



REPORT 2

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# Comparative Report on Digital Spaces of Migrants in Poland, Czech Republic, and Israel

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M I N T E

This report presents a comparative analysis of the findings from a series of interviews conducted with Ukrainian war refugees in three countries: Poland, Czech Republic, and Israel. The purpose of these interviews was to gather information about digital skills and abilities of Ukrainian war refugees, methods for effectively communicating with migrants and to identify gaps in current communication. The interviews also investigate how these refugees obtain information about their new country and their perceptions of its accessibility.

Furthermore, the report incorporates insights from Comparative Report 1 which gives a general overview of digital skills of migrants and refugees, and digitalised services designed for migrants across EU countries. Ultimately, based on comparative analysis of findings collected in Poland, Czech Republic and Israel, this report provides recommendations for more efficient and effective communication with Ukrainian war refugees in different countries.

## KEY FINDINGS

### 01.

Most Ukrainian war refugees in the Czech Republic, Israel, and Poland possess digital competencies, are well-educated, and are of working ages. This enables them to access various online information sources. However, the surveyed population in Israel and Poland is heterogeneous in terms of age, family situation, and education, which can affect their digital skills and virtual engagement. Among highly educated and working-age Ukrainian war refugees in Israel and Poland, digital skills and competencies are widespread, while digital gap is slightly more pronounced among elderly migrants, primarily concerning the use of social network applications.

### 02.

Ukrainian war refugees across Poland, Israel and Czech Republic possess equipment to use internet such as smartphones and laptops and use different means of communication to stay in touch with their relatives back home. For instance, in Israel, social networks like Facebook, Whatsapp, Youtube, and Telegram are the preferred communication channels. In Poland, phone calls and apps like Viber, Telegram, WhatsApp, or Messenger are used to keep in touch with relatives in Ukraine. When communicating with people in Poland, phone calls or face-to-face meetings are favoured. In the Czech Republic, social networks such as Telegram, Facebook, and Viber channels/groups are trusted sources of information and means of communication. They also use personal experiences of others, shared either through social networks or directly, to verify such information, while Ukrainian war refugees in Poland verify information from numerous sources with their language and entrepreneurial skills.

03.

Although institutions in Poland, Czech Republic and Israel provide information related to the stay and life of Ukrainians through their web pages, Ukrainian respondents in Czech Republic have expressed a lack of trust in the information provided by these institutions and their web pages and respondents in Poland prefer to use the information from volunteers. Moreover, abundance of information on the internet in Israel might be confusing for migrants who are unfamiliar with the Israeli bureaucracy. In Israel, the information provider for Ukrainian olim and other Ukrainian migrants are different. Being Israeli citizens, Ukrainian olim has more access to governmental services as compared to Ukrainian migrants.

## INTRODUCTION

Since Russia's military aggression in Ukraine in February 2022, Europe has received the largest number of people fleeing war since World War II. For the first time, the Council triggered the Temporary Protection Directive, which was implemented as a special measure to offer prompt and provisional protection in case of a sudden or imminent mass influx of non-EU displaced individuals who cannot go back to their home country (European Union, 2001). The UNHCR records 8,108,448 refugees from Ukraine across Europe as of 7 March 2023. 4,890,639 refugees have registered for temporary protection in Europe (UNHCR Data Portal, 2023).

As of January 2023, 971,271 Ukrainians were registered with the Polish temporary protection scheme (UNHCR, 2023). This allows them access to the labour market, housing, medical assistance, education, and the national healthcare system for 18 months, as per a special act in Poland. As of January 2023, the Czech Republic has granted temporary protection to 483,310 Ukrainian war refugees. Most Ukrainian war refugees have obtained higher education, and over 40% are working in the Czech Republic, with many being employed below their qualifications (PAQ, 2022). In 2022, about 75,000 olim immigrated to Israel, with 15,037 being refugees from Ukraine.

## METHODOLOGY

Findings in this report are based on 62 interviews with Ukrainian war refugees in Poland (20), Czech Republic (22) and Israel (20). Most of the interviewees in Israel were Ukrainians with Jewish ancestry (olim). All interviews were conducted between September 2022 and February 2023. Interviews in Czech Republic were conducted in Ukrainian, while Russian was the interview language in Israel and Poland. Prior to interviews, participants signed a consent form which was approved by the ethics committee of University of SWPS, Ruppin Academic Centre and Charles University. Snowball technique was used to reach out participants. Recorded interviews were transcribed, thematically coded, and analysed (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The age of participants ranges from 18 to 77 and the majority of participants were female.

# FINDINGS

## Digital competencies of Ukrainian migrants

The vast majority of interviewees have digital skills and access to electronic devices, including smartphones, computers, and tablets. They all use social media extensively for communication, entertainment, and information seeking. The interviewees in Poland and the Czech Republic both maintain contact with their relatives in Ukraine via phone calls and messaging applications, while the interviewees in Israel mainly communicate with friends and relatives in Israel using social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Telegram, and use Facebook, WhatsApp, and Viber to communicate with friends and relatives in Ukraine.

The interviewees in Poland and the Czech Republic have language skills that enable them to check information from different sources and communicate in different languages depending on the situation. In Israel, Russian is their primary language, and many also speak Ukrainian and English, and they attend Hebrew classes to learn the language.

Overall, all three groups have been able to transfer their digital skills and adapt to new technological environments, with the use of electronic devices and social media enabling them to stay connected with their loved ones and navigate life in their new countries.

## Differences in digital competencies among Ukrainian migrant groups

The education level of Ukrainian war refugees in Poland, Israel, and the Czech Republic is high, and most of them have an academic degree and a profession. The digital gap in the samples is not significant, as most are of working age, but age influences the type of social media used. Older migrants tend to use Facebook and WhatsApp more often, while younger migrants mentioned TikTok as a source of entertainment and information. Education level affects the ability to receive and perceive information, and having children impacts the time spent in digital spaces but not competencies. Social networking and information search are closely linked to the migrants' life situation, and some form social ties with locals after arrival. Migrants have limited trust in institutions and value information shared in informal communication channels more than official sources. Information is considered reliable only after someone confirms it with personal experience.

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## How do Ukrainian migrants access information?

The comparative analysis highlights the importance of social media channels for information and support among Ukrainian war refugees in Czech Republic, Israel, and Poland. In Czech Republic, social media is the primary source of information for education, jobs, and accommodation, and Ukrainians turn to NGOs, personal contacts, and real estate websites for finding accommodation. In Israel, governmental services and information for Ukrainians are mostly available online in Russian, and the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration provides comprehensive assistance through branch offices and Russian-speaking coordinators. Ukrainian war refugees mainly receive assistance and information from NGOs. In Poland, migrants use social media, Telegram, Viber channels, Facebook groups, and official websites for information, and networks, especially other co-ethnics, are an important source of information on their rights, while face-to-face meetings and communication technology support these networks. Migrants who are employed in Poland benefit from contact with native speakers and are able to learn the Polish language faster.

## Communication with friends, employers, and schools

The children of some respondents in Poland and Czech Republic are studying in Ukraine remotely. However, internet connectivity issues due to unstable electricity in Ukraine were reported as a current challenge. While some interviewees in Poland work online for Ukrainian companies, only two interviewees in Czech Republic worked remotely for their Ukrainian employers, which is consistent with national statistics showing a low percentage of economically active Ukrainians who continue to work with their Ukrainian employers. Additionally, interviewees in Poland faced difficulties finding employment due to age, unrecognized qualifications, or young children, and some had to use the Employment Service or their networks to find work.

## Local administration and NGOs

Both Ukrainian war refugees in Poland and Israel received assistance and support from local authorities, though in Poland, information about legal stay is primarily obtained from other Ukrainians and volunteers rather than government websites. However, the war in Ukraine caused high levels of stress for some interviewees, hindering their adaptation to life in Poland. In Israel, while interviewees were generally satisfied with the assistance and support they received, they faced challenges with e-government services not being available in Russian and difficulties communicating with institutions. Understanding common patterns and procedures in Israel was also difficult for both olim and refugees, particularly those without an Israeli ID card. Both groups found navigating the Israeli bureaucracy challenging.

In the Czech Republic, municipalities were not considered a primary source of information for Ukrainian war refugees, though municipalities reported receiving inquiries from migrants on various issues. NGOs were considered important sources of information during the initial settling-in period, and personal contacts were considered more reliable than online information.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

01.

It should be ensured that information is accessible to all groups of users, regardless of their background, and assistance is provided to those who may face challenges in accessing and processing information (e.g. elderly).

02.

Institutions and organizations should collaborate to bridge information gaps and improve the integration of migrants and specifically Ukrainian war refugees. For example, labour offices should develop better cooperation with counselling organizations or local Ukrainian associations to utilize their information potential.

03.

All public institutions should ensure to provide standard information in all regions and provide language assistance for migrants and refugees, including access to e-government services in their native languages.

04.

Active help should be provided to migrants to enter the labour market and to enrol their children in schools to increase the number of information channels available to them.

05.

Those who have been affected by war trauma should be provided assistance to process information effectively.

06.

Digitalisation should be promoted in a culturally sensitive and inclusive manner. It should be ensured that recently arrived migrants and other vulnerable migrant groups are able to reach digital services.

07.

The communication channels, both online and offline, should be continuously adapted to the evolving demographics and media consumption patterns of the recently arrived migrants.

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