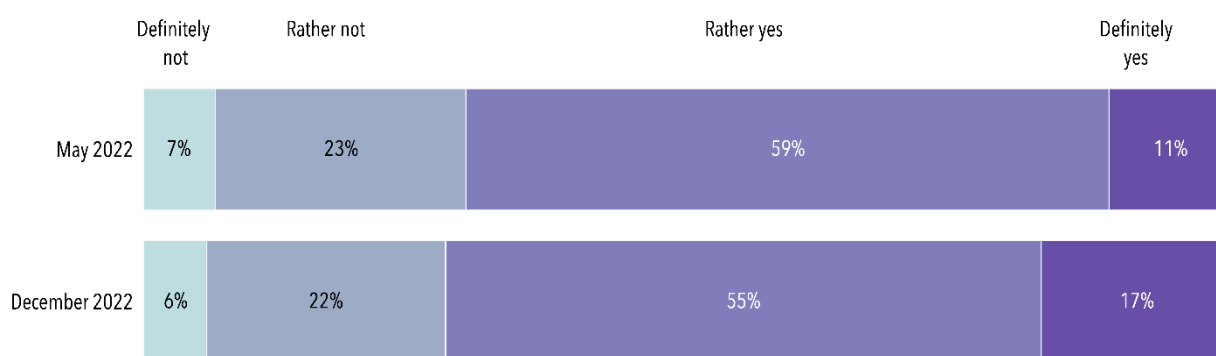


Chart 5. Support for introducing the refugee sponsorship programme in Poland in May 2022 and December 2022. Source: TAPI survey by Ipsos on a representative sample of the Polish population aged 15 and above. N=1020/1010.

contribute to this reluctance, which can be substantiated by our analysis below of the question who, in general, should be primarily responsible for helping refugees (Chart 6).

Our survey in December 2022 also shed some light on public opinion on who should be responsible for helping refugees. Of all respondents, 64% indicated the central government, 11% local government, 11% NGOs, 6% no one, 3% individuals, 3% private companies, and 3% – someone else. The vast majority of those who selected the last option pointed to the European Union.

Our analysis demonstrates that attitudes towards refugee support vary considerably depending on the level of involvement in the

aid for Ukrainian refugees. Among the non-engaged and engaged only in financial support, the central government was viewed as the main responsible actor by 65% and 76%, respectively, with 10% pointing to the local government in both groups. The active helpers seemed more sceptical towards the state’s responsibility, with 54% indicating the central government and 13% – the local government. This may confirm our previous interpretation that another factor contributing to lower support for refugee sponsorship among active helpers can be disbelief in the state’s capacity to provide adequate systemic support.

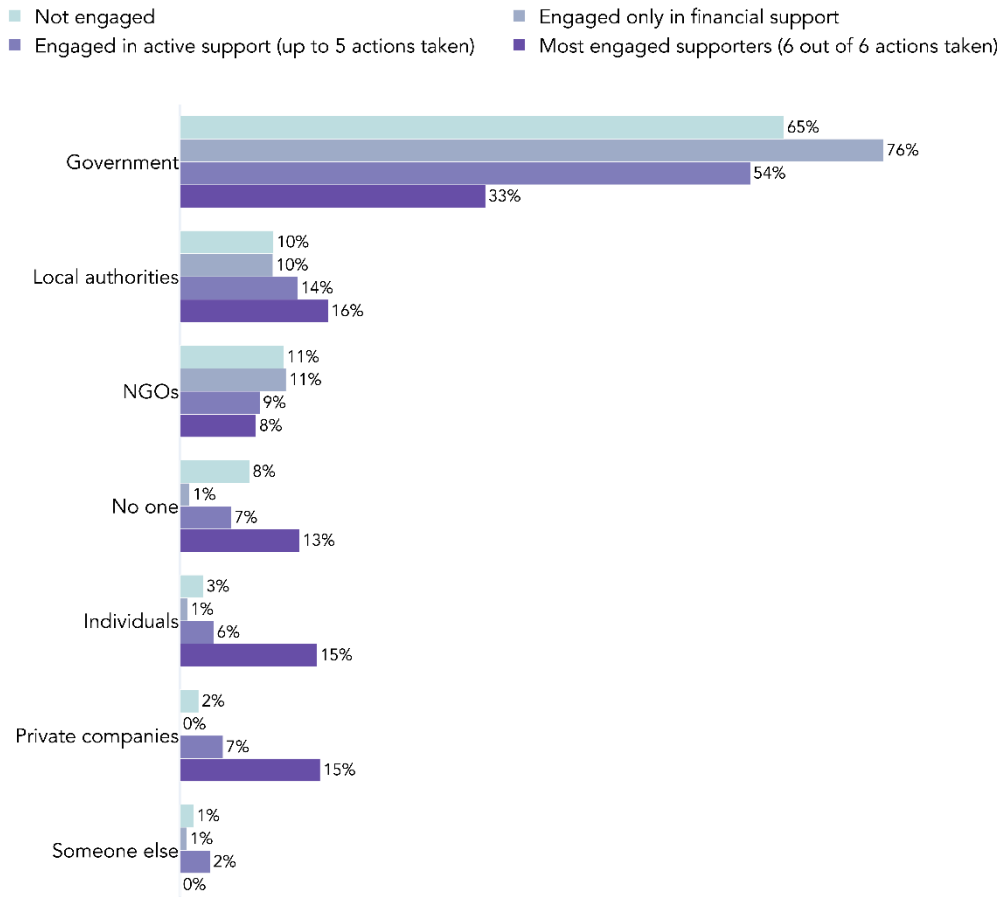


Chart 6. Recognition of responsibility for supporting refugees from Ukraine in Poland in December 2022. Source: TAPI survey by Ipsos on a representative sample of the Polish population aged 15 and above. N=1010.

Interestingly, the view that no one should be responsible for supporting Ukrainian refugees is most common across two opposite parts of the spectrum – those not supporting refugees at all (8%) and those helping them the most (13% involved in all six active forms of aid). In the case of the non-engaged, it may be linked to a general reluctance to provide refugees with any help. Yet such an interpretation does not explain the lower share of the most active helpers recognising the authorities' responsibility for managing the support. Among them, only 33% indicated central

government, and 16% the local government. The rest (51% in total) believed that the responsibility for help should fall on private companies (15%), individuals (15%), no one (13%), or non-governmental organisations (8%) (see Chart 6). In the face of perceived insufficiency of government social policies (not only related to the assistance for refugees) and limits of one's own engagement, the most active helpers may be questioning the possibility of long-term systemic solutions, rather believing in more spontaneous and ad-hoc activity enacted by individuals and private organisations.

## Conclusions

The unexpected and urgent need to admit and support Ukrainian refugees fleeing the full-scale war in their territory created an unprecedented humanitarian challenge for the Polish state. It has been overcome thanks to the huge civic response from vast numbers of individuals and local organisations providing essential assistance. However, with the prolonged war, more long-term and systemic help is needed with local integration policies adequately prepared and implemented, accompanied by cross-sector cooperation and central government support sufficiently delivered (Jarosz and Klaus 2023). Bearing in mind the scale and complexity of the challenges, all types of possible resources should be mapped and efficiently unlocked in line with the increasingly popular welfare mix approach that underlines a need for a combination of inputs from government, market, formal organisations, and informal networks. Our analysis shows the still-existing potential of individual assistance and favourable public views of its utilisation for refugee support. Research-informed and co-produced policy is required to make the best of the remaining resources, build on the experiences of mobilisation and solidarity and the still positive attitudes towards Ukrainian refugees. While using the long-term support of individuals, the helpers' systemic support and prior preparation are of crucial significance, drawing on the best practices of countries such as Canada or the

UK that are more experienced in implementing RS.

## Note

\* The respondents were asked the following questions:

1. In the last three months, have you been involved in the following forms of support for people fleeing the war in Ukraine?: Financial support; providing a flat/room; job search assistance; support in administrative/official matters; help in learning Polish; spending time together (the question asked in both waves).

2. How likely is it that you will engage in the following forms of support for refugees from Ukraine over the next 6–12 months in the face of the protracted war? (scale 1–7): Financial support; providing a flat/room; assistance in looking for a job; support in administrative/official matters; help in learning Polish; spending time together (the question asked in both waves).

3. Who do you think should be responsible in Poland for supporting people fleeing the war from Ukraine?: Government; local government; non-governmental organisations; private companies; no one; someone else (who?) (asked only in December 2022).

4. In some countries, there are programmes that combine state aid with citizen involvement. The state guarantees refugees access to public services, e.g. health care and education, and private persons or groups support refugees in dealing with formalities,

learning the language, and finding a job. Do you think that Poland should introduce a similar programme? (scale 1-4): Definitely not; rather not; rather yes; definitely yes (in both waves).

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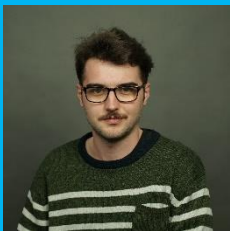
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