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# When working in crisis becomes daily life.

Local organisations supporting  
refugees in Poland



Research report 2024

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Humanitarian  
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# Executive summary

The humanitarian crisis related to the arrival of hundreds of thousands of people from war-torn Ukraine has shifted the responsibility for refugee support from a small group of specialised and experienced organisations to a challenge faced by the wider Polish social sector. Additionally, the operating conditions of the surveyed group of organisations are changing dynamically. The long-term activities in the crisis and the shrinking of funding, partly linked to the withdrawal of international organisations, bear consequences for the organisations themselves, those directly involved within them, as well as for refugees. This research project responds to the need for access to current and reliable data regarding the situation, challenges, and needs of civil society organisations supporting all refugees in Poland.

## Research objectives

The aim of this research is to look at the status of Polish civil society organisations, and other informal initiatives providing aid to refugees in Poland as of February 2024, and to describe their activities, resources, challenges and needs. This research focused on the following:

- Characteristics of the landscape of local organisations supporting refugees in Poland, including the identification of key activities of these organisations;
- Looking into the conditions of these organisations, including their resources, needs and challenges, with a particular focus on the issue of burnout among teams and challenges related to access to funding;

- Formulating recommendations that will facilitate support for local organisations providing services to refugees in Poland, especially in developing organisational infrastructure and business continuity.

Our approach to the research topics is multifaceted and evolving, we have depicted the current state of affairs and the changes that organisations have experienced between 2021 and 2022, the period directly before and after the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine, and between 2022 and 2023, during the crisis.

In the report, we also examine the differences between organisations supporting refugees, and the non-government sector in Poland as a whole.

## Methodology

The study consisted of both quantitative and qualitative components. It was preceded by a literature review of existing studies. The quantitative data is based on online surveys submitted by 158 organisations. The qualitative data is derived from 6 focus group interviews with representatives of 22 organisations. These organisations differ in terms of resources available and the scale of their operations. Additionally, we carried out an expert group interview with people from 6 organisations, sense-checking the findings and co-creating recommendations derived from the study.

## Key findings and conclusions

- Local organisations supporting refugees are a specific part of the non-governmental sector in Poland. They are characterised by larger financial and human resources than the average Polish NGO. In 2023, 35% of the organisations supporting refugees had budgets of approximately over €230,000 (over PLN 1 million), most of the total of organisations employed paid staff (83%) and relied on volunteer support (94%). On average, 12 employees and 15 volunteers are involved in the activities of the surveyed organisations.
- A small percentage of the surveyed organisations (14%) were established after 2022, as a direct result of the war in Ukraine. However, a third of organisations (31%) in existence prior to 2022 were not supporting refugees previously but are now providing this type of support as one of their key activities.
- Currently, the most common activities include efforts to integrate refugees into the Polish community and providing information, as well as psychological support and education, including language courses. Organisations have continuously adapted the forms of support as the needs of refugees changed very quickly throughout the months.
- The outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine has caused a significant number of changes for local organisations supporting refugees and their resources. However, these changes are not permanent. Shortly after February 2022, organisations experienced an increase in the availability of financial and human resources

(in 2023, 72% of NGOs declared an increase in budgets for refugee support when compared to 2021, and 47% reported an increase in staff and volunteer teams). In 2024, organisations forecast a reduction in available budgets, and the number of staff or volunteers. The shrinking of resources has its consequences as organisations invested in the training and skills development of the newly employed staff who they will have to let go relatively quickly due to lack of funding. This situation threatens the continuity of their operations overall.

- Over the past two years, local organisations have seen the expansion of their networks and increased collaboration with other entities. The partners of organisations providing support to refugees are most often other Polish NGOs, the local community, and foreign NGOs. At the same time, organisations see the need to further develop collaboration and networking.
- The refugee crisis had a notable influence on the Polish non-governmental sector and altered the landscape of the sector's organisational activities. Since 2022, most of the surveyed organisations experienced changes in their activities. Less than half (37%) needed to redevelop their missions or objectives.
- Since 2022, the primary source for financing of refugee supporting activities have been funds from international organisations, such as the United Nations (for 20% of local organisations), and funds from international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) (18%). The withdrawal of these partners from Poland carries serious consequences for the organisations in our study.

- The lack of financial stability is the main problem for organisations delivering support for refugees - it has been experienced by 75% of entities. Unfortunately, more of them predict that this problem will escalate in the coming years.
- A pressing issue faced by the majority of surveyed organisations is fatigue and burnout among staff, volunteers and management. More than half of these entities have already undertaken some actions with a view to address this issue, mainly in the form of supervision, specialised psychological support, and burnout prevention workshops.
- Apart from stable funding and the wellbeing of teams, local organisations stated they require substantive support, including trainings and workshops, focused on a variety of topics, including management and fundraising.
- Other trends that will shape the circumstances of the refugee support in Poland in the next two years are: lack of migration policy, negative public attitudes towards refugees, and difficulties in working with local communities. In interviews, representatives of organisations presented examples of growing anti-Ukrainian sentiments and declining willingness of Polish society to engage in refugee supporting activities.
- Despite these demanding and uncertain operating conditions, organisations are determined to continue running services for refugees. Most of the surveyed organisations plan to keep their activities for the next two years, yet 25% of surveyed organisations expect to cut them back due to a lack of funding.

## Recommendations

Many of the challenges faced by local organisations that deliver support to refugees in Poland are systemic. For this reason, our recommendations are mainly directed to donor and support entities that provide support to the surveyed group of entities.

### Recommendations for donor and support entities:

- Invest in long-term projects that will enable strategic and institutional support for local organisations. It is also necessary to review the mechanisms and procedures for awarding grants.
- Allow projects to include budget for costs related to combating burnout and developing employee skills development in organisations.
- Need to invest in opportunities for networking and strengthening the intra-sector cooperation.
- To design support for organisations, considering the diversity of activities and key organisational aims.

### Recommendations for public administration institutions:

- Transfer some of the supporting and integration tasks to state institutions and use the expertise of local organisations and civil society at large.

### Recommendations for local organisations supporting refugees:

- To diversify the sources of funding, find new partners and reduce dependency on grants.
- Provide consistent support, such as training and supervision, to prevent burnout of staff.
- Regularly align the vision and mission of the organisation among the staff and strengthen a sense of community.
- To build coalitions and undertaking undertake joint advocacy activities.

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# List of Acronyms

<b>AI</b>	Artificial Intelligence
<b>CAWI</b>	Computer Assisted Web Interviewing
<b>CRM</b>	Customer Relationship Management
<b>CSR</b>	Corporate Social Responsibility
<b>DEC</b>	Disasters Emergency Committee
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FDG</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>GDPR</b>	General Data Protection Regulation
<b>GUS</b>	Central Statistical Office in Poland
<b>HLA</b>	Humanitarian Leadership Academy
<b>INGO</b>	International Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-Operation & Development
<b>PLN</b>	Polish Złoty
<b>SHIFT</b>	Sustainable Humanitarian Innovation for Transformation
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Committee for Refugees
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund

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# Introduction

Following the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine on 24 February 2022, its residents began to flee the conflict to neighbouring countries, including Poland. Almost overnight, it was necessary to organise shelter, food, support, healthcare, medical and psychological support for hundreds of thousands of people. Organising this humanitarian relief effort required immediate mobilisation and coordination by various institutions and local communities. During the first weeks of the attacks on Ukraine, local organisations and private individuals played a critical part in the humanitarian crisis by hosting refugees in their homes, organising donations of items, volunteering, and providing other forms of support.

Based on [data from the Central Statistical Office \(GUS\)](#), in 2022, around 17 000 associations and foundations took action to support people in need as a result of the war in Ukraine. In the first year after the outbreak of the full-scale war, almost one in four Polish civil society organisations (23%) were involved in supporting refugees. Two years later - at the beginning of 2024 - the scale and nature of the needs have changed. However, to date, around 1 million refugees from Ukraine still reside in Poland ([data from UNHCR](#) as of 7th of May 2024).

The aim of this research was to investigate the status of local organisations delivering support for refugees in Poland as well as to identify key challenges and needs of these entities. In the report, we describe the situation of local organisations supporting refugees at the beginning of 2024, two years after the escalation of the war in Ukraine. To closely examine the changes these organisations have undergone, we compared their current state to their activities prior to the escalation of the war. We would like to stress that in the report we focus on organisations that work for all refugees, not just those from Ukraine.

As part of the study, which was completed over the period of November 2023-April 2024, we carried out a review of existing thematic literature and undertaken quantitative (online survey) as well as qualitative (focus groups discussions) research. In addition, we conducted a focus group discussion (FGD) with experts that centred on the interpretation of research findings and formulating conclusions and recommendations.

## Report structure

In the following chapters, we present the fundamental characteristics of Polish organisations delivering support for refugees (see: [➔ Local organisations working for refugees - essential information](#)), as well as describing different forms of support they provide (see: [➔ Activities of local organisations](#)). We also look at human resources and burnout (see: [➔ People and teams in local organisations](#) and [➔ Staff burnout](#)); financial resources (see: [➔ Funding](#)); their relationships with partners (see: [➔ Collaboration with partners](#)); and key challenges, needs and plans (see: [➔ Challenges, needs and plans](#)).

Based on the data gathered in the study, and the conclusions from the expert FGD, we formulated [➔ Conclusions and recommendations](#) mainly addressed to the donor and support entities that provide support to the surveyed group of entities.

Details regarding the research methods can be found in the [➔ Research methodology](#) section.

An important perspective, which allows for a better understanding of the specificities of organisations working with refugees, is comparing these entities with all NGOs in Poland. In separate sections of the report, we have describe the results of this light-touch comparison (section: 'The surveyed organisations compared to all NGOs in Poland').

## All non-governmental sector in Poland

It is worth noting that the whole Polish non-governmental sector (understood as foundations and associations) comprises of approximately 70,000 active entities. The dominant industries in this sector are sports, culture, and education - almost two out of three organisations focus on one of these topics. Over half of the funds for the entire sector come from domestic and foreign financial sources. As for the human capital of the whole sector in Poland, 41% of local organisations have permanent staff; (on average three staff members), and 61% engage volunteers too. We encourage you to read the Klon/Jawor report - “The capacity of NGOs in Poland,” available on [kondycja.ngo.pl](http://kondycja.ngo.pl) for more insights on the Polish non-governmental sector.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the representatives of all 176 organisations and initiatives that agreed to take part in the study, as well as the experts from organisations such as Migration Consortium, Homo Faber Association, Humanitarian Leadership Academy, Ashoka Foundation, NGO Forum “Together” and Ukraine Foundation, who helped us shape the final conclusions and recommendations.

Special thanks go to Elisa Sandri and Jessica Anderson of the Humanitarian Leadership Academy, on whose support we could count during the research phase and drafting of the report.

We invite you to read on.

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Marta Gumkowska



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Julia Bednarek

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# Research methodology

## Definitions

- The research focused on local organisations supporting refugees in Poland. We understand these to be registered organisations (foundations and associations<sup>1</sup>) or informal initiatives (grassroots, unregistered groups) that currently, in 2024, state that the target group of people receiving their support are refugees residing in Poland.
- Refugees are defined as all people who have fled their countries due to conflicts, violence, persecution, or other reasons, and currently reside in Poland regardless of whether they have refugee status, where they come from, and if they are in Poland temporarily or permanently.
- The research pertains to activities and situations the organisations find themselves in during the last two years, since the outbreak of a full-scale war in Ukraine in February 2022. It includes organisations supporting all refugees, not just those from Ukraine.

## Research objectives

The research aimed to reach Polish civil society organisations, and other informal initiatives that were providing aid to refugees in Poland as of February 2024, and to describe their activities, resources, challenges and needs. The main research objectives included:

- Characteristics and key activities of local organisations supporting refugees in Poland today;
- Confirming the conditions of these organisations in terms of their resources, needs and challenges, with a

particular focus on the issue of burnout among teams and challenges related to access to funding;

- Formulating recommendations that will facilitate support for these local organisations in Poland, addressed to institutional and donor organisations.

## Desk research

The first phase of the project included a review of existing reports and studies concerning organisations providing assistance to refugees, both in Poland and abroad. The list of references and sources consulted can be found in the → [Bibliography](#).

## Quantitative research

The main objectives of the quantitative data collection included:

- Looking at the type, location and scale of activities;
- Analysing the state of financial and human resources of local organisations, and related issues;
- Understanding future plans of these organisations in the context of challenges related to financing, as well as identifying key organisational needs.

The quantitative study included an online survey using the CAWI method and used purposive sampling for selecting organisations. We administered the survey to 176 organisations, and we considered 158 responses for the analysis. The remaining organisations did not meet the selection criteria (they currently do not provide support for refugees in Poland). All data discussed in the report refers to the group of 158 organisations that met the selection criteria

The quantitative database of organisations was based on a number of data sources: a database from the spis.ngo.pl service (an online database of all NGOs in Poland), a list of member organisations from NGO Forum “Together” (a collaborative network of organisations and entities for people with refugee and migration experience in Poland), and organisations from the MapujPomoc.pl website (a map of support points for refugees in Poland and Ukraine). The resulting database was supplemented with organisations we found on the internet using search phrases related to the research topic, as well as organisations that expressed interest in our study following invites distributed across the ngo.pl portal and its social media channels. Merging the data sets from all these sources allowed us to build a database containing 889 entities for which we confirmed email addresses and invited them to complete the online questionnaire. Details related to the structure of the database used in the study can be found in the [➔ Annexes](#).

The quantitative data collection was carried out between 18th January and 16th February 2024 using the LimeSurvey tool for online surveys. The questionnaire consisted of 31 questions and took approx. 15 to 20 minutes to complete. It was divided into six themes: basic information, people in NGOs, finances, cooperating with partners, problems and challenges, future and needs of the organisations.

In some sections of the report, the results of this study are compared with the results of a nationwide study carried out by the Klon/Jawor Association called „Condition of non-governmental organisations 2021.” This wider research project is conducted periodically using a representative sample of Polish associations and foundations, and in 2021 the sample size was 1,200 organisations. The nationwide data in the text refers to 2021, and the financial data is from 2020. More information can be found on [kondycja.ngo.pl](http://kondycja.ngo.pl).

## Qualitative research

The main objectives of the qualitative data collection included:

- Deepening the understanding of the three selected topics identified during the quantitative study, i.e. staff burnout, the future of organisations, and adaptability to change;
- Recognising organisational needs in relation to the above-mentioned topics.

Qualitative data was collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). We conducted six FGDs with a total of 22 representatives from various organisations (as outlined in the [➔ Annexes](#)). Individuals holding managerial and leadership positions took part in the interviews. Due to participants’ time constraints, two FGDs were divided into smaller sub-groups.

The sampling for the 6 FGDs was based on the characteristics that in the analysis of the quantitative data were found to most differentiate the organisations studied in this project. These characteristics were: the size of the annual budget, the team size, and the scope of operations. The interviews were divided into three main topics: team burnout, the future of organisations, and adaptation to change. Individuals who participated in the FGDs declared their willingness to do so earlier in the online questionnaire. The distribution of characteristics across the FGDs and the anonymised list of organisations can be found in the [➔ Annexes](#).

Finally, we carried out an FGD with experts in this field to sense-check the findings and co-create recommendations. Six experts took part in this activity from the following organisations and initiatives: Migration Consortium, Homo Faber Association, Humanitarian Leadership Academy, Ashoka Foundation, NGO Forum “Together” and Ukraine Foundation.

The FGDs were completed remotely between 29th February and 25th March 2024 using StreamYard tool. Each FGD lasted approx. 75 minutes, and all data was recorded and transcribed. At the beginning of each FGD, the participants were informed of the confidentiality of the information provided.

## Data analysis

Quantitative data analysis was done using the statistical analysis software SPSS. During the analysis, we assumed a statistical significance level to be  $p < 0.05$ . This means that all relationships described here are statistically significant at this level.

We conducted analysis of the qualitative data using transcripts from the interviews and used coding, where the list of codes was created based on the research questions, and key themes from the study.

## Study limitations

This study is not representative for all local organisations supporting refugees in Poland and does not warrant drawing statical conclusions. However, thanks to the use of public databases of entities supporting refugees and connected initiatives, a broad spectrum of organisations was reached, enabling a comprehensive study encompassing many operational aspects of these initiatives. For this reason, we are convinced that this research offers a comprehensive insight into the subject matter, and the needs of the group of organisations in question.

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1 | For the international reader, according to the Act of 24 April 2003 on Public Benefit Activities and Volunteering, non-governmental organisations in Poland are defined as organisations that do not operate for profit. This broad definition of the non-profit sector covers diversified entities such as political parties, trade unions and religious organisations. However, the common understanding of NGOs refers to associations and foundations, which are the most popular legal forms of NGOs in Poland. Associations are organisations in which the highest decision-making power is held by their members. In order to set up an association, a group of people is required, and no assets are needed. A foundation, on the other hand, is established by a founder (or founders), with the essential element for its establishment being assets. The statute of the foundation determines who holds the highest authority within it.

# Local organisations working with refugees - essential information

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In this chapter, we analyse the basic characteristics of local organisations providing aid to refugees in Poland. We examine their legal forms, locations, the scale of activities, the duration of their operations, and the industry within which they operate.

## Key findings

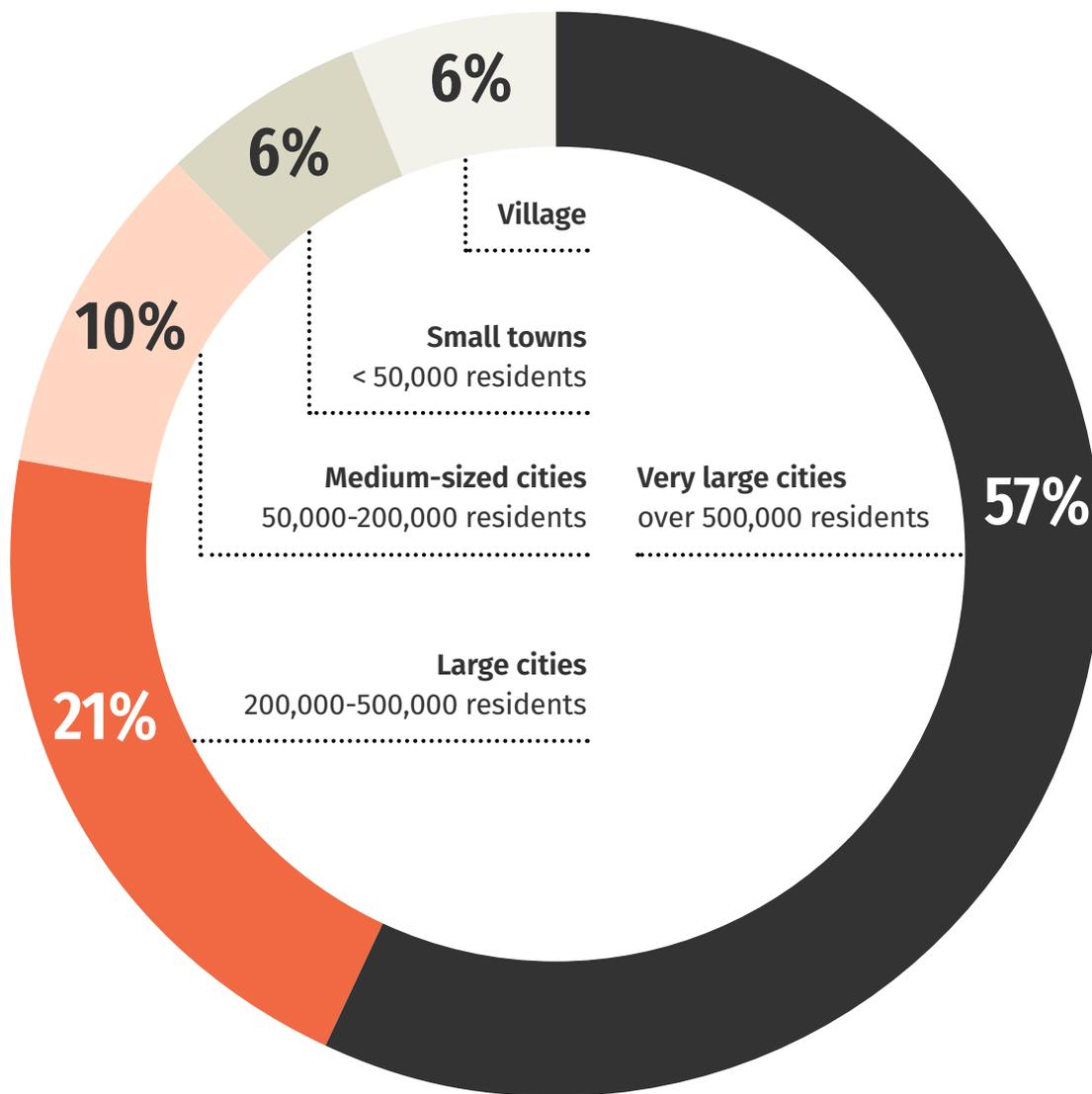
- Local organisations supporting refugees are part of a specific part of the non-governmental sector in Poland. Most of them are legally registered as foundations, and overall half are based in cities with over 500,000 people.
- The organisations surveyed have a long operational history - on average 12 years. A small percentage (14%) of organisations was established after 2022 as a result of the escalation of the war in Ukraine.
- Among the local organisations working with refugees, most operate on a nationwide or international scale.
- Local organisations mostly support refugees through supporting refugees is typically social services, such as educational activities (e.g. language courses), vocational training and career assistance, and psychological support.

# Legal form, location, and length of operations

In the surveyed group, foundations dominate (59%), while nearly one-third (32%) are legally registered as associations. The remaining entities consist of religious organisations (5%), informal groups (2%), and federations or unions of organisations (2%).

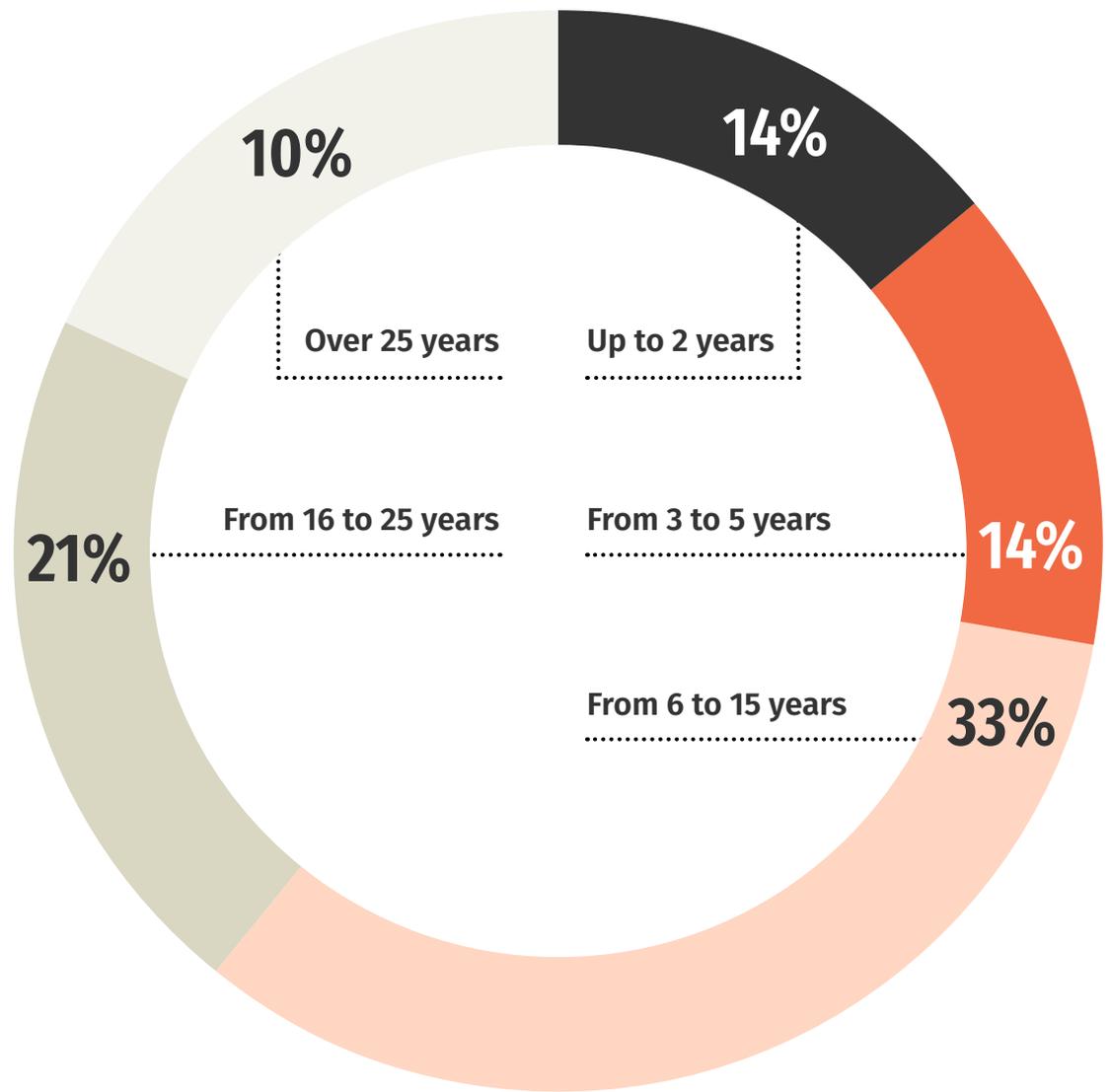
More than half (57%) of the organisations surveyed are based in Poland's largest cities with a population of over 500,000 people, including Warsaw, Cracow, Lodz, Wroclaw, or Poznan. 12% of the organisations are based in villages and small towns with up to 50,000 residents.

Most of the surveyed organisations have been active for 6 to 15 years, with the average length of operation being 12 years. Only 14% of the surveyed entities were established after 2022, as a consequence of the escalation of the war in Ukraine.



Location of organisations supporting refugees

**Length of organisations supporting refugees**

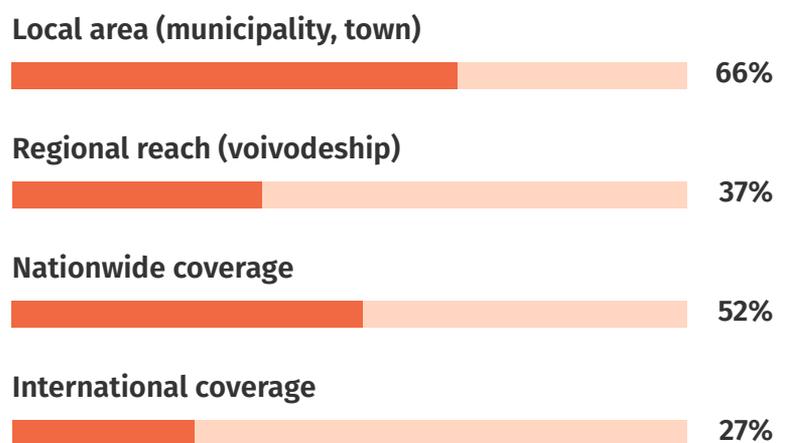


## Scale of operations

Organisations carry out their activities at the local, regional, or nationwide scale, or even combine domestic and international activities<sup>2</sup>. For this reason, in the survey, we asked about all areas of work implemented (the organisation could select multiple responses). Importantly, in the survey, the question concerning the scale of activities referred to all activities undertaken by organisations and not only those focusing on the support to refugees.

The vast majority (66%) of surveyed organisations provide services in their municipality or town, of which 23% do not have activities which go beyond the local scale. At the same time, over half of the surveyed NGOs (52%) declare that their activities cover the entire country, while 27% of NGOs provide support abroad (the latter group simultaneously operates in Poland).

**Scale of activities of organisations supporting refugees**



Organisations could choose multiple answers - the question referred to all the activities organisations carried out, not only those for refugees.

# Key areas of expertise

Most of the organisations supporting refugees (27%) recognise social services as their primary areas of specialisation. The three other main activities are development and humanitarian aid, education, and legal services. This is in line with the broader landscape of Polish organisations, as they also commonly provide multiple services in a number of thematic areas, while still specialising in specific services.



## In Focus: Surveyed Organisations Within the wider Polish NGO Landscape

The results of the study reveal that local organisations working with refugees differ from the entire Polish non-governmental sector in terms of:

- **Legal status:** the local organisations supporting refugees are predominantly foundations (59%). Foundations only constitute the 22% of the entire non-governmental sector in the country;
- **Location:** 78% of the examined organisations are based in large cities with over 200,000 residents. In the wider sector, only 32% are based in big cities;
- **Longevity:** 39% of the surveyed organisations have normally operated for over 15 years, compared to 29% in the entire sector operating for over 15 years;
- **Scale of activities:** the examined organisations are less likely to operate exclusively locally than the rest of the sector (23% versus 39%);
- **Primary activities:** organisations supporting refugees are more likely to specialise in social services than organisations in the entire sector (27% compared to 7%).

## Summary

Concluding the findings described in this chapter, the profile of the surveyed organisations working with refugees is unlike the rest of the sector in Poland. The researched entities are more urban, experienced, and operate on a larger scale. These characteristics support delivering activities that require cooperation, multi-organisational coordination with other state institutions, including the Office for Foreigners in each Voivodeship and educational institutions, as well as demand a comprehensive approach to the issue of adaptation and integration of refugees.

Probably helped by the fact that most of the organisations have a long history of operations and expert knowledge in the field, they were able to react quickly at the onset of the humanitarian crisis that arose with the mass arrival of people from Ukraine, as well as the crisis at the Polish-Belarusian border. These organisations were able to implement

a number of activities delegated from the state administration and coordinated social mobilisation of many Polish citizens to support refugees. This is discussed in the [2022 report](#) of the Migration Consortium, titled [The Polish School of Helping](#). Additionally, data from [The Polish Economic Institute](#) shows that it is exactly in cities where most refugees settle in Poland, and for this reason, the need for these activities is greater there.

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2 | Some of the organisations registered in Poland conduct their activities in the country as well as internationally. The best example is one of the biggest Polish organisations -- Polish Humanitarian Action, which provides aid in Poland, Ukraine, Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan, and other locations. Therefore, in the study, some of the organisations declared that they have a wider scope of activities beyond the national level, but at the same time, all of them, provide refugee support in Poland.

3 | Examples of activities in the area of social support and social services encompass running shelters, orphanages, and material and non-material assistance for the elderly, the sick, and the disabled.

# Activities of local organisations

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In this chapter, we describe the activities of the surveyed organisations, determining whether these are central to achieving organisational goals or if they are secondary. We present a ranking of the current activities implemented and highlight changes in the type of support provided since 2022. We also examine how organisations have changed their activities, missions, and goals in response to the humanitarian crisis and outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine.

## Key findings

- For the vast majority of the surveyed organisations (68%), activities aimed at refugees are their key aim.
- For one in three organisations, delivering activities for refugees is a relatively new experience, which has been undertaken as a consequence of the humanitarian crisis in Poland caused by the escalation of the war in Ukraine.
- The most common activities delivered by local organisations aim at integrating refugees (74%) and providing information (69%). Organisations have continuously adapted the type of support as the needs changed very quickly.
- As of 2022, most of the surveyed organisations experienced changes in their activities. However, a small group of organisations (27%) believes that their activities have changed permanently.
- As a result of the war in Ukraine and the humanitarian crisis that followed, 37% of organisations reframed their missions and objectives. The refugee crisis has significantly impacted the Polish non-governmental sector, changing the thematic areas in which these organisations operate.

# The importance of activities supporting refugees

In the case of 68% of the surveyed organisations, activities in aid of refugees represent the most important or one of the most important organisational objectives. Slightly over one-fourth (27%) state that these actions serve as an additional or secondary objective of their operations.

The situation changed drastically after February 2022. The outbreak of the full-scale war on Poland’s eastern border and the increase of refugees from Ukraine prompted many organisations, which had not previously been involved in supporting refugees, to start providing such support. **Before the escalation of the war in Ukraine, 25% of organisations that now support refugees did**

**not provide this aid at all.** For 31% of organisations, supporting refugees was of secondary importance prior to February 2022.

This means that organisations involved in supporting refugees today vary significantly in terms of their experience in this field. Based on the survey findings, four groups can be identified, differentiated by their experience and the significance of activities in aid of refugees. The first group, accounting for 34% of all surveyed entities, consists of organisations that declare supporting refugees as one of their key objectives, both now and prior to February 2022. From FGDs, it is evident that even before the outbreak of the full-scale war organisations in this group already delivered broad and comprehensive activities for the benefit of refugees.

Slightly fewer organisations (31%) currently provide support to refugees as one among other key activities. However, before February 2022, they either did not engage in these types of activities or considered them as secondary. **This means that for one in three**

**The importance of activities in support of refugees among organisational goals at two moments in time: currently and before February 2022**

**Before February 2022**



**Currently, in 2024**



0% 100%

- The most important goal
- One of the key goals
- One of the additional, secondary goals
- They are not a target
- Hard to say

The data analysis of the category “Before February 2022” includes organisations established no later than 2021.

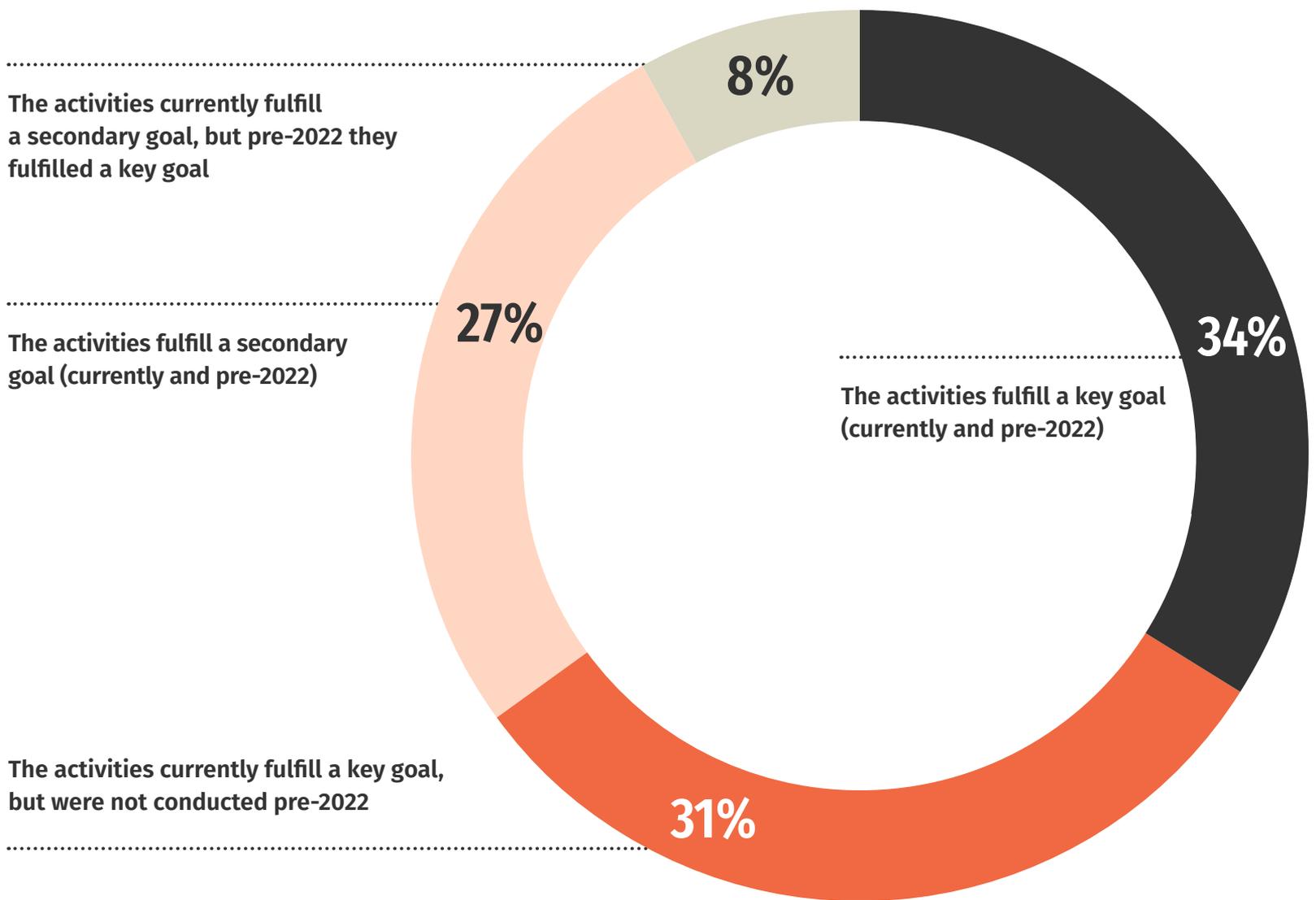
organisations, providing support for refugees is a relatively new experience, prompted by the humanitarian crisis in Poland caused by the escalation of the war in Ukraine. Services previously offered to Polish residents have now been redirected or expanded to refugees.

” After 24 February, the association transformed itself at a lightning speed into one of the most important humanitarian hubs because we already had created support systems for people with disabilities. During the first few months, local government institutions, and the city directed all people with disabilities to

us. Relatively quickly, we opened two additional reception points. [FGD5]

For over 25% of the surveyed organisations, support for refugees was not and still is not a focal point of their activities. Interestingly, for the minority (8%) of the organisations, refugee support was one of the key objectives before February 2022, but not anymore.

The change in the importance of activities for refugees in the organisations' objectives (comparison of the situation before and after February 2022)



As a result of the war in Ukraine and the humanitarian crisis that followed, less than half of organisations (37%) had to reframe their missions and objectives. The necessity to organisational objectives touches upon what forms the core, ethos of actions, and values of the organisation, as well as the internal identity of an organisation. Considering the scale of such change, it can be stated that it is a **significant phenomenon, demonstrating how much the refugee crisis influenced the non-governmental sector in Poland.**



## Activities implemented

### Current activities

We have described the area of expertise of local organisations supporting refugees in Chapter 1. Now, we will turn into looking at the activities implemented specifically targeting refugees. These activities could be directly related to the organisations' area of expertise, but they might also extend beyond it.

Local organisations supporting refugees state that their current activities (at the beginning of 2024) most often focus on community integration (74%) and providing information (69%). Slightly more than half of the organisations provide psychological support and conduct activities for children and teenagers. Almost half offer language assistance and translations, Polish lessons, as well as other non-vocational activities for adults.

Less often, activities such as support with finding employment, vocational training, material aid, or legal advice are undertaken. More than one-third of the surveyed organisations arrange accommodation and assist in finding housing. One in three organisations claim to coordinate relief efforts. Slightly fewer organisations undertake advocacy and cooperation with authorities. The least undertaken activities currently are medical assistance and family reunification.

Other activities provided by 13% of organisations include support of refugee entrepreneurship, support with administrative matters or transport, or support for other organisations providing refugee assistance in Poland.

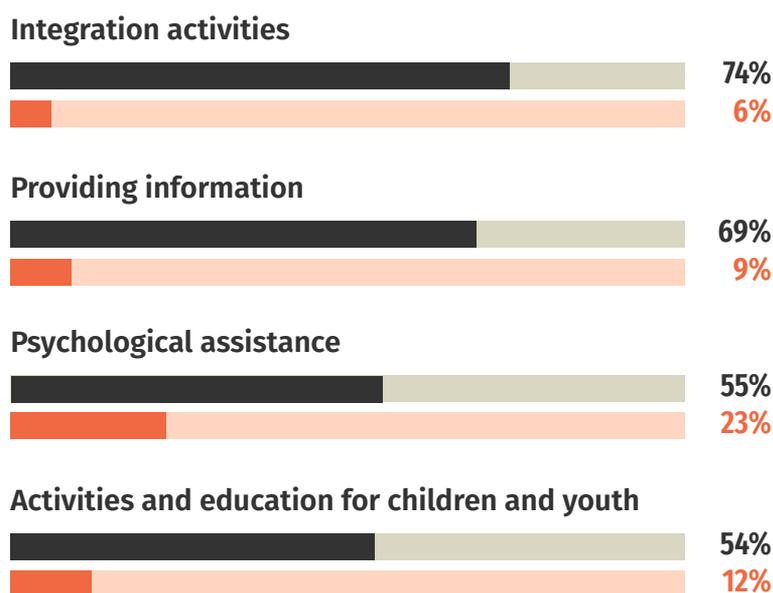
Some of the activities are more often undertaken by organisations with larger resources, a broader scope of activities, and greater experience. A prime example of such activities is legal advice, which is typically provided by organisations with budgets of approximately €230,000 (PLN 1 million), as well as by teams consisting of over 100 paid staff 100 volunteers. Providing legal advice is more common among organisations operating nationally or internationally, as well as those for whom supporting refugees has been a key objective even prior to the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine. This is due to available resources that these organisations can deploy, including experts and lawyers. Legal cases can often be prolonged, complex, and requires a deep understanding of both Polish and international law.

## Activities in support of refugees undertaken after February 2022

The survey provided an insight into the activities implemented immediately after the escalation of the war in Ukraine but have since been discontinued. The highest percentage of local organisations ceased providing assistance related to delivering material support (34%) and organising accommodation (28%), which addressed the most critical needs during the initial days and weeks of the humanitarian crisis following the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine. Other types of assistance provided in the immediate aftermath included searching for missing individuals, family reunification, and relocation to other countries. However, these activities are now less common. This shift is linked to a change in needs.

### Activities undertaken in support of refugees now (2024) and after February 2022

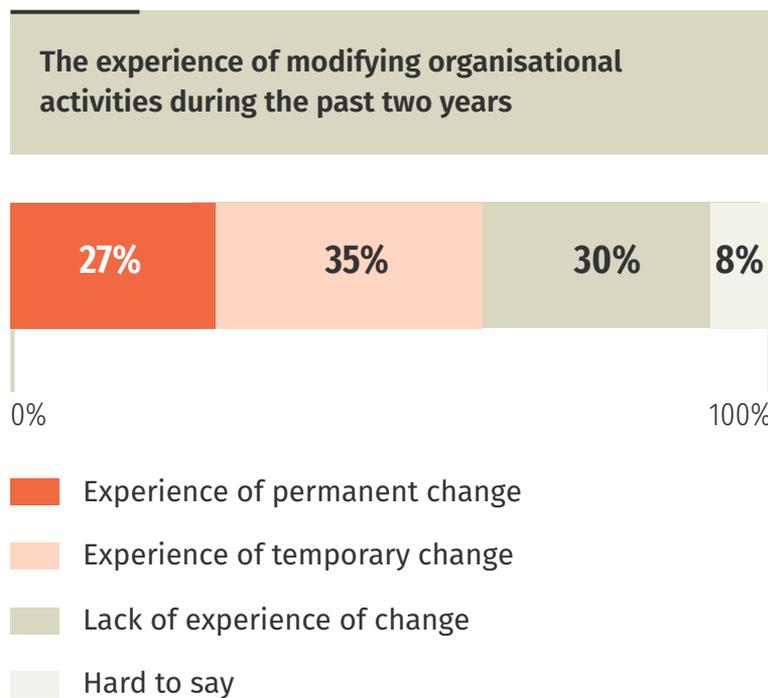
Currently conducted  
 Conducted after February 2022, but not currently



In relation to the total number of organisations conducting a specific type of activity (see chart), a significant proportion of organisations have stopped activities such as relief coordination and, medical and psychological assistance.

## Changes in activities

The majority of surveyed organisations (62%) have modified their activities since 2022. Clearly, the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine has altered the way organisations operate, especially those that had not previously engaged in aid activities or considered it a secondary activity. However, a small subset of organisations (27%) believes that these changes are permanent.



The interviewees confirmed that the war and the ensuing crisis have led to modifying the type of activities and aid delivered **on an ongoing basis as the needs changed very quickly. Learning to monitor the current needs of refugees was an important lesson from the crisis response.**

” The profile of the refugee’s needs has changed greatly because the needs of the first wave were different from those currently. We try to follow the needs of refugees, and constantly reassess their needs and feedback. Currently, we focus mainly on vocational counselling. [FGD5]

Along the way, we came to realise that we have to have tools that will enable us to obtain feedback on what they need, and which part of our assistance to broaden. Is it better to provide more food vouchers or clothing vouchers? At the beginning, there was a great need for clothing vouchers, but soon after they were not needed any more. Suddenly, food became more important, so the projects had to look a bit different. [FGD5]

A few months after the escalation of the military actions in Ukraine, local organisations had to consider which activities they wanted to sustain long-term and collaborate with other support providers in their region. Many statements suggest that only then **was it possible to achieve better coordination of efforts and greater specialisation among organisations.**

” In June and July, the situation calmed down because there was chaos before. And every organisation was forced to deal with everything. This meant dealing with humanitarian aid here, a language course here, and assistance elsewhere. At a later stage, we began holding meetings at the Social Activity Centre to avoid the chaos we experienced before when there were no clear-cut responsibilities. That’s when specialisation appeared. [FGD6]

When the war started, we were providing humanitarian aid, legalisation, translations, and assistance. After that we chose our specialisation area and... we focused on this area. Before the outbreak of the war, we were involved in integration, and we stuck to it. [FGD6]

Often, **the reduction or change in the way activities are delivered depends on funding cuts.** According to the interviewees, it is especially difficult when it concerns activities for which there was considerable funding during the first year after the escalation of the military activities in Ukraine. More information about the changes and challenges related to the funding of these organisations can be found in the → [Funding](#) chapter.

” We don’t have as much funding for direct support this year, and it is difficult for our staff because last year they were able to respond to the arising situations immediately: a private doctor appointment, purchasing a wheelchair for PLN 10,000, buying plane tickets to Colombia for those returning... And now, it is not possible. At the moment, we have a monthly micro-budget, which impacts the way we work with clients. [FGD5]

Organisations emphasise the importance of implementing changes thoughtfully. Respondents described a process of gradually withdrawing from specific forms of assistance, preceded by intensive **efforts to empower recipients to become independent, taking into account their individual situations and abilities.** The interviewees highlight that this process may unfold at different speeds; some recipients find it easier and progress faster towards self-sufficiency, while others need more time or may even not achieve independence at all.

It is important to prepare beneficiaries for the possibility of reduced or discontinued organisational activities. In the interviews, instances were mentioned **of organisations abruptly ending their assistance,** leaving recipients without any support. Consequently, other organisations needed to “fill the void” that was left by the departing entities.

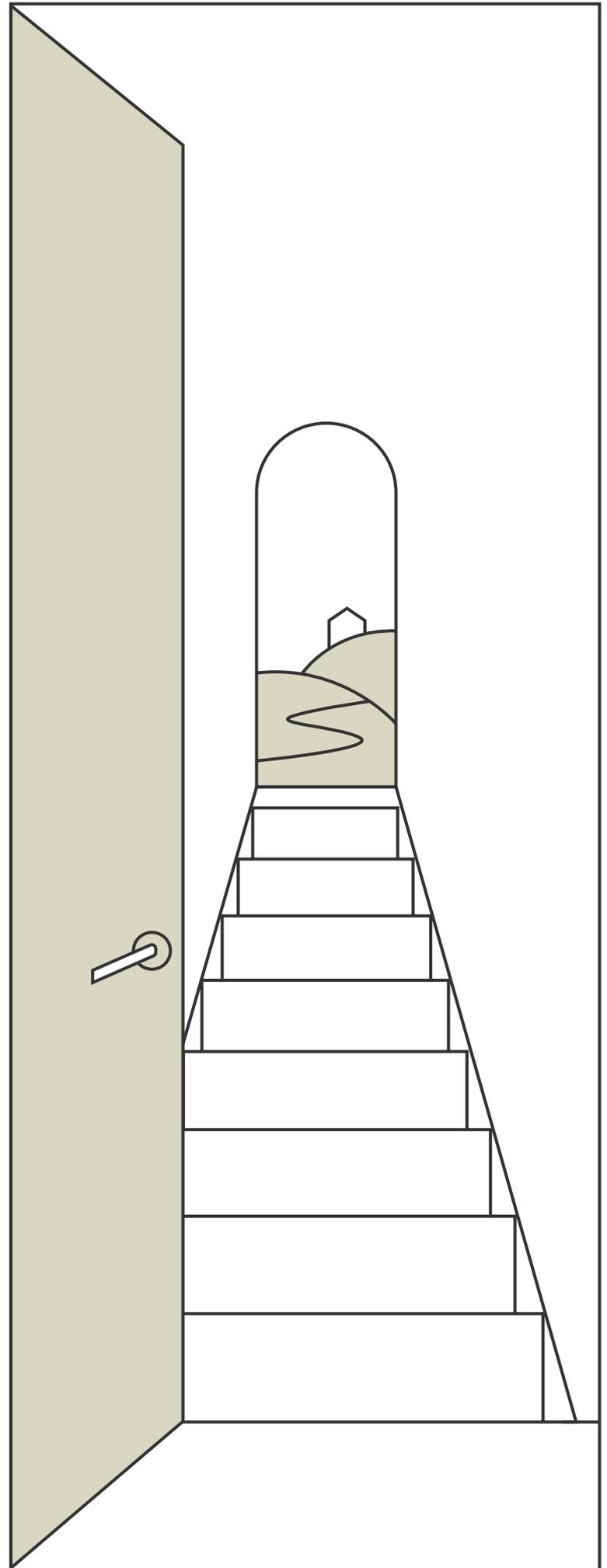
” Many of our current activities are focused on filling the void left by the entities that departed our city. As an example, one organisation which had mobile teams visiting shelters in the area, and this group left people with scheduled doctor appointments, psychologist visits, and with unclaimed prescriptions. Simply, the organisation terminated its activities, which is not atypical, but this should not happen without an exit strategy. [FGD3a]

## Summary

Local organisations operate comprehensively and support people arriving in Poland at all stages as they assimilate to their new realities. They guide refugees through the legal-administrative process, provide psychological assistance, support with finding housing and employment, learning the language, and integrating into the community.

However, these organisations vary in their length of experience with this target group. While a considerable number of organisations began delivering refugee support solely due to the humanitarian crisis in Poland, there is also a substantial group of organisations that have specialised in this area for many years.

It is worth highlighting that over the last two years, the profile of organisations' activities has evolved. In the early weeks and months of the crisis, activities focused on providing material assistance were predominant. However, currently, the focus has shifted towards integration efforts, psychological assistance, and vocational support. This shift reflects the evolving needs of refugees residing in Poland. Organisations continuously monitor these needs and attempt to address them by adapting their activities. Other factors driving the changes in organisations' activities include the division of tasks between different entities in the area, the increased specialisation of individual institutions, as well as the termination of funding by sponsors. These factors forced organisations to either scale back or alter the scope of their activities.



# People and teams in local organisations

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In this chapter, we describe the human capital in local organisations supporting refugees. We analyse the current size of teams, comparing them to before and after the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine. We also assess the portion of teams involved in refugee support activities.

## Key findings

- The significant majority of organisations supporting refugees employ staff (on average 12 employees) and engage volunteers (on average 15 volunteers).
- However, not all organisations have employees: 17% of the surveyed organisations do not employ a single person. These are mainly organisations with a shorter operational experience, especially those established after the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine.
- Although refugee support is not the only area of focus, the data points to a high level of involvement for staff in this area. Half of the surveyed organisations involve 75% of their employees and volunteers in activities for refugees.
- Almost half of the surveyed initiatives declare an increase in employee and volunteer team sizes in 2023 when compared to 2021, before the outbreak of the full-scale war.
- However, the enlargement of teams is not permanent. Nearly half (42%) of organisations anticipate the number of staff will decrease in 2024. This situation will have some consequences, as organisations have invested in the training and skills development of the newly employed staff who they will have to let go of due to lack of funding, threatening the continuity of their operations.

- The most significant challenges faced by organisations working in this sector of civil society (over half of the surveyed organisations) are fatigue and burnout, which affect staff, volunteers, and management.

# Changes in team sizes

Data indicates that the increase of human capital in local organisations supporting refugees is, to a large extent, the result of the escalation of the war in Ukraine in 2022. Along with this, new needs of those fleeing the war emerged in tandem with new financing opportunities for organisations, which led to an increase in human capital. **Almost half of the surveyed initiatives declared an increase in the employee and volunteer team sizes in 2023 when compared to 2021, before the outbreak of the full-scale war.** A significant, almost twofold growth in the team size was experienced by 30% of organisations, while a similar scale in volunteer growth was reported by 26% of organisations. The growth of teams of employees in the surveyed organisations is directly linked to the increase in their budgets. Among the surveyed organisations, those with larger budgets,

with at least approximately €230,000 (over PLN 1 million) in 2023, faced an increase in numbers of employees more frequently than organisations with smaller budgets.

In the FGDs, organisation representatives indicated that the **dynamic change in the size of the teams and volunteers which followed the outbreak of the full-scale war is not permanent.** In the history of the organisations, 2022 was marked with the growth of both teams and budgets. Unfortunately, in the second half of 2023, organisations were forced to downsize their teams due to reduced funding.

” We began in 2018, and mainly in theory, in a somewhat reduced capacity, as there was no real interest or requirements as far as migrants and refugees were concerned. However, in 2022, we experienced a windfall, both in terms of the beneficiaries and donors. From a team of 4, we expanded to 36. The majority of our personnel are refugees, who began as volunteers in the Social Integration Centre and were later employed by us. [FGD5]

## The number of people involved in organisational activities in 2023, compared to 2021 (the questions were related to the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine)

### Number of paid staff



### Number of volunteers



- There was a significant, at least twofold, decrease
- There has been some decline (less than twofold)
- There were no significant changes
- There has been some increase (less than twofold)
- There was a significant, at least twofold, increase
- Hard to say, not applicable



The 'Hard to say, not applicable' category also includes organisations that did not operate before 2022.

” In the second half of 2023 we had to lay off the entire assistance team, 10 people, because our projects came to an end. In 2022 and the first half of 2023, we were running multiple projects, and we employed quite a few people who we had to let go at the end of 2023. It was difficult for our organisation. [FGD6]

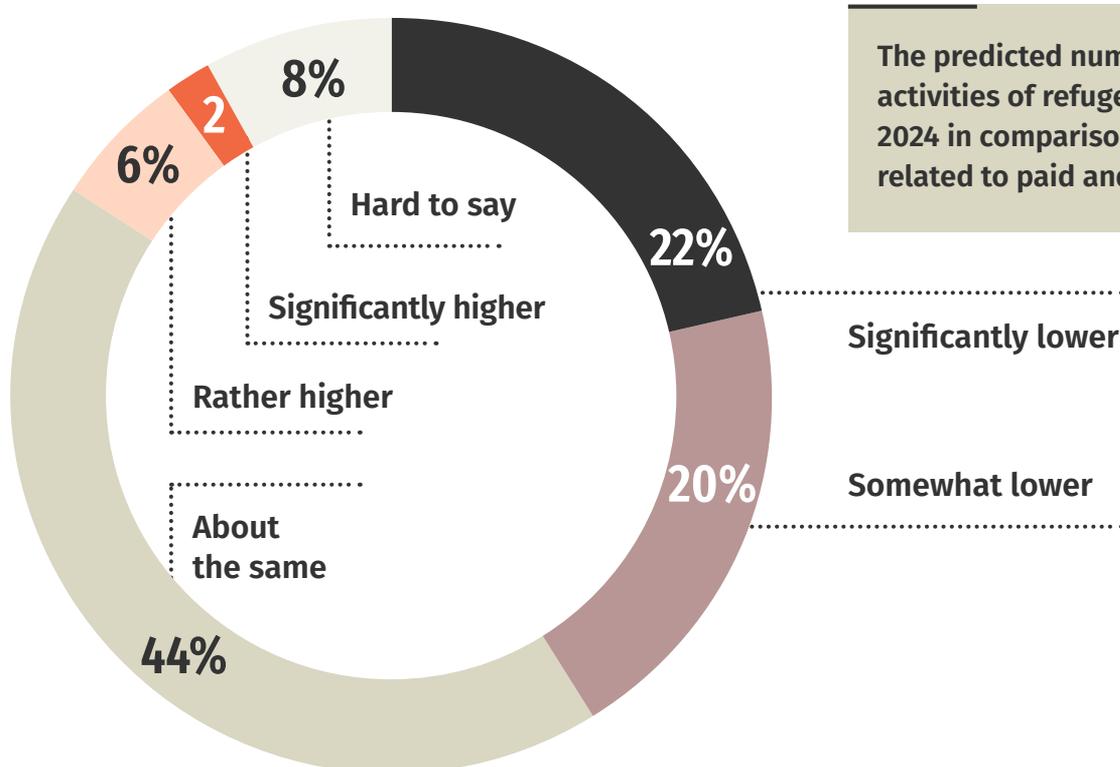
**The consequences of such fluctuations in the team are multiple.** Organisations invest in the skills of newly hired people who they must lay off relatively quickly. The necessity of reducing the workforce is also a threat to the continuity of operations and the functioning of the organisation itself, which will have a new, reduced structure.

” We have managed to restructure everything so that it works and is harmonious and each aspect complements what the other team members are doing. And cutting out one of us will turn the whole system upside down. (...) Regardless which puzzle piece we remove from this puzzle, the rest will fall apart. [FGD6]

Growing the team size also had positive consequences. The increased number of people in the organisation allowed for greater professionalisation and motivated to implement various procedures, e.g. regarding work evaluation or introducing activities to combat burnout.

” We are becoming a more professional organisation; we are becoming better at managing. We are still creating policies; we have implemented a seven-hour workday; additional leave days, and wide-reaching developmental programmes. This was the answer to burnout. We place emphasis, for example, on workload monitoring and client feedback. [FGD5]

In our survey, we also asked about the immediate future of organisations regarding their personnel. **42% of local organisations anticipate a decrease in the number of people implementing activities in 2024 compared to 2023.** A similar percentage (44%) expect that the size of employees and volunteers will not change significantly. Only 8% of organisations expect the growth of their staff.



The predicted number of people involved in the activities of refugee supporting organisations in 2024 in comparison to 2023 (the questions were related to paid and volunteer teams only)

# Team sizes

Most of the organisations (83%) working in support of refugees employ paid staff, which means they have at least one person employed on permanent basis (under an employment contract or another type of agreement).

**17% of organisations operate only through volunteers.**

Predominantly, these are organisations with limited operational experience. 40% of local organisations established after the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine do not employ a single person.

On average, the surveyed organisations are made up of a 12-person employed team (median), and only 9% of organisations count very large teams of over 100 people.

**Nearly half (49%) of the surveyed organisations employ from 1 to 20 staff members.**

The size of the employed team is directly proportional with the organisation’s operational experience: the longer the operational experience of an organisation, the larger the team of permanent staff. On average, an organisation with two years of operational experience employs one person,

while organisations with 3 to 10 years of experience employ an average of 8 people. Those with 20 or more years of experience typically employ 30 people on average.

Volunteer support is very common among the surveyed organisations, with 94% of organisations using volunteers. On average, these local organisations engage volunteer teams of 15 people (median). 16% of the surveyed organisations have teams of over 100 volunteers, with the majority engaging from 1 to 10 volunteers. Clearly, local organisations rely more on volunteers than on paid employees.

If we consider both employees and volunteers as the total human resources available to the organisation, one in three organisations is made up of a maximum of 20 people, while every fourth organisation over 100. The following chart presents detailed data about the size of employee and volunteer teams.

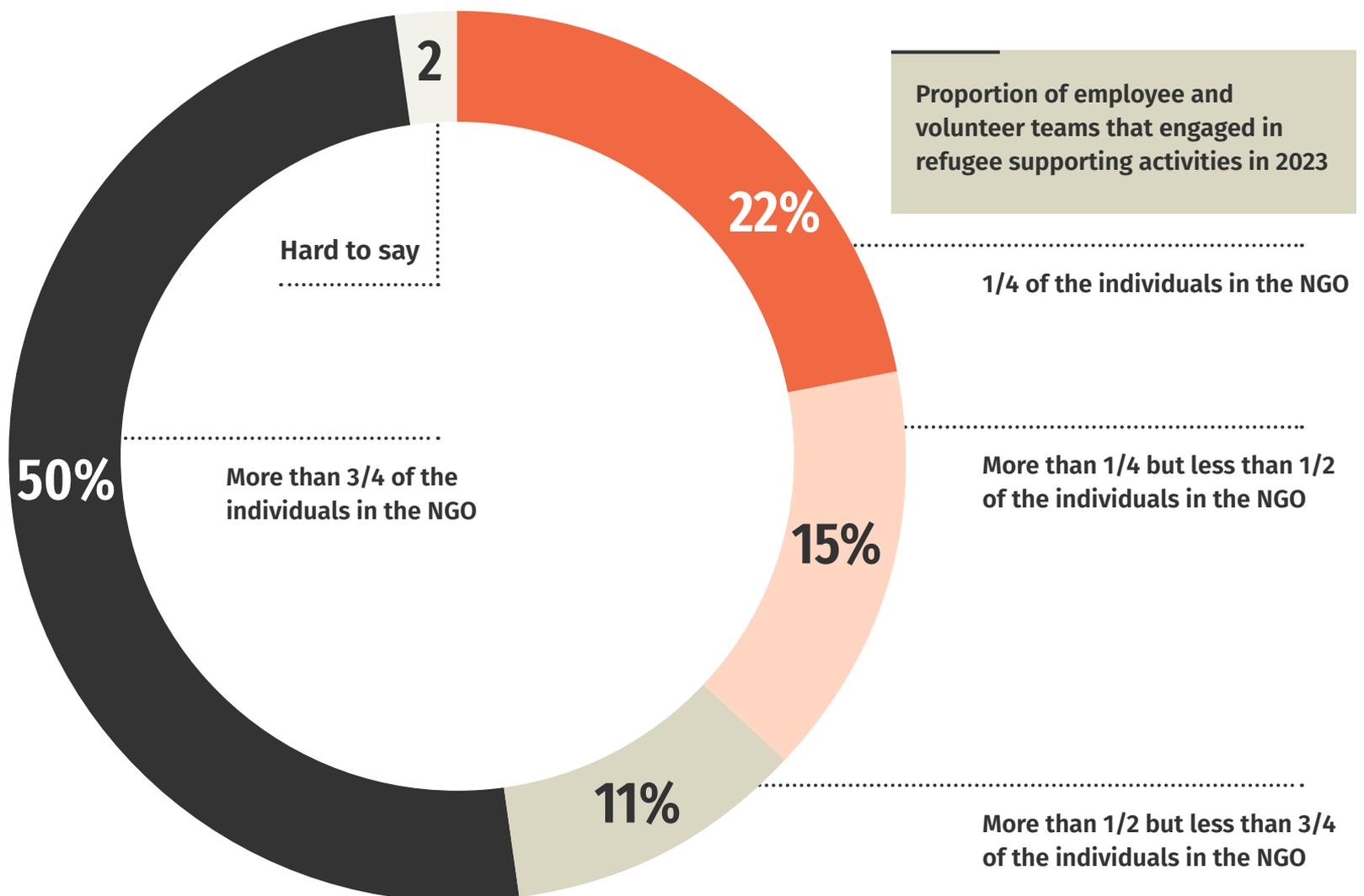


The inability to pay for work done by team members and the related challenges is a stark reality among organisations. **The representatives of three organisations with smaller resources state that management of the organisations is carried out on a voluntary basis**, which requires them to undertake paid employment elsewhere. They are often forced to contribute their own money to sustain the organisation.

” I have only one need: stable employment because, as you can see, I volunteer all the time. At the moment, my personal finances are completely drained having donated to the foundation, just to cover electricity bills and repaint the premises. [FGD2b]

” In our organisation, we don't have people working just for the organisation (...). We all work professionally elsewhere. This is our free time, which we dedicate to working in the NGO. [FGD2a]

The above data refers to the human capital of the entire organisation. Polish organisations often work across multiple sectors. The fact that they work for refugees does not mean it is their only area of focus. In this context, it is important to measure the significance of activities targeted at refugees compared to all other activities. To determine this, we asked representatives of organisations what proportion of people in their organisation engages in refugee supporting activities. **Half of local organisations involve 75% of their employees and volunteers in the activities with refugees.** The data demonstrates a high level of engagement among the surveyed organisations in these types of activities.



# People-related issues in local organisations

The most significant challenge concerning people working for refugee supporting organisations in the last two years is **fatigue and burnout. It affects the staff, volunteers, and management teams. Over half of the surveyed organisations struggle with this problem** (precisely 59% of NGOs report staff and volunteer burnout, and 58% report burnout among leaders). A detailed description of this issue can be found in the next chapter → [Staff burnout](#).

**Slightly less than half of the organisations working in support of refugees (46%) report difficulties with finding and retaining personnel.** These difficulties more often impact organisations with smaller resources, both financial and human. Precisely half of the organisations that engage up to 100 employees and volunteers struggle with retaining personnel, while among organisations that involve over 100 people, this problem is experienced by fewer entities (32%). Challenges with attracting and retaining staff appear to be similar in relation to the size of financial resources available. Organisations with smaller budgets report this issue more often than organisations with budgets surpassing approximately €230,000 (PLN 1 million).

However, **38% of organisations struggle with a shortage of people ready and willing to volunteer.** This challenge is more pronounced among local organisations that were not previously involved in refugee support before the escalation of the war in Ukraine (53%). This is most likely due to a lack of experience in recruiting supporters and creating a cohesive group willing to collaborate with the organisation. Additionally, the scarcity of socially engaged individuals more often impacts entities established in locations with populations of up to 50,000 residents.

The least prominent human capital issues in organisations pertain to people management (30%) and a lack of relevant skills in the organisation (26%).

## Issues concerning people in organizations in terms of their activities for refugees, experienced in the last two years



Data for the NGO sector as a whole is derived from a representative survey carried out by Klon/Jawor Association - "Capacity of Non-Governmental Organizations 2021." This research also asked about the two-year prospective at the time. The lack of data for a part of the category of problems indicates that the relevant categories were not researched at the time. The percentages are the sum of responses indicated by 'very noticeable' and 'somewhat noticeable' for each specific issue.

In the group interviews, it was emphasised that in 2022, the readiness of private citizens to engage in voluntary activities was very high. However, the current shortage of people ready and willing to engage and provide support is related to the diminishing energy levels among Polish society, possibly due to an overall fatigue. One organisation noted an acute lack of involvement from young people and their fresh perspectives and energy.

” People are stepping back, and new ones are not stepping in. They are tired of it, but perhaps because they earn money elsewhere. (...) Young people almost never come. (...) I’m not sure if it’s a generational issue, that they have different priorities. (...), we lack new blood; young people, who will come and say, listen, now we are doing it differently because there’s a new reality. It would be amazing if the perspective of the twenty-year olds showed up in our organisation. [FGD2a]

## In Focus: Surveyed Organisations Within the wider Polish NGO Landscape

Comparing the human capital described in this report to the broader NGO sector in Poland reveals a significantly larger scale. In the surveyed group of organisations, the challenges regarding personnel are also distinct in nature. Local organisations supporting refugees differ in this regard as follows:

- The number of employees: 83% of the surveyed organisations have teams averaging 12 people, compared to 41% for all NGOs in Poland, which average 3 people,
- The number of volunteers: 94% of the surveyed organisations engage volunteers (averaging

15 people), while in the entire sector, it is 61% (averaging 5 people),

- The scale of burnout: in the surveyed group of organisations this phenomenon is markedly higher. 58% experience burnout among its leaders or teams. This figure stands at 43% among the overall non-governmental sector in Poland,
- Other human capital issues: lack of people willing to get involved with civic and volunteer activities is reported by 38% of the refugee-supporting organisations, while the same issue is noted by 62% of all NGOs in Poland.

The differences in personnel among the surveyed organisations are interlinked to the higher budgets of organisations supporting refugees compared to the overall sector. This was influenced by significantly larger funding opportunities that emerged soon after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. Additionally, activities requiring direct engagement with specific groups of people typically necessitate larger staff resources. For instance, managing contact with these individuals may require more personnel compared to other types of projects.

A pressing issue for Polish organisations, albeit less common, is the shortage of individuals willing to participate in civic and volunteer activities. Additionally, the fact that fewer organisations in the surveyed group, compared to the entire NGO sector, report a shortage of people willing to engage in volunteering is most likely connected to the civic mobilisation observed in Poland right after the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine.

## Summary

The surveyed organisations experienced favourable conditions regarding human capital in 2022 and 2023. The availability of international funding, along with the strong community response in Polish society, enabled organisations to create groups of individuals (employees and volunteers) ready and willing to undertake efforts to receive refugees into the country. However, as the transition from the reception to integration phase of refugees in Poland occurred, organisations experienced adverse changes, impacting the human capital aspect. The declining energy among Polish society towards supporting have been confirmed through regular CBOS surveys on attitudes towards the war in Ukraine. [The results of CBOS survey from November 2023](#) revealed that 33% of Poles were engaged in assisting refugees from Ukraine, either directly or through someone in their household. Over a year earlier, in April 2022, the percentage of such statements stood at over 60%.

This decline in the willingness to support refugees among Polish society, as well as the necessity to reduce organisation staff count due to the withdrawal of funding by international organisations, puts refugee-supporting organisations in an exceedingly difficult situation. The needs concerning refugee support are not diminishing, but rather, their nature is evolving.

Simultaneously, the prolonged duration of working within the crisis has impacted the mental well-being of staff. Consequently,

fatigue and burnout among both the employees and volunteers, as well as the management, are today the most pressing issues concerning human capital. This stands as one of the most significant challenges of the surveyed group of organisations overall, posing a threat to the continuity of delivering effective refugee support.

# Staff burnout

In this chapter, we will analyse the causes, symptoms, and consequences of burnout for local organisations supporting refugees. We will also describe the steps taken to address the issue of burnout, and further needs of organisations in this area. We discuss the phenomenon of burnout in detail based on the data gathered through FGDs.

## Key findings

- Burnout is the most serious issue for people working in local organisations supporting - it affects almost 60% of organisations. Most of organisations that identify this problem among their teams declare that they undertake anti-burnout measures, for instance, supervision or integration activities.
- The causes of burnout are mainly structural and are associated with the lack of job security in these organisations. This is caused by the unstable financial situation of the non-governmental sector as a whole. The emotional burden and stress of working with people in crisis and those affected by trauma are the causes of burnout in this sector.
- Even though burnout among management and teams has different causes, the consequences are felt by the entire organisation.
- Local organisations express the need for strategic and long-term solutions, rather than one-off support in dealing with burnout. Funding for staff, capacity development and non-financial rewards need to be considered as part of their strategic plans to ensure causes of burnout are addressed.

Among all issues concerning people in local organisations supporting refugees, burnout is the most common challenge, affecting 60% of organisations. Additionally, survey respondents predict the worsening of this phenomenon, as 66% of organisations foresee deepening of challenges regarding the mental well-being of their personnel.

To expand the understanding of burnout and capture its consequences in various organisations, we conducted separate FGDs with organisations operating across Poland, including those with large teams of over 20 people and those engaging fewer than 20 people.

Below, we describe the causes and symptoms of burnout identified by representatives of the surveyed organisations. We also examine the symptoms and impact of burnout among management and staff. Additionally, we will explore solutions implemented by organisations to prevent or address burnout.

It is worth noting that the FGDs included leaders of organisations supporting refugees, and the following views express their perspectives on the issue of burnout.

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## Causes of burnout

Burnout in organisations supporting refugees has multiple root causes. **Structural factors within the sector, such as financial instability and the lack of employment security, are significant contributors.** The uncertainty arising from grant-based funding and the lack of financial security for ongoing activities, combined with the pressing need to provide assistance to refugees, create stress for the management teams and members of staff. In the initial phase following the escalation of the war in Ukraine, there were various funding opportunities for the humanitarian response, which led to the creation of multiple paid positions. However, since 2023, the decrease in funding has led to a decrease in the number of these positions, leading to job insecurity and in some cases members of staff have had to seek second jobs, contributing to the increasing levels of fatigue.

” There is general tiredness resulting from being understaffed. (...) In our organisation, we do not have anyone who works exclusively for the organisation. Everyone works professionally elsewhere (...) And burnout is linked to fatigue, lack of new human resources. (...) we don't have work capacity to carry out tasks we have listed in our statute. [FGD2a]

The difficult financial situations of smaller organisations sometimes force staff and/or management to contribute their own money to support the running of the organisation. This practice, coupled with the investment of personal spare time, leads to frustration and burnout.

” We are in a fantastic situation because we've secured premises from the city. In January, I was able to move the kids we were taking care of because they didn't find places in public kindergartens. We've renovated the premises ourselves with the help of volunteers, my husband's, and mine. Electricity bill because there's electric heating: PLN 6,500 for

January! We are unable to support it. I've paid for it using my own money. And, you know, this is also a reason for burnout and growing frustration. And, it was supposed to be so great. [FGD2b]

Long-term fatigue and burnout are also attributed to **factors such as increased workload and the growing scale of needs among the refugee population.** The escalation of the war in Ukraine led to a sudden and considerable increase in demands that organisations were not prepared for. In the first months after the outbreak of the full-scale war, work often extended beyond regular working hours, as, it required immediate responses.

” I remember 2022 as if it were a dream. I come from Ukraine and still get calls from my relatives, colleagues, and friends. For instance, I worked from 6 am to 5 am the following day. In June, I had to undergo therapy because I was so exhausted. [FGD6]

I believe that we weren't really prepared for such a scale of activities, and I think it overwhelmed all of us. Up to that point, in our everyday lives, we never faced such challenges. We didn't have to deal with such issues and on this scale. It was a bit of a lack of solid preparation, and best practices from other countries. [FGD2a]

Burnout is also caused by **emotional factors related to working with newly arrived refugees.** Working with people who have experienced difficult and often traumatic situations can bear an emotional burden on staff. An added challenge is the lack of well-being practices, such as supervision sessions, to support emotional well-being of employees.

” I think it is the result of seeing trauma (...). And if your team is missing professional supervision, which would take care of emotions, it's only natural that symptoms of burnout will appear. In our case, we take team supervision quite seriously because we also work in psychosocial support. [FGD2a]

I've noticed that people who are burnt out can't really cope with their emotions, the fact they can't help everyone that they don't have this absolute power, they can't support everyone. (...) and then people come and share their difficult life situations. Unfortunately, this powerlessness can sometimes translate into how we treat our clients. [FGD1]

Burnout is also caused by **organisational factors related to work management and internal processes.** The lack of clearly defined boundaries around working hours, often leads to working late and over weekends. While the ability to react to the needs of refugees spontaneously and swiftly is undoubtedly an advantage, there is a downside: the absence of suitable systems and processes to manage these responses lead to various challenges, including fatigue, and burnout.

” I can foresee a massive issue, which I've encountered myself in the past, and it's noticeable among the new staff. There's the eagerness to do too much, and unfortunately in NGOs there's no time limit, there's no 9 to 5. [FGD1]

A problem with a non-governmental organisation is often the tendency to act very impulsively. When we begin our activities, we lack corrective mechanisms from the outset. After the fact, we realise that someone's burnt out, resigned from work. [FGD1]

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# Burnout symptoms and consequences

As burnout has multiple origins, it can manifest in various ways within organisations. The representatives of management board involved in this research reported symptoms of burnout manifested as **constant stress, total absorption of what is happening at work, and feeling overwhelmed**. They also emphasised that stress and overwhelm are pervasive issues that can't be resolved simply by taking a holiday or resting.

**Individuals experiencing burnout in organisations can impact the functioning of the entire team.** Our research has shown that burnout results in difficulties in meeting deadlines, being late for work, or a build-up of tensions among employees. Burnout does not always result in falling behind on tasks. It has also manifested as falling into routine, relying on formulaic solutions, and decreasing creative energy and innovation within the team.

” The physical tiredness and feeling overwhelmed become evident in not being punctual, lack of energy, and paying less attention to the quality of work. In the sense that it's already following its own course, instead of preparing, thinking through a workshop or activity, as if they are just coming along because they lack that energy. (...). It also manifests in the lack of creativity in the team, the willingness to search for new solutions, and ideas. There's only routine and repetition. [FGD1]

Another symptom shared during the FGDs was physical tiredness, or general weakness, which leads to taking **frequent sick days**. Sick leave has been described as the final manifestation of burnout.

” In 2023, we had the highest number of sick leave notes. This is also a result of what happened with us in 2021. And these are such obvious symptoms of burnout because sick leave is the final sign of burnout, however, fatigue, lack of willingness, lateness is also happening. [FGD1]

## The situation in local organisations

From the FGDs, it is evident that burnout among local organisations operating on a smaller scale with smaller teams is not so widespread. Representatives from these organisations admitted that **although symptoms of fatigue may be noticeable, the subject of burnout is not brought up**, and the phenomenon is not discussed at the team level. Representatives of these organisations therefore considered whether the problem is not strongly felt in their organisations or if the absence of discussion on burnout is a strategy to avoid confronting the problem.

” I think that the problem lies in the fact that we don't openly discuss the issue of burnout. Even when we see that someone is becoming withdrawn, we think that it's a result of being tired of the issues. But actually, there is no plan in the organisation, algorithm that can be implemented when we see signs of the issue. I think it's a problem that we don't talk about it in an open forum, and don't call it by its name. Perhaps, it isn't such a big problem after all. [FGD2a]

## Burnout in the team and its consequences

FGD participants highlighted a difference between the burnout of individuals within a team and those in management positions. For each of these two groups, there are slightly different origins as well as consequences for the organisation.

**A very strong commitment to clients and beneficiaries of organisations** is one of the roots of burnout among team members. In our FGDs, it was reported that staff strive to support clients no matter what, which often demands complete dedication and emotional resilience. Because of the emotional commitment, there is sometimes a lack of patience towards team members and an increase of internal frictions.

” The team has a hyper sense of responsibility. Even when they are extremely tired, but when they go outside to meet the clients, then they give it their all, but once back in the organisation, it’s as if they had no more resources. That’s when their emotions are running havoc, sometimes it’s like they are... not aggressive, but they have no patience for one another. It’s as if they spent the rest of their energy reserves outside, so that the clients, beneficiaries don’t bear the cost of it. [FGD1]

A very strong commitment towards the clients may push employees to accomplish difficult tasks despite tiredness and difficulties, but once these tasks are finished, they often have to take sick leave to recuperate. Unfortunately, while completing the task, they often do not communicate their exhaustion, which, according to a board representative, is likely because they do not know how to do it. **When a team member goes on sick leave, the workload needs to be redistributed, sometimes triggering a domino effect where other individuals also go on sick leave, due to stress and organisational crisis.**

” We already have a number of people on mental health sick leave, and it usually looks like this: people just work, trying to accomplish something, and when, for instance, they send out a difficult report, finish a difficult project, they just collapse the next day, because the built up tension is released, and then they are out. (...) For us, organisationally, it’s very difficult when one or two people suddenly disappear. [FGD1]

**Burnout also affects volunteers**, as they try to do as much as they can, but they quickly feel burnt out, often leading them to leave the organisation. This is particularly challenging for the organisations that heavily rely on volunteers’ commitment.

## Burnout among board members

From the FGDs, it is evident that burnout among board members is a common occurrence too. It is primarily connected to a heightened **sense of responsibility for the organisation and its employees**. The perpetual concern about the organisational survival, providing job security, especially amidst acute financial uncertainty, results in operating under constant stress. At the same time, a strong focus on administrative and managerial aspects of the organisation can lead to losing sight of the organisation’s core mission.

” Lately, in our management board team, I think all of us have been diagnosed with burnout, which doesn’t make operating easier. [FGD1]

It is responsibility for other people, for workplaces, constant thinking about the foundation’s survival so that individuals also have employment. I reckon, this is where you can lose the sense of mission, why we do it, and become, perhaps, like a clerk. [FGD1]

Managing an organisation, especially during a crisis, entails a high level of stress. The excess of responsibilities and time pressure often leads to **feeling overwhelmed and constantly rushed**. Consequently, this leads to the inability to properly considering tasks, increasing tension among the team and resulting in postponing important tasks, such as designing projects.

Burnout among the management impacts the rest of the team because leaders serve as the driving force behind the team. Recognising the importance of their own mental well-being, it was clear in our FGDs that individuals in management positions acknowledge they need to look after their own mental health, so that they can positively influence the team's atmosphere, effectively manage the organisation, and maintain consistency between the messaging directed at the team and their own actions. These individuals felt the **responsibility of setting an example of self-care** to build a healthier work culture in the organisation.

” Setting an example of looking after yourself is very difficult. Whatever we say from the perspective of those in management positions, if we ourselves are constantly tense and tired, we are effectively sending a message that this is our desired style of work. You have to push yourself, become a workaholic, you have to be stressed out because if aren't stressed about something, you aren't really responsible. This is something we diagnosed, and we are working on, to start with ourselves to make sure this example is authentic, not just lip service, with actions that contradict it. [FGD1]

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## Counteracting burnout

**In the survey, 59% of organisations that have identified burnout as an issue state that they take actions to address it in their teams.** Representatives of these organisations shared strategies they employ to counteract burnout during our FGDs.

**Psychological support is frequently offered to both teams and individuals through** group and individual supervision sessions led by external professionals. These sessions aim to identify symptoms of burnout and provide support. At times, organisations carry out supervision aimed at addressing specific and particularly difficult situations. Some organisations also offer psychological support in the form of **therapy sessions**. In turn, individual management **coaching** provides a space for discussions and venting frustrations.

” We have a budget allocation for the team's psychological support. The support we get from UNHCR has been hugely beneficial to us. Included in this, we have a team where professional supervision sessions are carried out, which gives us a lot. [FGD5]

Individual, external coaching for managers certainly works for us. It consists of long and recurring sessions. A person, who carries greater responsibility, and pressure, has an opportunity to talk it through with someone from outside. I know, it often comes down to just having a good venting session when you can spill all your frustrations, but it clears the air and provides safe space. [FGD1]

It is clear from our data that support provided by an in-house therapist has not been as helpful as other activities. The overlapping professional and personal connections among those seeking support from the same person created concerns regarding confidentiality and the therapist's neutrality. In another case, group

supervisions were ineffective because long, regular meetings began to generate additional tasks, stress, and burden for staff.

Organisations also offer capacity development opportunities, such as **burnout prevention** training, aimed at increasing awareness of the symptoms and consequences of burnout. They also provide trainings in **softer skills**, such as setting boundaries and non-violent communication, to equip employees with tools to better cope with challenges.

Organisations strive to provide a **calendar of events and training sessions for employees** to access additional activities focused on personal and professional development. One organisation allocates additional **funds for employee personal development**, such as language courses or professional training.

Another category of actions aimed at preventing burnout involves **organisational changes**. These can include providing **additional days off work** throughout the year, or a one day a week as an **internal team day** without direct contact with clients. Some have also implemented **buddy systems** to provide mutual support and work coverage, alleviating some stress and pressure. It is not uncommon for larger organisations with **dedicated HR departments** to support employees and management with internal communication and create an appropriate work atmosphere.

” A buddy, a person in a given team who supports me, has a decent understanding of what I do, and when I need to go on holiday, is able to step in and cover for me. It worked really well on a psychological level because people didn't feel the pressure that if they had a cold or fever, they couldn't stay home for a couple of days. [FGD1]

We strive to build a support system for our employees, not just centred on burnout, but we have a large HR department, which supports soft-skills and works

with employees and the management on internal communications. [FGD1]

Organisations undertake **initiatives to promote cohesion and integration**, both informal as well as those focused on common organisational objectives, values, and missions, to foster a sense of belonging and motivation. Creating an **atmosphere based on mutual respect and support** is important for these organisations. They also offer additional activities, such as cultural and social events, **retreats, and out of work socials** to help employees relax and integrate.

” We try our best to create moments at work when we can discuss values, and how we perceive different topics to prevent any dissonance or frustration in terms of vision, mission and actions. [FGD1]

I think that it's very important for all of us to share a common worldview and values regarding the topic we are dealing with. This is something that really bonds us and helps us stick together (...). Women's and minority rights - these are the things that really bring us closer. [FGD2a]

## Challenges in responding to burnout

From the FGDs, it appears that having the awareness of tools and solutions to address burnout does not fully resolve the issue. Implementing burnout preventive measures can be challenging due to task overload and the difficulty of finding time for these types of activities. Another challenge is effectively providing aid to those who are dealing with long-term overload.

” We never had a chance to implement activities directed at addressing the burnout issue because we were caught up in the vortex of work (...), because these issues kept changing and we never really had a stable and calm jobs. [FGD2b]

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# Sustainable measures for combating burnout

Both the quantitative and qualitative data highlighted a strong need to implement activities to prevent burnout.

**Organisations indicated that this type of support should be long-term rather than a one-off activity.**

They expressed a hope for anti-burnout measures to be sustained for longer periods of time, implemented in phases, and incorporated into projects as targets with results reported accordingly.

” In the context of what would help us, individually tailored programmes and simply a bit longer. (...) Because we often receive support proposals such as anti-burnout workshops, supervisions, but we have three months and have to cram it all in, and everyone has to be involved and so on. What works a lot better are programmes that take a bit longer to unfold, giving us more time to implement them. Because we are often up to our necks in work, such assistance is often seen, at the beginning, as an extra task. [FGD1]

I also have this idea (...) that if we are applying for grants, as there's a defined percentage for administrative costs, there could be a defined percentage for employee wellbeing. [FGD1]

The survey participants also highlighted the need for funding for capacity development opportunities and for non-financial motivation rewards (such as trainings, conferences, etc.). According to the representatives of the organisations, these activities not only would strengthen those who benefit from the support, but also demonstrate the organisation's commitment to the well-being of its employees and volunteers.

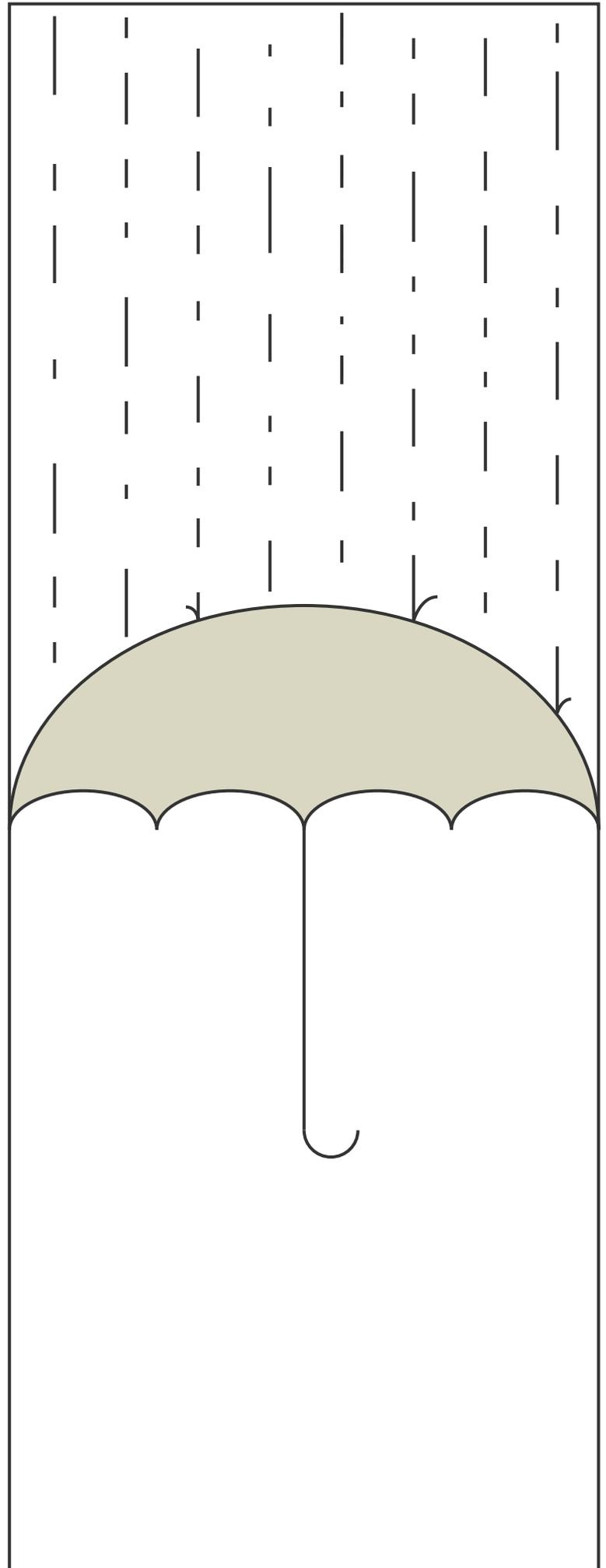
” Certainly, all types of motivational training, as well funding for skills development, management training (...), but also budgets for personal development, such as additional training in the form of postgraduate studies or courses. (...) This also creates strong ties with the organisation, boosts confidence and show that the organisation looks after its people. [FGD2a]

**However, in combating burnout, achieving financial stability is the primary need for organisations,** as a stable organisational income will lead to a more stable workforce that can take care of its staff and clients in equal measure. This is especially true for smaller, local organisations with small teams. In the FGDs, it was suggested that employing management teams permanently is a vital step in preventing burnout. When management teams operate as volunteers due to the organisation's financial instability and inability to employ them, it becomes especially difficult to counteract burnout due to competing pressures and demands.

## Summary

These findings reveal the complexity of burn-out and the need for a strategic approach to combat it, enabling local organisations to effectively support refugees. The sources of burnout among employees and volunteers are mainly connected to the working environments and the nature of their operations, rather than the individual characteristics of people or organisations. For this reason, the issue should be approached and resolved systematically.

The issue of burnout in this sector has been a subject of interest within the social sector for several years. This is evidenced by studies carried out by the Ombudsman for Citizen Rights from 2022 ([Ombudsman research 2022](#)) and the report by the Stabilo Foundation from 2022 ([Stabilo Foundation research, 2022](#)). However, there is still a lack of a systemic approach to treating this issue by donors and support entities. Local organisations supporting refugees, within their capabilities, are attempting to address the issue, but they still encounter challenges especially if the solutions are only short-term, rather addressing systemic problems in the sector.



# Funding

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In this chapter, we will analyse the financial landscape of local organisations supporting refugees. We will look at the budgets of these organisations and explore the expected changes in the size of revenues in 2024. We will touch upon the ranking of funding sources and challenges related to financing of refugee-supporting activities.

## Key findings

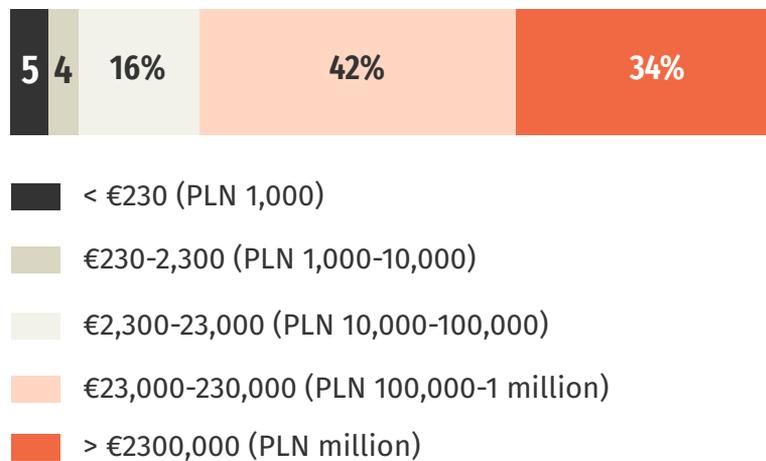
- Since 2022, a key source of funding for local organisations working with refugees has been funds from international organisations, e.g. UN (for 20% of local organisations), and INGOs (18%).
- The size of budgets of the surveyed organisations depends on their experience - the longer an organisation has been operating, the more likely it has a budget of approximately over €230,000 (PLN 1 million) in 2023.
- For organisations established in 2022 or 2023, the most important source of funding is donations from individuals, while the national public funds are predominantly important for organisations that had been delivering refugee support even before the escalation of the war.
- Almost three out of four organisations reported an increase in their budgets for activities directed at refugees in 2023 when compared with 2021. Organisations are not optimistic about their budgets in the near future: over half anticipate that their budgets will decrease in 2024 compared to 2023.
- The lack of financial stability and difficulties of securing funds are key problems facing organisations working in support of refugees, affecting 75% of entities. Moreover, organisations foresee that the situation will deteriorate.

- Data pertaining to budgets of organisations working in support of refugees indicates a better financial situation than the rest of the non-governmental sector in Poland. Every third organisation working in support of refugees had a budget of more than approximately €230,000 (PLN 1 million) in 2023.

# The size of financial resources

Most of the organisations supporting refugees in Poland (65%) declared that their 2023 budgets were smaller than approximately €230,000 (PLN 1 million), and only one in three (35%) had budgets of approximately over €230,000.

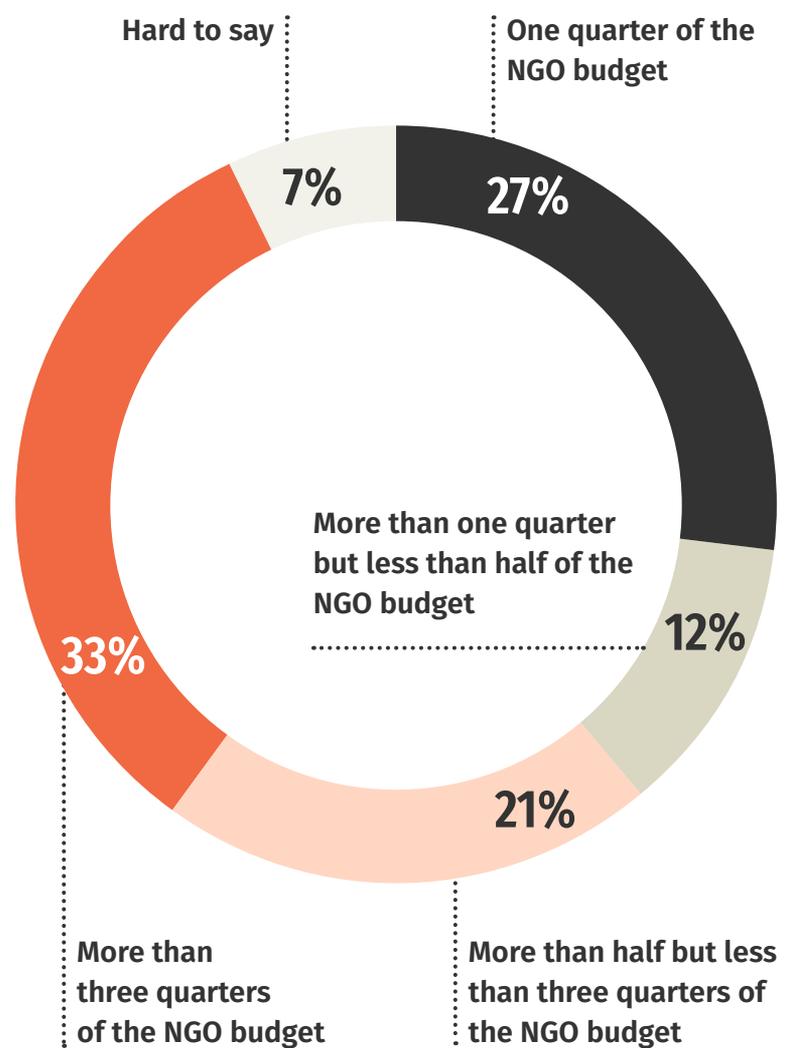
The budgetary structure for organisations supporting refugees in 2023



The size of budgets for organisations engaged in refugee support depends on their period of operation and scope of activities. Overall, the older the organisation, the more likely it had a budget of approximately over €230,000 (PLN 1 million) in 2023. Among the organisations established in 2022 or later, 19% declared budgets of approximately €230,000 (PLN 1 million) or more in 2023, while among organisations with over 20 years of experience, 58% exceeded the same budget. Half of the organisations established in 2022 or later, disclosed that budgets for 2023 did not exceed €23,000 (PLN 100,000). Larger budgets are typically associated with a broader scope of activities, with 43% of nationwide organisations having budgets surpassing approximately €230,000 (PLN 1 million) compared to organisations that focus on local activities (22%).

Similarly, as in the case of human capital, we explored the proportion of the overall yearly budgets organisations allocated for activities supporting refugees. In 2023, over half of the organisations (54%) allocated more than half of their annual budgets to supporting refugees.

A portion of the total budgets allocated to refugee-supporting activities in 2023

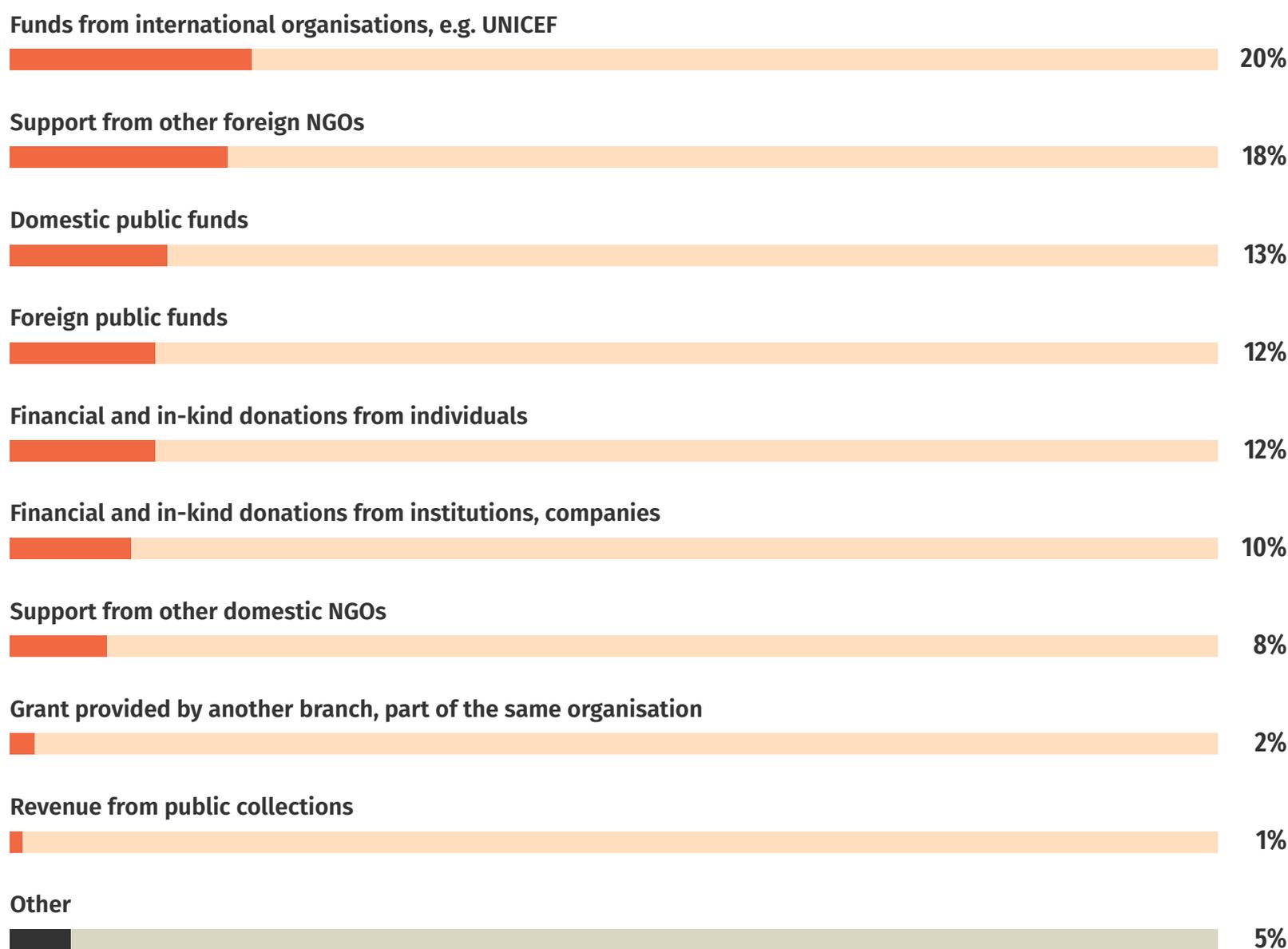


# Sources of funding

Local organisations finance their operations through different funding sources. **The key source of funding for activities with refugees is funds from international organisations such as UNICEF, OECD, and the UN.** One in five (20%) organisations indicated that since February

2022, they have received the largest inflow of funds from international organisations. For a slightly smaller group (18%) of organisations, the key source of funding comes from INGOs.

## The key source of funding for refugee supporting activities since February 2022



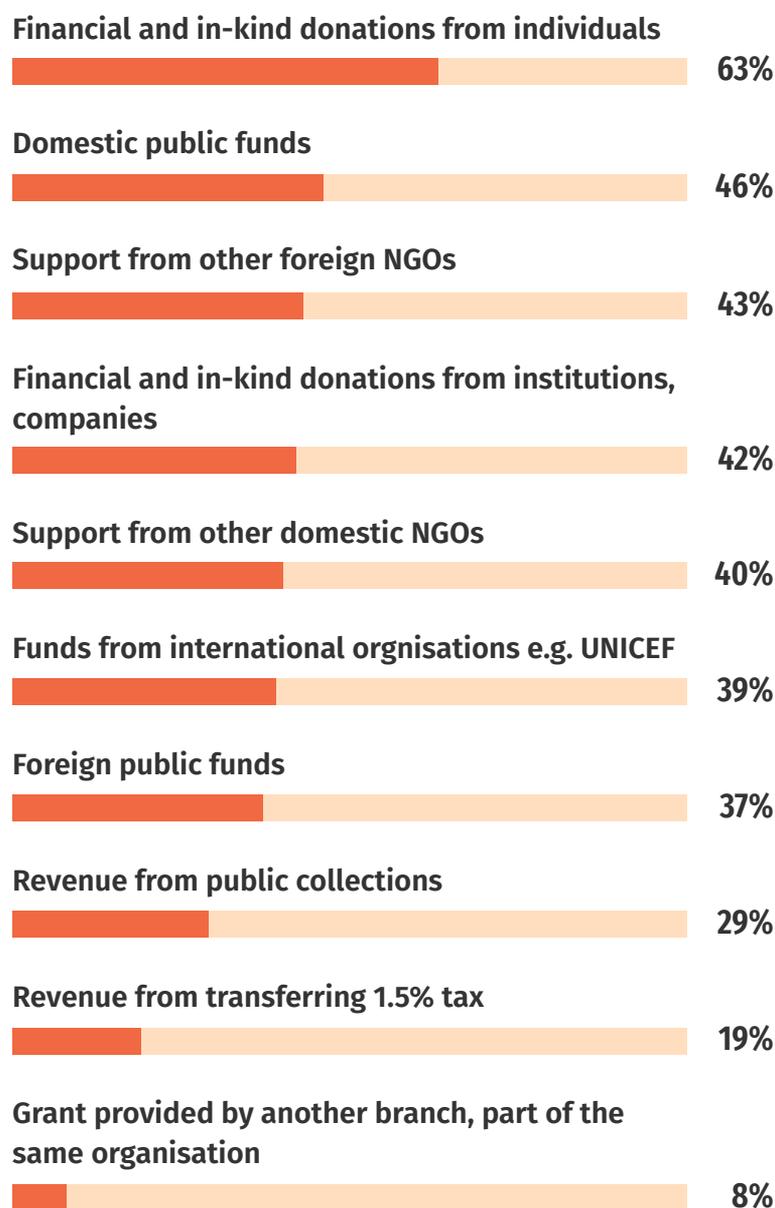
Organisations could choose only one key source of funding.

Budgets of local organisations typically come from various funding sources. In addition to asking about the key sources of funding, we also asked the surveyed organisations about all types of funds they used to finance their activities in support of refugees over the last two years. **Donations from individuals (63%) were the most frequently used sources of funding.** Organisations also used national public funds (46%), funds from INGOs (43%), as well as donations from institutions and private companies (42%). Fewer organisations used domestic NGO support (40%), funds from international organisations like UNICEF, the UN or the OECD (39%), and foreign public funds (37%).

For organisations established in 2022 or 2023, donations from individuals are the most important source of financing (36%), whereas only 8% of organisations set up before 2022 cited this source as most important. National public funds are the most significant for organisations with total budgets of over approximately €230,000 (PLN 1 million) (21%) and for organisations that have been supporting refugees before the escalation of the war (18%). The second group also stands out due to the above-average importance of funds from local NGOs (18%).

The aggregate data on key funding sources with their frequency of use demonstrates that some frequently used funding sources are not considered key. For instance, local organisations most often collect donations from private individuals, as shown in the above chart, but only 12% consider this as a key funding source. This indicates that while most organisations collect donations, the revenue generated this way is typically modest.

### The popularity of using different sources of funding for refugee supporting activities since February 2022



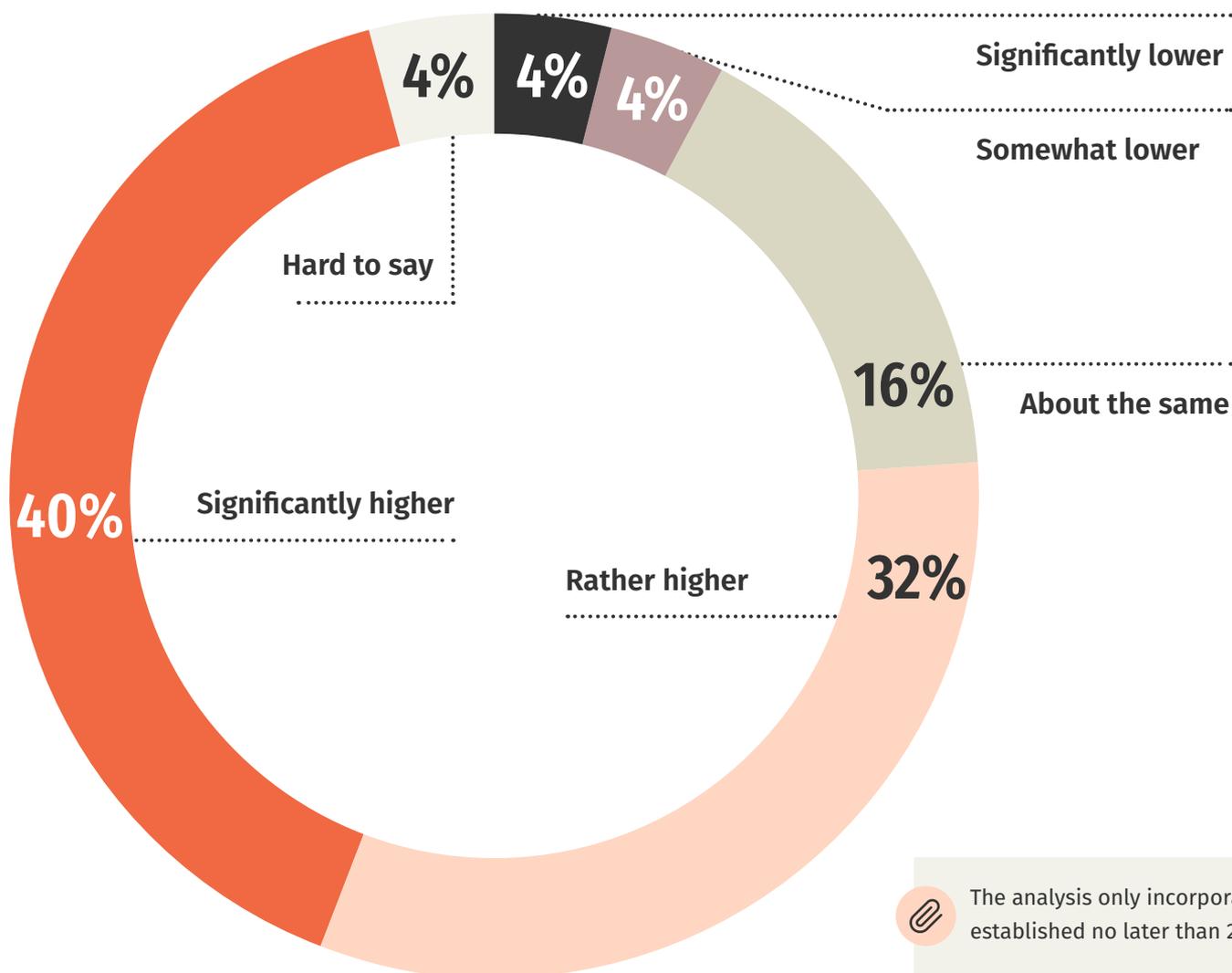
This chart shows the percentage of local organisations using a specific source since February 2022. Organisations could select multiple answers and for this reason, the responses do not add up to 100%. In the questionnaire, some of the categories of funding sources were specified as follows: national public funds, including government and local government sources; foreign public funds, including EU funds, European Commission programmes, funds from other governments, funds from embassies; funds from international organisations such as UNICEF, OECD and the UN - funds transferred directly by these organisations as well as through intermediaries, e.g., local government.

# Change in the size of funding

Below, we discuss the change in the size of organisations' budgets. We have examined the change between 2021 and 2023, comparing current budgets to budgets before the escalation of the war in Ukraine. Next, we analysed the projected changes in these budgets in the near future, specifically the expected size of budgets for 2024.

In response to the escalation of the war in Ukraine, numerous new funding opportunities became available for Polish organisations focused on refugee support. Almost three out of four organisations (72%) reported an increase in their 2023 budgets compared to 2021.

Organisations' budgets in 2023 in relation to budgets in 2021



In the FGDs, organisations highlighted that the increased funding possibilities in 2022 and the first half of 2023 allowed for meeting basic organisational needs such as renting offices or employing more staff to support the delivery of new projects.

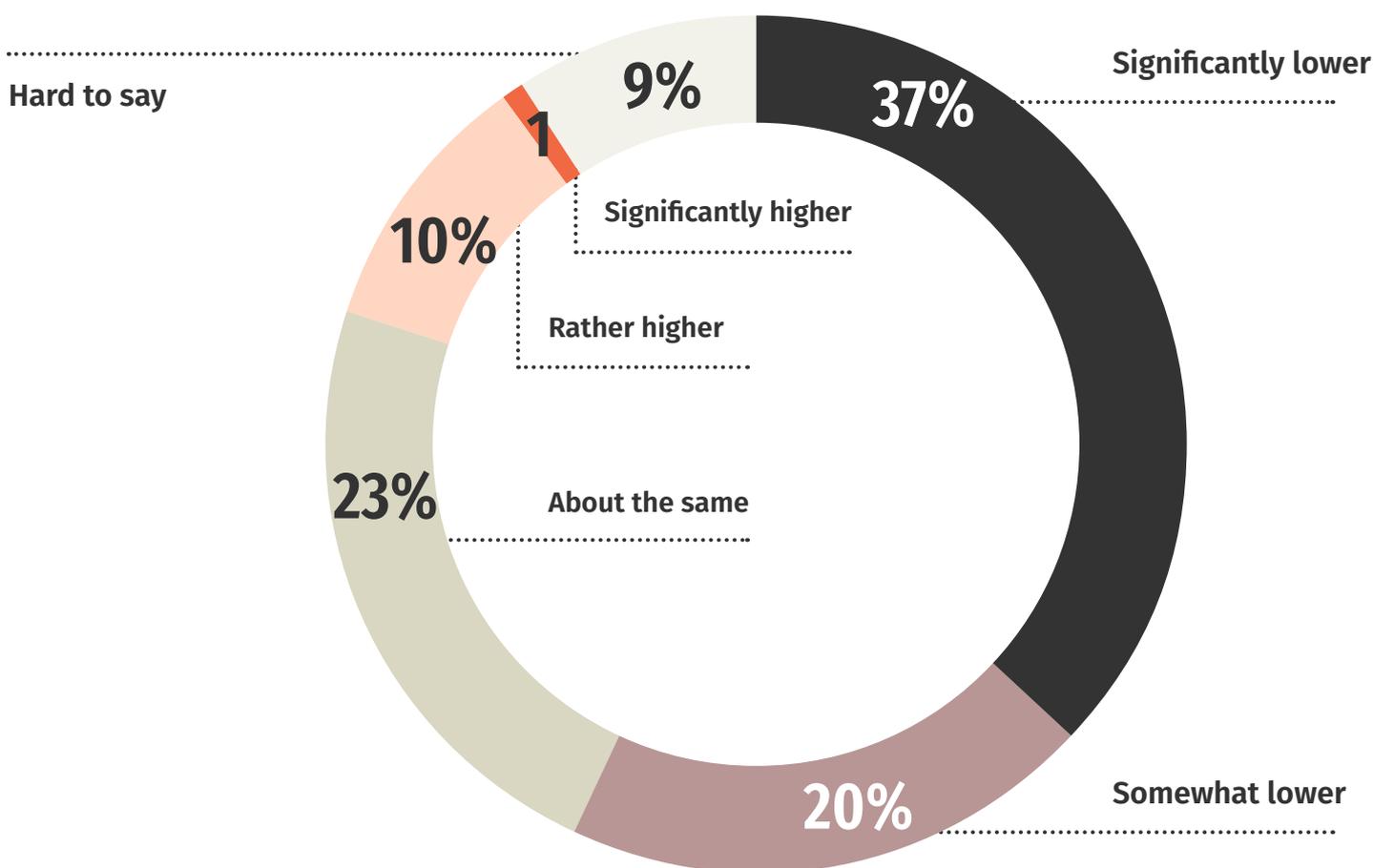
From around mid-2023, organisations began to experience a decrease in funding. This led to necessary decisions to reduce the number of employees.

” Now both enthusiasm and funding have faded away, so instead of the windfall, which we experienced in 2022 and 2023, we have a period of scarcity, and we needed to reduce the staff headcount. [FGD5]

” Last year we had programmes worth over PLN 1 million (approx. € 230,000). That’s how many different grants we received. This year [2024], we have received a tiny one, for PLN 40,000 (approx. €10,000). [FGD3a]

Organisations are not optimistic about the sizes of their budgets for activities targeted at refugees in 2024. **More than half (57%) of organisations expect a drop in their budgets for refugee support in 2024**, while a significant minority (11%) expects an increase. A small proportion (23%) of organisations expect it to be similar to 2023.

The projected size of budgets for activities supporting refugees in 2024 compared to 2023

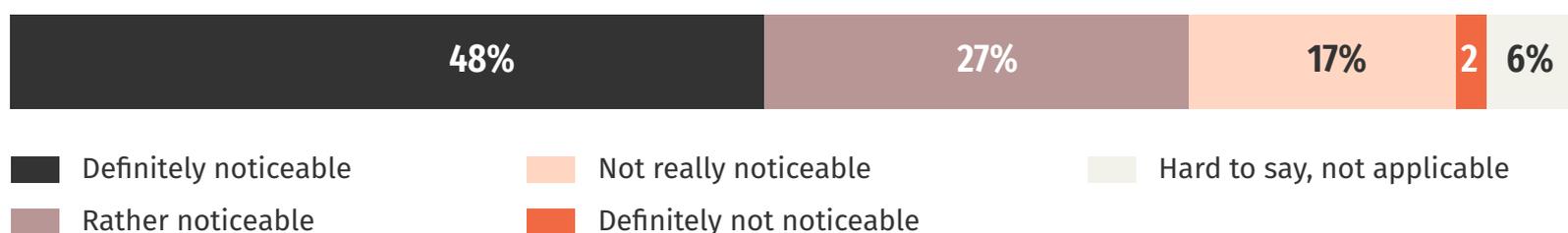


# Challenges with funding

Regardless of whether organisations forecast that their budgets will be larger or smaller in 2024 than 2023, the lack of financial stability and difficulties in obtaining new funds is a pressing issue across the board. 75% of organisations providing refugee support declare that

this is an obstacle which hampers their work. Moreover, organisations anticipate the worsening of funding: over the next two years, 86% of the surveyed organisations expect increasing difficulties in raising funds for activities towards refugees.

## Difficulties in obtaining funds or equipment, a lack of financial stability experienced in the last two years



## Reasons behind financial challenges

The current problems related to financial stability and funding of refugee activities stem from the withdrawal of INGOs and international organisations from Poland. Until now, these entities have been a key source of funding for the surveyed organisations. Additionally, there has been a noticeable decrease in individual donations, which are decreasing after two years of war.

A less recent and more structural cause of financial challenges experienced is the reliance on short-term grants. This type of funding is subject to extensive bureaucracy, both at the application stage as well as in the management of grants. Almost two in three organisations (65%) believe that the bureaucracy involved in obtaining grants is far too complicated and makes some funding options unavailable for them.

## Overly complicated formalities linked to obtaining grants experienced in the last two years



In the FGDs, it appeared clear that using grants sometimes leads organisations to comply with the donor's perspective, prioritising project and outcomes that are significant to the donor, such as the number of people supported by the organisation. This shift in focus brings about the risk of losing sight of the individual needs of the people the organisation is trying to support and it can negatively impact the team.

” We are changing our fundraising strategy. In 2022 and 2023, many of our partners were mainly interested in numbers - how many people and in how many places we are helping; making sure these numbers are impressive. (...) Now we intend to focus on people's stories - that is how we help. Not how many, but whom. [FGD3a]

I think, I would now take care about the psychological support for the lecturers. (...) Actually, in the management of it all, I got caught up in the flurry of applying, reporting, etc. These were rough, short crisis projects, done quickly in uncertainty, equally on the part of the grantor, and this really amplified the uncertainty. [FGD6]

The continuous cycle of applying for funds, delivering results, and reporting can trap organisations in the vicious cycle of short-term projects that do not provide financial stability.

” We are an organisation which doesn't run a business operation. Rather, we are dependent on projects. Now we have financial problems. All our projects were finished in 2023. We had five or six projects, and now we have two small ones that run until May. What will happen next? It's hard to say. [FGD3b]

## Dealing with funding cuts

To deal with funding cuts, some organisations see the diversification of funds as a solution to the decreasing international funding. Exploring new sources of funding, such as engaging in business activities, could potentially help reduce dependence on grants. Organisations also emphasise the importance of corporate philanthropy and creating partnerships with the business sector. Cooperating with companies is a more secure and predictable source of funding, also because there is a perception that companies treat these types of partnerships strategically and are interested in a long-term cooperation. These, in turn, can help them reach their social objectives written into their corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies.

### In Focus: Surveyed Organisations Within the wider Polish NGO Landscape

We carried out a general comparison of the size of budgets of organisations supporting refugees with the revenue of all NGOs in Poland. The results show that the first group has greater financial resources, and that their funding sources are more diverse.

This comparison needs to be caveated as the data for the wider sector was collected in 2020.

Local organisations supporting refugees are distinguished by:

- Annual income of approximately €23,000 (PLN 100,000): 24% of the surveyed organisations (2023), and among all NGOs in Poland 71% (2020),

- Annual revenue of more than approximately €230,000 (PLN 1 million): among the surveyed local organisations 34% (2023), and 6% for the entire sector (2020),
- Sources of funding organisations use most frequently:
  - In the surveyed group: financial and in-kind donations from individuals, national public funds, and INGOs,
  - Among all NGOs in Poland: membership fees, local government funds, financial and in-kind donations from individuals,
- Problems with obtaining funds and maintaining financial stability: reported by 75% organisations supporting refugees, and 67% among all Polish NGOs.

The differences between the compared these groups may not necessarily reflect generally greater resources among organisations assisting refugees, but rather confirm the findings of the study described above around the increase of funding due to the humanitarian crisis in Poland in 2022.

## Summary

In summary, organisations currently providing support to refugees are deeply concerned about the future funding for these activities. The lack of predictable and stable funding poses a serious threat to the continuity of assistance provided to refugees, potentially leading to reductions in staff and project prioritisation. Financial instability also means not being able to attend to other aspects of the organisation, including the wellbeing of the team.

The dilemmas of insufficient funding for local organisations supporting refugees are described and confirmed by the ‘Where are we now?’ report ([“Gdzie teraz jesteśmy?”](#)), by the Migration Consortium and Ashoka Foundation in 2024.

Until now, funding from international organisations has played a key role in financing local organisations working with refugees. With these entities leaving Poland, organisations are looking for alternatives. Some organisations are counting on national and local public funding, however, uncertainty surrounding the final shape of the policies for supporting refugees makes it difficult to rely on this source.

Organisations understand the need to find more independent methods of financing their activities. While some admit their uncertainty about how to achieve financial stability, others openly state the need to become independent from grants by developing fundraising activities. However, many organisations lack the expertise, resources, and strategy to implement such processes effectively.

# Collaboration with partners

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In this chapter, we look at how organisations supporting refugees collaborate with other entities, such as businesses, Polish NGOs, INGOs, and government. We outline different groups of partners, types of cooperation, as well as the importance of networking for organisations. We also discuss the type of non-financial support the surveyed organisations received in the past two years.

## Key findings

- The most frequently felt and long-lasting change for the organisations appeared to be the broadening of their networks and collaboration with other entities.
- The most common partners of organisations supporting refugees are other NGOs from Poland, local community, and INGOs.
- One in three of the surveyed organisations partners with INGOs. Organisations with larger budgets and longer operational experience, as well as those with a national or international scale of operations, are more likely to collaborate with them.
- Representatives of the organisations emphasised that the most valuable cooperation with INGOs took place when both sides learnt from each other, and where international organisations gained knowledge, and know-how, from those in Poland.
- The most frequent forms of collaboration between organisations are joint activities, projects and events, information sharing, and financial support. Organisations that collaborate with INGOs or businesses are more likely to report that this collaboration is financial in nature.

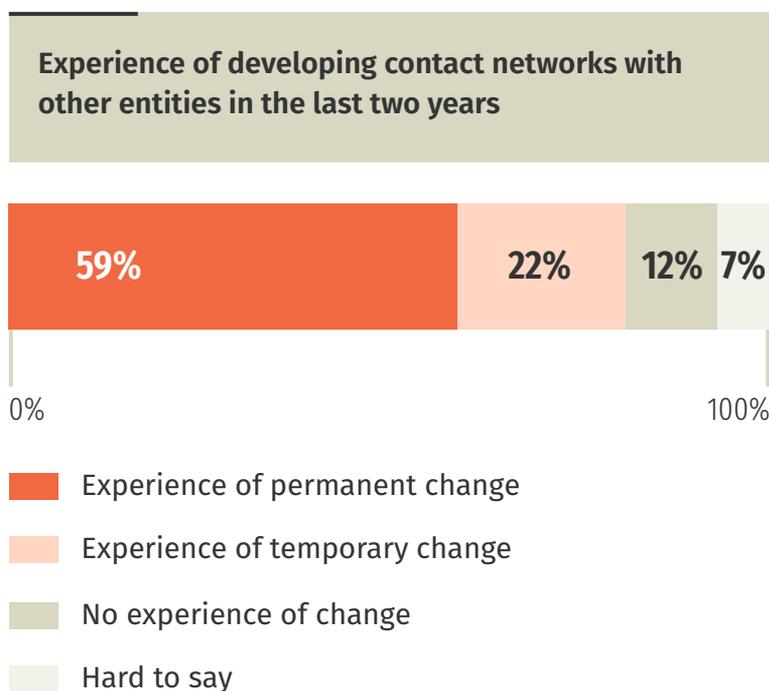
- 90% of the surveyed organisations report that they have received non-financial support for activities with refugees since the escalation of the war in Ukraine. This support, most commonly, was in the shape of networking opportunities and partnerships with other entities. Networking is especially appreciated by organisations as it gives them the opportunity to share experiences, resources, and support.

# Partners

Organisations supporting refugees developed their networks and considerably expanded their cooperation with other entities in the last two years. Changes in cooperation have been experienced by 81% of the surveyed organisations and they see this as the most permanent change in their operations.

Organisations supporting refugees are well networked and work with a variety of partners: for example, one of the organisations worked with 6 different types of entities (out of 11 choices in the questionnaire) in the last two years.

**Among the surveyed organisations, the most common partners are other NGOs in Poland (87%), local communities (73%) and INGOs (70%).** Cooperation with INGOs is significantly more prevalent among organisations with larger annual budgets (above approximately €230,000 or PLN 1 million) that operate on a national or international scale, and those that carried out activities with refugees before the escalation of the war in Ukraine.

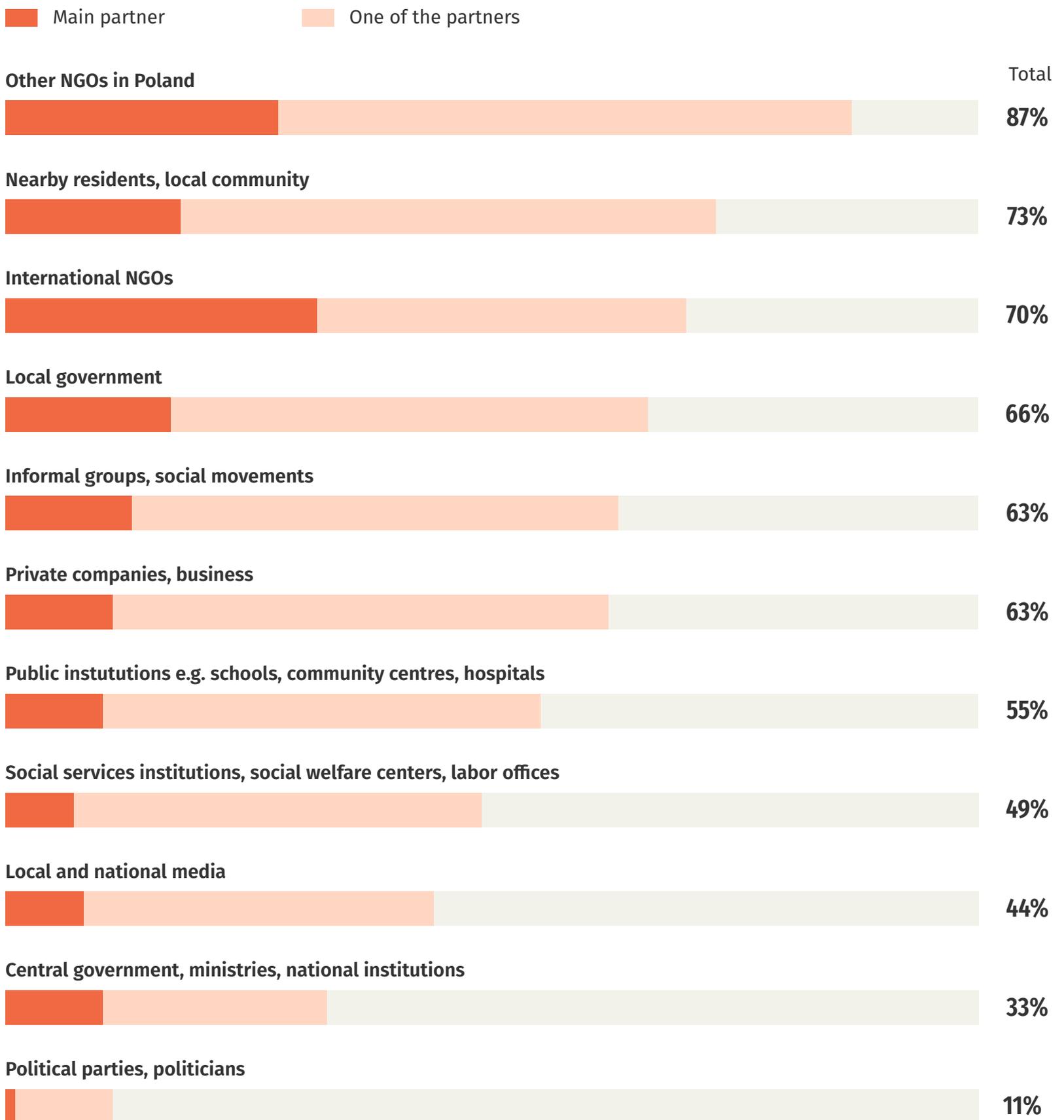


The frequent cooperation with international entities differentiates organisations supporting refugees against the backdrop of the entire non-governmental sector in Poland. A quarter of all foundations and associations in Poland work with international organisations, but among organisations supporting refugees the percentage is almost three times higher, at 70%. This is related to the arrival of international organisations, which supported the Polish non-governmental sector in the humanitarian crisis.

More than half of the surveyed organisations also cooperate with the local government, informal groups, businesses and public institutions. Entities that most often work with the local government and the local community are those based in medium-sized town (100,000 to 500,000 residents) and with medium sized annual budgets of between approximately €24,000 and €230,000 (PLN 100,000 and PLN 1 million). Unfortunately, we do not have data on the type of cooperation they are undertaking with individual partners.

In the survey, we also asked about the significance of working with a particular partner, i.e. if it is a key partner or one of many partners. **Most of the surveyed organisations (32%) indicate that their key partners are INGOs with Polish NGOs in second place (28%).** Almost 20% of organisations rate collaboration with the local community or local government as key, while more than one in ten with businesses and informal groups. Cooperation with the central and local governments is rarely rated as key, surprisingly. This is despite the fact that public administration is responsible for the process of integration of refugees in Poland. In the context of withdrawal of international organisations, it seems that closer ties with the government and local government are necessary in the context of funding future activities and integration of refugees.

## List of partners of organisations supporting refugees



The question referred to the partners with which the organisation cooperated in the last two years. Organisations indicated whether they considered each partner type as key; one of many partners; or whether they did not work with them at all.

The data shows how important the INGOs are for organisations working with refugees. Their arrival in Poland became an opportunity for Polish entities supporting refugees to create a new style of cooperation, obtain know-how and to raise their expertise levels. In the FGDs, representatives of organisations emphasised that the most valuable cooperation with INGOs took place when both sides learnt from each other, and where international organisations gained knowledge, and know-how, from those in Poland.

” We have become part of global migration processes, which also allows (...) to influence what’s happening in the world. (...) I think that we - Polish organisations working in support of refugees - can also teach them [INGOs] a lot. I hope we can influence how the humanitarian and development aid will look like in other parts of the world. [FGD5]

The first year after the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine has resulted in a greater choice and comfort in forming financial partnerships. It gave some organisations the opportunity to forgo those collaborations that were, for example, burdened with conflicts of values. However, this situation did not last long, as already from 2023 securing financial partners became more difficult.

” We explained to the donors that it’s great when they want to give us money, but please bear in mind that people of other nationalities will attend the Polish language course, not just from Ukraine because we serve the entire refugee community. We couldn’t agree with one donor, and we had to part ways. I said I couldn’t discriminate people only because of where they come from. They got pretty upset that, after all, it wasn’t about discrimination at all, just business consideration. Well, okay, so you have your considerations and I have my ethics. Goodbye. Of course, this was a situation with which I could do it. [FGD6]

## Forms of cooperation

The most common form of cooperation between the surveyed organisations and other partners are joint activities, projects and events. In the last two years, 89% of organisations have undertaken cooperation with other entities. Information sharing was considered very important for 81% of partnerships, while receiving financial support ranked high for 77%. Two thirds of organisations received in-kind support in the last two years, and approximately half used shared resources or received know-how, meaning practical knowledge, skills, or expertise from other organisations. A few organisations indicated that they used other forms of cooperations, e.g. when they were the ones sharing their resources (financial, material, knowledge) with other partners rather than receiving them.

### Forms of cooperation with partners in the last two years



We have observed some patterns between the types of partners and the forms of collaborations implemented. Organisations collaborating with foreign entities or businesses are more likely to receive financial support, in-kind support, know-how, as well as the use of shared resources. However, local organisations collaborating with each other are more likely to undertake joint activities and projects, exchange information or receive know-how. Organisations that work closely with the local authorities, government or the media are more likely to report receiving in-kind support and undertake joint projects.

## Non-financial support

90% of the surveyed organisations report that they have received non-financial support for refugee-related activities in Poland since the escalation of the war in Ukraine. Most often (62%) organisations have been supported by networking and partnerships with other entities. More than half of the entities received non-financial support such as training, team workshops and access to knowledge, know-how, access to experts or educational materials. Almost half of the organisations (47%) report that other organisations and institutions supported them with their volunteers.

In recent years, new networks and coalitions have begun to emerge, such as The Border Group, Migration Consortium, NGO Forum “Together”. In group interviews respondents noticed multiple benefits from contacts with other organisations, as they can share experiences and support each other, fostering a sense of solidarity and awareness by sharing similar challenges.

### Non-financial support received in the past two years



” Networking is important for us. (...) It’s often the case that someone hasn’t spent their budget, someone else has beneficiaries, another one has no support, and yet another has other needs. When networking, we are able to support more beneficiaries, but also support each other. (...) This is also important for mental hygiene, because sometimes it’s good to have a moan with other people who have the same problems. [FGD5]

Networking with other organisations has always been important. (...) If you need to organise a demonstration, it’s done! 200 people will turn up straight away. If you need to raise a quick buck, it can be done. (...) When the going gets tough, we close the ranks and stand united. [FGD5]

## Summary

Based on the presented data in this chapter, it is clear that the state of working in crisis in recent years has led local organisations to become more supportive and collaborative with each other. New networks and coalitions have begun to emerge, consolidating the collaboration of Polish organisations working with refugees. The entry in the country of INGOs contributed to the development of this sector, by delivering not only financial support, but also transferred knowledge and insights.

The challenge that remains for organisations supporting refugees is building closer relations with the government and local authorities, which seem necessary in this context. Additionally, organisations foresee a further need to network, as they want more opportunities to share experiences and resources and carry out joint projects.

# Challenges, needs and plans

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In this chapter, we describe other types of challenges faced by for local organisations. We show organisations' outlook regarding the socio-political issues that may influence activities with refugees in the next two years. We look at the non-financial needs of organisations, as well as their operational plans for the near future.

## Key findings

- Two key problems for organisations supporting refugees are ineffective systemic solutions in assisting refugees and financial instability. Each of these problems affects three out of four organisations.
- Most organisations also struggle with excessive paperwork when applying for and using grants, and burnout among their staff.
- The majority of organisations state that the lack of a long-term migration policy and legal solutions in relation to refugees in Poland will affect their day-to-day activities over the next two years.
- Organisations also anticipate an increase in negative public attitudes towards refugees, and difficulties with the local community. In interviews, representatives of organisations presented examples of growing anti-Ukrainian sentiments and declining willingness to engage in activities aimed at supporting refugees.
- One in three of the surveyed organisations underlined the need for various types of training, workshops for staff and volunteers. The most frequently suggested topics for such activities were: coaching or mentoring for managers, fundraising training, support on working with people in crisis or crisis intervention.
- More than one in four organisations still see the need for networking and seeking partnerships with other entities.

Organisations are keen to have convening spaces where they can share their experiences, learn about best practices, and form coalitions around advocacy activities.

- More than half of the surveyed organisations plan to maintain their level of activities in support of refugees over the next two years. 18% of entities plan to significantly increase their activities, while 22% to reduce them.

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# Organisational problems

So far in this report, we have looked at issues on human and financial resources (see: → [People-related issues in local organisations](#) and → [Challenges with funding](#)), however, organisations also struggle with other types of problems that are worth noting.

**The most frequently noted problem among refugee supporting organisations are the ineffective systemic and legal solutions regarding refugee support (77%).** Most of the organisations also report excessive bureaucracy and paperwork, and challenges with the cooperation with the public administration.

Organisations supporting refugees **are ambivalent about the relationship with the authorities and future systemic solutions.** On the one hand, **the majority of the surveyed organisations (80%) predict that the lack of a long-term migration policy and legal solutions** in relation to refugee support in Poland will affect their day-to-day activities over the next two years. On the other hand, in the FGDs, it was argued that the change of government in Poland in the autumn of 2023 has led to a greater openness to a dialogue with the sector. This shift is expected to improve the situation for both organisations and refugees. However, some interviewees were not as optimistic and emphasised that a dialogue with the public administration alone would not necessarily bring about the change, especially in the context of the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border. A significant proportion of organisations (44%) expect that the political climate in Poland may hinder actions in support of refugees. Most likely, these predictions are based on previous experiences of organisations and situations in which politicians and political parties used the topic of refugees and migrants to shape social fears and deepen polarisations in Poland.

” It starts getting busy (...), [the authorities] are inviting us to meetings to talk about different topics related to migration. This is already happening. There’s a hope, but I don’t expect there to be such a big change immediately, because Poland lacks a migration policy. [FGD3b]

Changes are more possible than they were some years ago, when the United Rights party was in power (...), although in the area of migration, I see a bleak future, as the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border shows. It is a continuation of the previous government’s policies. [FGD5]

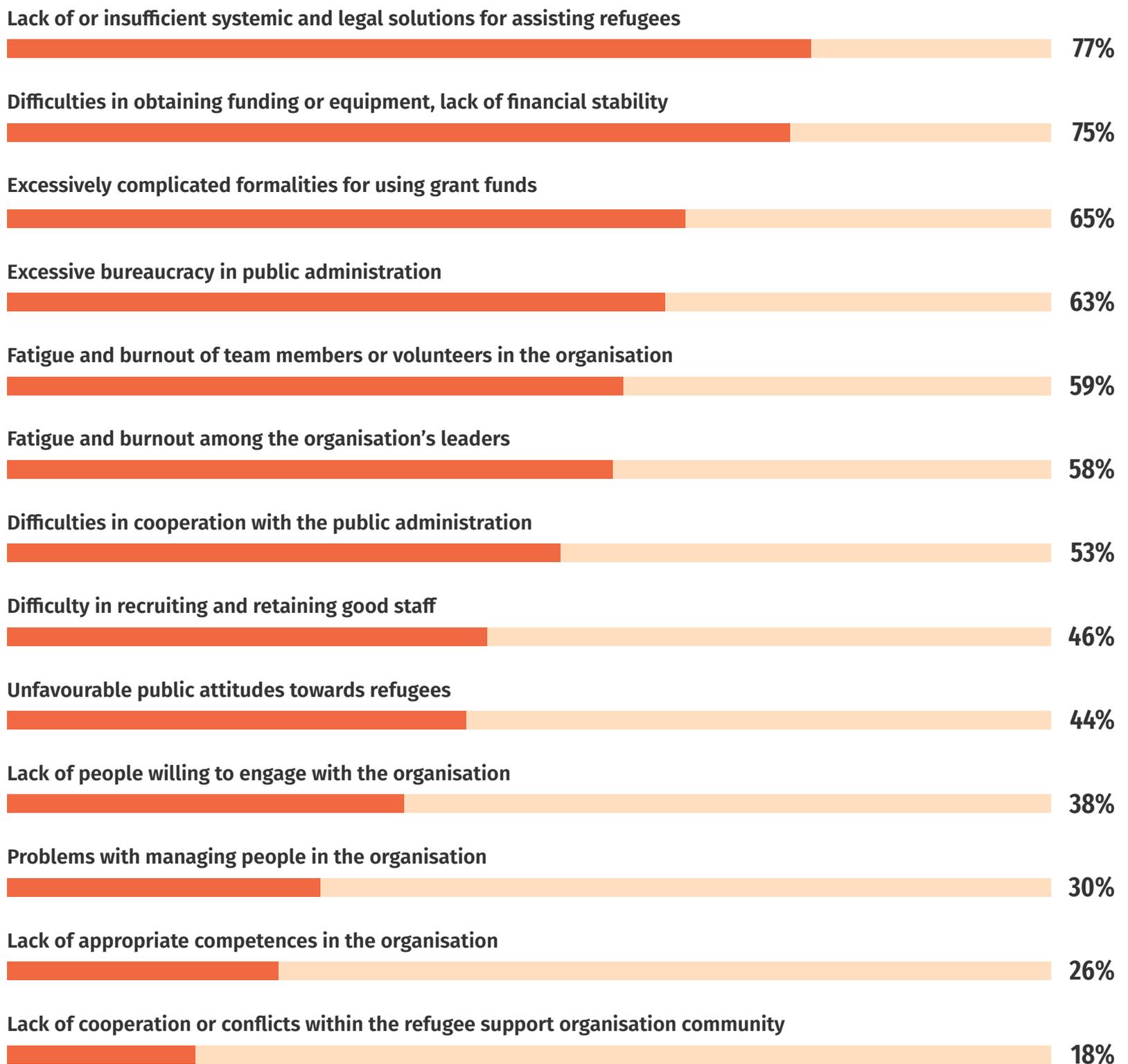
Another important problem noticed by organisations is the general attitude of Polish society towards refugees. **Almost half of the organisations (44%) report that their every-day activities are hampered by adverse public attitudes towards refugees, and 64% of organisations expect this negative sentiment to increase between 2024 and 2025.** In interviews, representatives of the organisations gave examples of growing anti-Ukrainian sentiments and a declining willingness to support refugees. They pointed out that the local community demands action to support other groups in need (e.g. seniors, people with disabilities, the unemployed), and that there are also cases of discrimination against refugees. **Most of the organisations (55%) expect further difficulties in cooperation with the local community in the near future when it comes to supporting refugees.**

” I think there’s a lack of social campaigns because we’ve noticed that there’s a wave of hostility towards supporting refugees in some circles. There’s an argument that because there are people without jobs, why are we spending money on people from other countries and not on people from our country? I have a simple answer - because we signed the Geneva Convention. [FGD3a]

” [The name of the city] still plays a key role in the relief system today, however, the anti-Ukrainian sentiment is slowly coming back. (...) We too, as an organisation based in the very centre of the city, often receive negative comments, directed at the minorities, immigrants or refugees, but in general at

Ukrainians. Luckily, it's still not systemic, but rather sporadic. It's demotivating, but it's also motivating (...), we expect it to become worse, so from our perspective we need to increase the number of dialogue activities. [FGD3a]

### Issues organisations experienced in their work with refugees in the last two years



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# Organisational needs

Some of the organisational needs stem directly from the challenges currently faced. Consequently, **the most important needs of the organisations surveyed concern financial stability and team support to combat burnout.** This topic has been covered in detail in previous chapters (see: → [Counteracting burnout](#) and → [Challenges with funding](#)), and in this section, we will focus on non-financial organisational needs.

## Non-financial needs of organisations

**One in three of the surveyed organisations (33%) vocalised the need for various types of training, workshops for staff and volunteers.** The subjects of training reported by organisations are very diverse, but they include **coaching or mentoring for managers, as well as fundraising trainings,** working with people in crisis, crisis intervention and mediation, and handling cultural conflicts. Other topics of training mentioned by some organisations are project writing, effective team communication, AI and other new technologies, specific tools training (e.g. Excel, Access, CRM, accounting and financial management tools), international law, cultural differences and multicultural education, anti-discrimination and advocacy.

**The next most common non-financial need, as reported by 28% of organisations, is networking, and seeking partnerships among other entities.** Above all, organisations would like to be able to meet with other organisations in order to share experiences, learn about best practices, and start coalitions and alliances for advocacy activities. Organisations that operate on a national scale mentioned a greater need to network and collaborate.

**Almost one if four organisations supporting refugees sees the need for better access to knowledge, know-how, experts or educational materials, as well as professional legal support.** In the open-ended responses, organisations specified that they would need legal and accountancy support, covering topics such as human rights, children's rights, legal employment, legalisation of residence, and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Some organisations also mentioned that they lacked good quality Polish and Ukrainian language learning materials. Above all, they cited the need for modern educational materials for different age groups. Respondents also highlighted the need for external expert support to help formulate various kinds of strategies e.g. fundraising, marketing, organisational development and restructuring.

Importantly, **one in five organisations working with refugees report no need for any kind of non-financial support.**

## Office equipment

**A quarter of the surveyed organisations report they need equipment, access to tools and software which can facilitate their work.** The majority indicated that they needed computers for employees, equipment, and office furniture, as well as different types of computer software (e.g. Microsoft Office, anti-virus software, Canva, Zoom).

Some of the organisations **reported the need to have their own offices or to secure larger premises.** Representatives of smaller local organisations emphasised the importance of having their own office space for fostering good team relations and combating burnout.

” We are a relatively large organisation, but we never rented our own office. And I simply dream, (...) of getting back my flat because one of my rooms is being used as an office. So, I’d like to have an office and I’d like to have a personal assistant who could take care of the paperwork and I could just stop trying to handle everything myself. [FGD3a]

” For me, the most important aspect would be a place where we could all meet, and it would be our place. (...) I have a feeling that we’d meet together more often, and it would influence us to simply feel better. (...) However, I think that by being able to spend time together, help and complement each other, would have a motivating effect on us. [FGD2a]



 The question referred to organisational needs in terms of refugee supporting activities. Organisations could choose a maximum of three answers and also had the opportunity to be more specific about certain forms of support in open-ended questions.

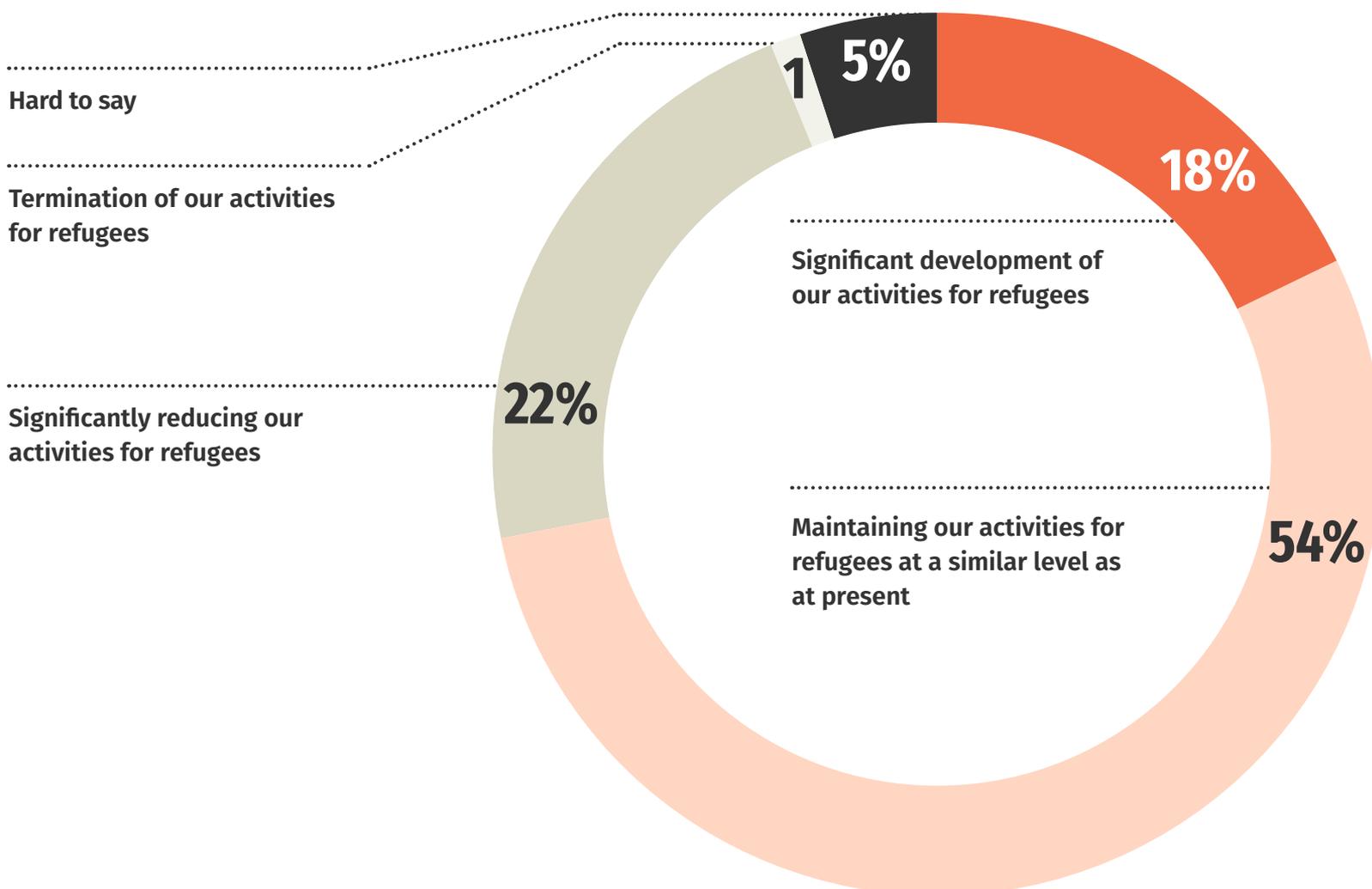
## Plans for the near future

Organisations supporting refugees are **pessimistic about what the next two years will bring**. They talk about uncertainty of their operations, which stems from the lack of stable working conditions, the lack of funding, but also external factors such as the political situation, public sentiment, or the economic crisis.

” When one of the donors asked me in 2023 what my plans were for this year, I said: I had plans for 2020 and the pandemic came. I had plans for 2021, and we got the humanitarian crisis on the Belarusian border. I had plans for 2022, and we all know what happened. So, for 2023, I have no plans at all! [FGD6]

Despite the adversity, **more than half (54%) of the surveyed organisations would like to maintain their activities with refugees over the next two years at similar levels**. A smaller percentage of organisations plan to considerably develop their activities in support of refugees (18%) or significantly reduce them (22%). Only 1% of organisations supporting refugees intend to end their activities for this group.

Organisation’s plans over the next two years regarding activities for refugees



Organisations that want to develop their activities with refugees **mention that they have created concepts for new projects, strengthening their advocacy, communications and promotions, and plan their long-term growth.**

Organisations notice that there are increasing needs, so they need to broaden their offering. This approach does not go hand in hand with the expected reduction in funding, but demonstrates a strong will, typical of the Polish sector, to continue their activities, along with the hope that funding can be secured due to the high needs of recipients.

” As far as future plans are concerned, we would certainly like to maintain all of the aid activities, but also to develop them. We have in our plans, for instance, a development of a residency system for aid organisations that operate in Ukraine. [FGD3a]

We are planning for the next two years, a time for a long-term action, broader thinking, more structured with some kind of perspective, rather than just reacting to the crisis, as it was. [FGD6]

I have a vision of where we will be next year, in two years' time. -I would like to grow our advocacy department so that we could start doing real advocacy instead of just ad hoc. (...) So, let's try to diversify more, both what we do and where we get the money from. [FGD6]

The reasons that lead organisations to scale down refugee supporting activities are wide-ranging, including the **pressure from the local community or the team to provide services for their community**, redirecting efforts towards projects aimed at a wide group of recipients. Another deciding factor is the low interest among refugees in the organisation's initiatives, which discourages further actions for this group. The decision to limit activities is also influenced by the completion of projects and funding constraints. Several individuals mentioned that due to a lack of funds, they opted for

significant structural changes, such as layoffs or establishing a new entity (social enterprise), which allowed different funding opportunities.

” The team suggests that perhaps we should write projects for our local community, to focus on activities (...) for our children and seniors. This results in more of these activities being delivered for these other social groups. [FGD2a]

When it comes to refugees, we encounter a great deal of ignorance on the subject of health. (...) I think this is the reason why... we are considering whether we should be moving into this, whether to continue organising educational and health-promoting activities for them, or whether it might be better to channel this energy to other target groups that also need work. [FGD2a]

## Summary

As can be seen, based on the collected data, organisations supporting refugees are facing various challenges. A considerable barrier to their activities is the lack of systemic solutions in place to assist refugees, and the absence of a long-term migration policy in Poland. Research carried out by the Migration Research Centre ([Ośrodek Badań nad Migracjami Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego](#)) shows that since 2016, no clear objectives have been set for the state's migration policy. As a result, only isolated initiatives are being undertaken, but without a comprehensive discussion or time perspective. Academics describe this state of affairs as public policy "without politics" and even though these are theoretical disputes, a well thought-through migration policy would result in tangible actions and funding opportunities for organisations providing support for people arriving in Poland.

Another external phenomenon, which impacts the daily work of organisations is the growing anti-refugee and anti-Ukrainian sentiment in Polish society. According to the survey carried out by Centre for Public Opinion Research ([Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej](#)) on Polish attitudes towards refugees from Ukraine, in March 2022, 94% of Poles supported the welcoming of refugees, but in November 2023 this number has dropped to 62%. As far as refugees from other countries than Ukraine is concerned, since 2016, and the so-called refugee crisis in Europe, [the support of Polish society for accepting refugees is significantly lower \(at around 40%\)](#). The negative attitudes

towards refugees are also observed by the surveyed organisations and they fear this trend will only get worse.

In this climate, Polish organisations are defiant and despite a less optimistic view of the near future, the vast majority plan to continue or even expand their activities in support of refugees. However, in order for them to be able support effectively, systemic solutions are needed that will support the development of organisations and the stability of their activities.

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# Conclusions and recommendations

Many of the problems and challenges faced by local organisations working with refugees in Poland are structural. Two years after the escalation of the war in Ukraine, the crisis turned into a daily reality, which calls for systematic solutions. For this reason, the following recommendations are directed mainly at the so-called donor and support entities, i.e. umbrella organisations, international organisations and other bodies (e.g. state institutions) that support NGOs and other organisations in Poland. We hope these recommendations will be taken into account in decision-making and strategic processes at local, national and international levels.

At the same time, we hope that these evidence-based recommendations will also be of assistance to local organisations in creating a vision for their growth. Some of the recommendations are directed to them too.

The recommendations have been divided into the following thematic areas: organisational stability, burnout, networking, organisational diversity, organisational expertise, and the role of the public administration.

## Organisational stability

Local organisations supporting refugees operate under conditions of high uncertainty and flux. In the first year since the escalation of the war in Ukraine, the attention of international organisations focused on providing funding for local organisations and initiatives involved in the response. As a result, these organisations increased their budgets and expanded the staff headcount and volunteer teams. In 2024, two years after the escalation of the war, the reality of organisations supporting refugees looks markedly different despite the unchanging scale of need. The key challenges revolve around the lack of financial stability and difficulties in securing funding.

Organisations anticipate that obtaining funding for activities aimed at refugees will become even more difficult in the near future. As a consequence, organisations had to reduce their staff headcount and are currently relying on short-term funding. The concerns related to financial stability and funding is due to the withdrawal of INGOs and international organisations from Poland, which have been a key source of funding so far. Despite the reduced funding, organisations want to continue their activities because the scale of the need is still very large.

Recommendations for donor and support entities:  
**Invest in long-term projects that will enable strategic and institutional support for organisations. It is also necessary to review the mechanisms and procedures for awarding grants.**

Delivering short-term projects is counterproductive for both the implementation of activities and for the organisational goals. The cycle of constantly applying for funding, delivering activities quickly and reporting, leads organisations to a vicious circle that prevents them from strategic planning and improving financial stability. In addition, such a system, subject to project logic of indicators and results, risks losing sight of the specific people the organisation is supporting, as well as its employees and volunteers. Supporting refugees requires

longer funding cycles and the inclusion in programmes of elements that strengthen the institutional structure of the organisations themselves, such as support of strategic processes, skills development, counteracting burnout support, and administrative costs.

Grants, even though a common method of funding in the sector in Poland, have many disadvantages, including not being conducive to the financial stability of the organisation. Therefore, it is necessary to revise the mechanisms of awarding grants by donor and support entities, international organisations, and governmental institutions. New mechanisms should take into account the flexibility in funds expenditure, simplified accounting procedures, a properly planned competition schedule and building partnerships between grantors and grantees. These changes will help improve the efficiency and effectiveness of financial support for local organisations and bring greater stability to their operations.

Recommendations for local organisations supporting refugees: **Local organisations need to diversify sources of funding, find new partners and reduce the dependency on grants.**

Grant-based funding carries several negative consequences for organisations and it is important to pursue diverse, non-grant funding sources. Potential directions for financial development are individual fundraising, institutional fundraising and for-profit activities. Therefore, it is essential to strengthen fundraising competences among the organisations' teams by participating in training, and for larger entities, by employing staff to fundraise and to build donor relationships. In the expert discussion it was emphasized, that in developing donor relationships with corporate philanthropy, it is particularly important to establish long-term partnerships with companies that are aligned with the organisation's mission and values.

## Burnout

An important aspect of the management of an organisation is, apart from the size of the budget, the wellbeing of its team. The most significant challenge concerning people working with refugees is fatigue and burnout and it affects everyone: staff, volunteers, and management. Furthermore, more organisations predict that burnout will become a significant trend affecting their activities in the coming years than those currently experiencing the problem. Most organisations that identify the symptoms of burnout among their teams undertake some preventative actions, yet there is a need to deal with this issue more systematically.

Recommendations for donor and support entities: **Allow projects to include budget for costs related to combating burnout and developing employee skills development in organisations.**

The issues of burnout and mental health at work are among [the most significant workplace challenges in Europe](#). In recent years, these issues have become part of the discussion on working conditions in the sector. In light of this, it is essential to look for systemic solutions that will guarantee the wellbeing of those involved in the organisation's activities, in particular by stabilising the organisation's financial situation, as described above. Effectively addressing and preventing problems requires continuous funding for combating burnout, employee development and non-financial rewards. In many cases, this is not possible because organisations cannot account for these types of activities in grant programmes, nor can they build up a stable enough financial base to pay for these activities outside of these projects. The role of donor and support entities is therefore crucial as they could allow for budgeting these costs.

Recommendations for local organisations supporting refugees: **Provide consistent support, such as training and supervision, to prevent burnout of staff.**

Many local organisations undertake activities that aim to counteract burnout, such as training or supervision. However, the challenging work environment of supporting people who experienced trauma requires that such support is ongoing, and not only a one-off opportunity. It is, therefore, crucial that counteracting burnout becomes a part of the strategic thinking of the organisation. Additionally, implementing long-term solutions increases awareness of the issue among the team members and builds an organisational culture where the wellbeing of those involved is as important as other responsibilities. For organisations which already undertake measures and have the appropriate staff resources, it is advisable to create anti-burnout policies, and regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the implemented solutions.

Anti-burnout measures should also be tailored to the needs of individual groups. In FGDs with management staff, the need for individual coaching and mentoring was the one cited most often, while other members of staff mentioned they would like the opportunity to develop their competences further. It is also crucial to address the needs of employees and volunteers with refugee background considering the profile of a worker with complex trauma.

Recommendations for local organisations supporting refugees: **Regularly align the vision and mission of the organisation among staff and strengthen a sense of community.**

One of the most important lessons that local organisations have derived from operating in crisis response is the need to focus on strategy and mission. This helps the organisations navigate the uncertainty and the quickly changing circumstances. A conversation about the values and mission of the organisation is needed and helpful to create a sense of belonging and motivation to action. Regularly undergoing this process and engaging

in integration activities are essential to strengthening to the organisation's community, bringing people together around shared goals and values.

## Networking

Local organisations supporting refugees work closely together with other entities. Their key partners are other Polish organisations and INGOs. Joint projects and sharing information are the most common activities carried out jointly. Organisations greatly value the opportunities to expand cooperation and consider the expansion of their networks as one of the key and lasting changes in the past two years. In addition, organisations see a further need for networking, as well as for various types training, workshops for staff and volunteers. These were the most commonly cited non-financial needs indicated by the surveyed organisations.

Recommendations for the donor and support entities: **Need to invest in opportunities for networking for strengthening the intra-sector cooperation.**

Working together in crisis requires coordination and cooperation. The surveyed organisations expressed a desire and need to continue networking; however, they are unable to create such opportunities for themselves due to time constraints. Clearly, there is a need for other, external entities to provide convening spaces where organisations can share their experiences and best practices and complement each other's resources. Showcasing the benefits of sector collaboration is especially important in the context of growing competition for funding. Through their networks, local organisations would also like to participate in training and workshops to develop skills.

Recommendations for local organisations supporting refugees: **To build coalitions and undertake joint advocacy activities.**

The bleak outlook for local organisations supporting refugees in the near future is related to the lack of a long-term migration policy and appropriate legal solutions in Poland. Following the change of Polish government in the autumn of 2023, organisations saw opportunities for dialogue with the authorities, which in turn led to the need to further develop coalitions and joint advocacy programmes. In particular, when attempting to make systemic and legal changes at a central level, it is necessary to have collective action and advocacy. Implementing solutions at a regional level also requires strong cooperation between local organisations. Due to the time consuming and lengthy nature of advocacy processes, there is a need to divide and share tasks and responsibilities between organisations. It is also important to develop advocacy skills among more members of staff in the organisation's teams, so that not only the leaders are responsible for this area.

## Organisational diversity

Organisations working with refugees are a specific part of the non-governmental sector in Poland, and as a result of the availability of funds allocated in response to the humanitarian crisis, they have greater financial and human resources. At the same time, these organisations are internally diverse, mainly in terms of experience, scale of activities and resources. Additionally, the implementation of activities aimed at refugees varies between organisations, although the majority of the surveyed organisations state that refugee support is one of the key organisational objectives, but for others it is secondary. Each of the organisations can effectively carry out their activities and deliver support to refugees as long as the support provided to them is relevant to the situation and their needs.

Recommendations for donor and support entities: **To design support for organisations considering the diversity of activities and key organisational aims.**

The survey included organisations with annual budgets of approximately €2,3 million (PLN 10 million), as well as those with budgets of less than approximately €230 (PLN 1 thousand). Consequently, the operational realities and needs of these organisations are very different. The same applies to the length of time organisations have been operating - those that have been working in the area of refugee support for two decades are in a different position than organisations that started their activities in 2022. Due to the broad spectrum of organisations, it is crucial to create programmes directed at different types of entities. Such diversity can be a strength for the sector, for example allowing for the development of activities not only in large cities, but also in small, local communities. It also helps to reach a more diverse group of refugees. Additionally, organisations would like to be seen by their donors and partners as a resource for insights and knowledge. Representatives of organisations highlighted that, for them, the most valuable cooperation is one in which both parties learn from each other.

## Organisational expertise and the role of public administration

Many organisations supporting refugees in Poland have extensive operational experience, resulting in a wealth of expertise acquired over the years. In addition, due to the growth in funding opportunities in the first year after the escalation of the war in Ukraine, some of the organisations underwent fast professionalisation, expanded their teams and hired specialists. Most of the surveyed entities received professional support in the last two years in the form of training, workshops, access to knowledge, know-how, experts or educational materials. The expertise includes experience of working in crisis and learning lessons from these activities. At the same

time, organisations recognise a need for an increased engagement from state institutions and the delegation of certain tasks currently carried out by NGOs.

Recommendations for public administration institutions:

**Transfer some of the supporting and integration tasks to state institutions and use the expertise of local organisations and civil society at large.**

Civil society in Poland has played a key role in the humanitarian response - both in relation to the war in Ukraine and at the Polish-Belarusian border. Two years after the outbreak of the war, organisations are still very active in supporting refugees and integrating them into the Polish community. In line with the principle of subsidiarity, organisations supporting refugees, perform a public administrative function for which they should receive public funding. Increased financial support from public funds for local organisations is therefore needed in order to build stable organisations that can execute their activities. At the same time, it is necessary for the public administration to take over some of the tasks previously carried out by the civil society, and for the government and local authorities to take advantage of the expertise offered by local organisations. Organisations should participate in the process of training and knowledge transfer in the area of effective refugee support.

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# Annexes

Annex 1 - Structure of the database used for the quantitative survey	
Organisation type	No. of organisations
Organisations working in support of refugees, migrants and repatriates in Poland (based on bazy.ngo.pl database)	222
Organisations working in the humanitarian field (based on bazy.ngo.pl database)	185
Organisations established between 2022 and 2023 on the wave of support for Ukraine (based on bazy.ngo.pl database)	72
Member organisations of the NGO Forum 'Together'	125
Organisations from the MapujPomoc.pl website, which run assistance points for people from Ukraine	395
Organisations added from internet desk research	76
<b>Total of individual organisations</b>	<b>889</b>

Annex 2 - Breakdown of characteristics in the six focus groups		
	“Large” organisations i.e. operating on a national scale, with a budget above approximately €230,000 (PLN 1m) and more than 20 employees	“Small” organisations i.e. operating on a local/regional scale, with a budget below approximately €230,000 (PLN 1m) and fewer than 20 employees
Organisations experiencing burnout	FGD1	FGD2a/FGD2b
Organisations planning to develop or maintain their refugee supporting activities over the next two years (2024 and 2025)	FGD3a/FGD3b	FGD4
Organisations which experienced an increase in budget and team size in 2023 compared to 2021.	FGD5	FGD6

### Annex 3 - A list of organisations participating in group interviews

Organisation (anonymised number)	Scope of activities	Voivodeship (organisation's headquarter)	Organisational annual budget size (1€=4,3 PLN)	Size of organisation's paid team	Interview code
1	nationwide	Kuyavian–Pomeranian	> €230,000	above 20 people	FGD1
2	nationwide	Lower Silesia	> €230,000	above 100 people	FGD1
3	nationwide	Masovian	> €230,000	above 100 people	FGD1
4	nationwide	Masovian	> €230,000	above 100 people	FGD1
5	nationwide	Masovian	> €230,000	above 20 people	FGD1
6	local	Lesser Poland	< €115,000	below 10 people	FGD2a
7	regional	Pomeranian	€23,000-230,000	below 10 people	FGD2a
8	regional	Greater Poland	€23,000-230,000	below 20 people	FGD2b
9	local	Silesian	> €23,000	below 20 people	FGD2b
10	nationwide	Masovian	> €230,000	above 100 people	FGD3a
11	nationwide	Subcarpathian	> €230,000	above 100 people	FGD3a
12	nationwide	Masovian	> €230,000	above 20 people	FGD3b
13	local	Opole	€23,000-230,000	below 10 people	FGD4
14	local	Greater Poland	€23,000-230,000	below 20 people	FGD4
15	local	Łódź	< €46,000	below 10 people	FGD4
16	nationwide	Masovian	> €230,000	above 20 people	FGD5
17	nationwide	Silesian	> €230,000	above 20 people	FGD5
18	nationwide	Lesser Poland	> €230,000	above 100 people	FGD5
19	nationwide	Lower Silesia	> €230,000	above 20 people	FGD5
20	local	Masovian	€23,000-230,000	below 10 people	FGD6
21	local	Podlaskie	€23,000-230,000	below 10 people	FGD6
22	local	Masovian	€23,000-230,000	below 20 people	FGD6

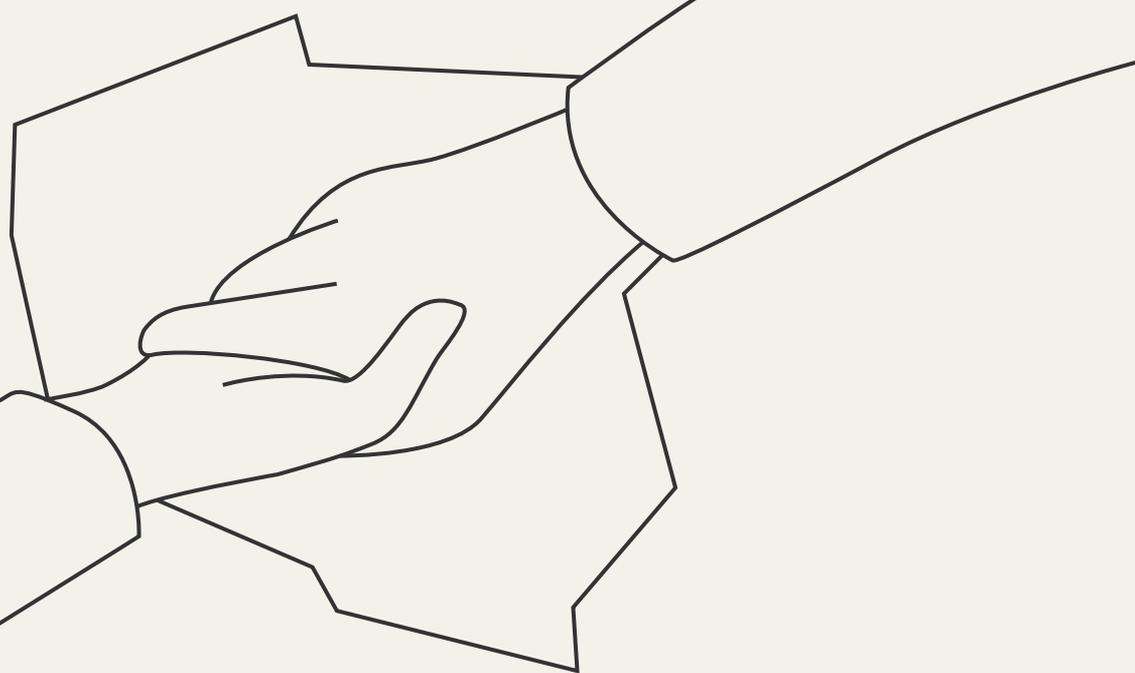
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## Klon/Jawor Research

The research team of the Klon/Jawor Association, an organisation that supports the development of civil society in Poland and runs the [ngo.pl](https://ngo.pl) portal. Klon/Jawor Research brings together expert knowledge of the non-governmental sector in Poland with experience of conducting research and analysis. Since 2002, we have been conducting the largest independent cyclical study of associations and foundations in Poland - [The capacity of NGOs in Poland](#).



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