

# The Activities of the Polish Red Cross as an Element of Cultural Integration of Ukrainian Migrants

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## ABSTRACT:

Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022, has resulted in a rapid influx of refugees into Poland, numbering several million. The armed conflict on the territory of Ukraine, which began in 2022, has entailed a number of social consequences. Local governments, government administration, public institutions, social, non-governmental and church organizations, entrepreneurs and residents have all joined forces to provide assistance to Ukrainian citizens. NGOs play a key role in helping the Ukrainian community in Poland. Their activities include helping refugees in Poland, providing humanitarian support to Ukraine, as well as countering disinformation and building communication bridges. The Polish Red Cross is one of the many entities that actively participate in adaptation and integration processes for Ukrainian citizens. This institution focuses primarily on helping people from Ukraine within long-term integration programs. The Polish Red Cross is constantly developing activation programs that provide refugees from Ukraine with stabilization and social integration. As part of the active activities of the Polish Red Cross, refugees receive comprehensive assistance in the areas of education, employment, health care and psychological support. The aim of this article is to attempt to analyse the forms of assistance and support for Ukrainian refugees implemented by the Polish Red Cross.

*Keywords: non-governmental organizations, humanitarian aid, support, integration, adaptation*

## 1. Introduction

Human societies, as it were, from the beginning of their existence, created organizations that today would be classified as non-governmental organizations, or non-profit organizations. Already in ancient times, practically in every country of that time there were various self-help organizations, in which the relief, charitable function of this type of organization was particularly evident (Les 2000).

In connection with the following integration processes and the existence of globalization, the role of NGOs is expanding. In a democratic system, non-governmental organizations must exist, in order to shield private individuals from the excessive power of the state, and at the same time constitute organizations in which the realization of the interests of various social groups functions. The entities that make up this sector are referred to as social organizations, non-governmental organizations, nonprofit organizations, philanthropic organizations, charitable organizations, voluntary organizations, voluntary organizations, voluntarist organizations, independent organizations, public interest organizations, public benefit organizations (Filirt-Fesnak 2022:119).

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They can take formal form as associations and foundations, organizations of economic and professional self-government, social religious entities, or operate without formalization as social movements. Non- governmental organizations operate in the fields of sports and tourism, recreation, education, upbringing, culture, arts, social services, social welfare, health care, local development, labor market and employment. The fields of activity of social organizations are assistance to families, the disabled, the poor, the elderly, the addicted, the homeless, victims of natural disasters, refugees, supporting orphanages (Rynkowska 2019:143). The purpose of the article is to present and attempt to analyze the Polish Red Cross (hereafter PCK) aid programs for Ukrainian migrants implemented in 2022-2025 in Poland. The article is an overview , presenting the humanitarian activities and strategic support programmes of the Polish Red Cross in the perspective of comparison with other NGOs providing support to the Ukrainian community. The research is based on desk research, which included strategic and system documents, reports and statements. At the same time, the review of the found data provided an insight into the experiences and forms of cooperation of third sector organisations for the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine.

## 2. Theoretical Background

The Polish Red Cross (PCK) is Poland's oldest humanitarian non-governmental organization. It is part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. PCK works to help victims of natural disasters and catastrophes, both in Poland and around the world, and prepares the public to cope with emergency situations.

**Table 1.** Basic principles of the PCK's operation

The principle of	Characteristics
humanitarianis	narodamio prevent and alleviate human suffering in all circumstances, to protect life and health and to ensure respect for human personality, to strive for mutual understanding, friendship and cooperation and lasting peace among all peoples
Impartiality	assistance is provided regardless of nationality, race, religion or political opinion, always giving priority to the most urgent cases
Neutrality	in order to maintain public confidence, the organisation shall refrain from taking part in hostilities and at all times in disputes of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature
voluntariness	the provision of assistance is voluntary, without regard to financial or other interests

Unity	there is only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society per country; it should be open to all and cover the whole country with its humanitarian activities
independence	national associations, serving to assist the public authorities in their humanitarian activities and subject to the laws in force in their countries, should always exercise autonomy, allowing them to act at any time, in accordance with the principles of the organisation
Universality	the organisation covers the whole world and all associations have equal rights and obligations to help each other

Source: own study based on the “Program Strategy of the Polish Red Cross until 2030.”

The fundamental principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent are humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, unity and universality of action without distinction of race, nationality or religion. The main mission of the organization is the prevention and alleviation of human suffering and the protection of human dignity without any discrimination based on nationality, race, gender, religious or political beliefs.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022, resulted in a rapid and several million refugee influx into Poland. Poland is one of the countries, along with the United States and Germany, which has accepted the most war refugees from Ukraine in absolute numbers (UNHCR 2024). As of June 2023, more than 4.7 million refugees from Ukraine were residing in OECD member countries (2023).

The exodus from Ukraine is the highest population movement in Europe since World War II. Poland has become an area of refuge for most Ukrainians. The armed conflict in Ukraine has been ongoing for 3 years and millions of people are still in need of assistance. The Ukrainian exodus has become an urgent target for the Polish social welfare system to address the need for adequate social security for war refugees, which has triggered a number of challenges that include the spheres of housing, education, health care, labor market, social integration, and financial security (Hermanowski 2022).

Nevertheless, Poland's involvement in supporting Ukrainian migrants would not be possible without Polish NGOs. In the face of the humanitarian crisis related to the war in Ukraine, many NGOs, including the Polish Red Cross, are actively cooperating and supporting the Polish social welfare system for Ukrainian migrants in many areas of assistance. The outbreak of war and the huge influx of refugees into Poland have posed numerous challenges for all NGOs. In addition to the Polish government and local government units, a number of entities belonging to the so-called third sector (NGOs) have joined in the organization of humanitarian aid for Ukrainian refugees. They undertook relief efforts immediately after the Russian aggression against Ukraine both in the center of the humanitarian crisis (on the Polish-Ukrainian border and in the border strip) and throughout the country (Grabowska, Szawara -Pięta 2023:387).

Non-governmental organizations working on behalf of migrants include, for example, the Polish Humanitarian Action, Caritas Poland, the Polish Red Cross, the Ocalenie Foundation, the SOS Children's Villages Foundation, the International Aid

Center Foundation, the Society of Friends of Ukraine, UNICEF Poland, or the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, and many others.

**3. Methods**

The main objective of the study is to present PCK's programs and other forms of assistance to Ukrainian migrants in the process of their adaptation and integration based on the analysis of the organization's reports, statements and statutes. One of the key dimensions worth analyzing is the way in which support concerning assistance from NGOs, including PCK to Ukraine and refugees from the country, is organized and implemented. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), together with national associations such as the Polish Red Cross and in close cooperation with the Ukrainian Red Cross, is constantly working to deliver aid where it is needed most - strengthening logistics, expanding warehouses , delivering supplies to those affected by the crisis (Hermanowski 2022 ).

In Poland, the Polish Red Cross focuses primarily on helping people from Ukraine through long-term integration programs. From the beginning, the Polish Red Cross has been committed to helping people from Ukraine who have found refuge in our country. The organization's networked nature, with nearly 200 branches, allows it to quickly reach out with assistance and identify the current needs of refugees. Thanks to the support of donors and volunteers, it has been possible to provide refugees with food, medical care, psychosocial support and assistance in integrating into Polish society. Initially, the priority was to provide humanitarian aid. For the entire Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, helping Ukraine is the largest and most difficult humanitarian operation conducted since World War II. PCK's integration activities are aimed at building social ties, supporting people in distress and promoting active participation in society. These activities target various groups, including seniors, migrants, refugees and local communities.

**Table 2** Examples of PCK integration activities

Form of activity Characteristics	Characteristics
Integration Centres	The Polish Red Cross runs integration centres that offer psychosocial support, assistance in finding work, Polish language classes and integration events.
Integration activities	PCK organises workshops, discussions, games and activities to help build relationships, develop communication and emotional skills.
Events and activities	The PCK organises picnics, excursions, cultural and sporting events that integrate different social groups, including migrants

Intergenerational projects	PCK involves seniors and young people in volunteering activities, promoting the exchange of experiences and breaking down intergenerational and international barriers
Support for refugees and migrants	PCK offers assistance in adapting to a new environment, language learning, career counselling and psychological support
Humanitarian Aid Groups	GPH PCKs work in emergency situations, providing humanitarian aid and supporting those affected by natural disasters, conflicts and accidents
Senior Citizens' Clubs	The activities of the PCK Senior Clubs aim to activate seniors socially and mentally, providing them with opportunities to develop their passions and forge new relationships.

Source: own compilation based on "Polish Red Cross Programme Strategy 2025-2030

PCK's integration activities contribute to building an open, tolerant and active society, where everyone has a chance to develop and participate fully in society. PCK is constantly developing activation programs to ensure the stabilization and social integration of refugees from Ukraine. The current form of assistance is implemented with an emphasis on long-term support, enabling Ukrainian refugees to become independent ( Rycerska 2022: 63–84; 85). However, despite the strong commitment and concern of aid programme implementers, a number of barriers and difficulties are identified to enable the full adaptation and integration process of Ukrainian refugees:

- PCK programmes offer Polish language and vocational training, but the lack of language fluency and cultural constraints often result in reluctance and withdrawal from activities during the project, especially for those with an unstable mental constitution
- traumatic experiences of beneficiaries , post-traumatic stress syndrome, prolonged tension, often bereavement, depression , lack of appropriate psychological intervention are also a barrier
- lack of appropriate long-term integration policy tools and strategies
- formal-legal difficulties (lack of possibility to nostrify diplomas, work placements and under-qualified work ) which cause frustration and bitterness among beneficiaries.

The following part of the article will present selected integration and adaptation programs of long-term assistance to Ukrainian migrants implemented in the PCK in 2022-2026. Under the analysis of the reports of programs such as ; “Together to Independence”, , “Chance for a New Start”, ‘Livelihoods’, “Friend in Contact” together with the PCK Helpline, the Restoring Family Links campaign, the initiative “Health Counts” or the activities of the Centers for Integration of Foreigners (CIC) and a wide range of psychological support, refugees receive comprehensive assistance in the field of education , employment and health care (Polish Red Cross Program Strategy for 2025- 2030).

The project , “Together to Independence - a step towards self-reliance”, is addressed to war refugees from Ukraine residing in collective housing centers. The leader of the initiative is the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration, and the partners are the

Polish Red Cross and the PCPM. The program is funded by the European Union. The program provides a transparent and reliable system of support in achieving self-reliance. It motivates and supports in entering the labor market, renting an apartment. Within the framework of the program, participants receive financial support for renting apartments to facilitate the transition to independent living. In addition, the project offers individual career counseling, job search assistance, Polish language courses and participation in integration and adaptation events. The Program is open to applicants who have a valid PESEL number with an assigned UKR status and live in collective housing centers in 9 provinces: dolnoslaskie, kujawsko-pomorskie, lubelskie, łódzkie, mazowieckie, opolskie, podkarpackie, pomorskie or świętokrzyskie.

In the remaining provinces, the Program is implemented by the Polish International Aid Center Foundation. The activities offered under the Program are aimed at helping people become independent by leaving the centers, receiving vocational counseling and participating in integration and adaptation events.

The “Chance for a New Start” program is an offer aimed at people who use the services of Social Assistance Centers, who are in a difficult financial situation, affected by disability, at risk of social exclusion, including refugees from Ukraine. The project is aimed at people over the age of 18 who want to improve their professional qualifications and increase stable employment. As part of the project, participants can take advantage of a wide range of support services: individual, counseling, specialized, activation support, training in key competencies (ICT), training or vocational courses selected individually to the needs and capabilities of participants and the requirements of the labor market, 4-month paid professional internships with local employers in positions consistent with the previously completed training - available to some participants and support in finding a job, including job placement, mentoring and supported employment. Each participant receives comprehensive support, including training and internship scholarships, social security, health insurance and training materials. As a result, the program provides not only professional development, but also life stability and future prospects. The project is funded by the European Union under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund for 2021-2027 and the state budget.

As part of the “Livelihoods” program, the Polish Red Cross, in cooperation with the Spanish Red Cross, is effectively supporting refugees in finding work and integrating into the Polish market. Its main goal is to increase employability and improve access to the local labor market for people who left Ukraine as a result of the conflict and have temporarily settled in Poland. The project provides a wide range of support from professional career counseling through vocational courses to legal and psychological advice. Project participants also have the opportunity to take a Polish language course and benefit from document translation services, and in special circumstances, targeted financial assistance. More than 5757 people have benefited from the courses, and more than 1,300 participants have found employment in various sectors, such as: elderly care, administration or logistics. An integral aspect of vocational activation is training and courses, which have been adapted to market needs. The project has so far organized 391 Polish language courses, in which, 2,301 people have participated, which has been crucial to their integration and increased chances of finding employment. With such a comprehensive approach, the Livelihoods project not only improves refugees' chances in

the labor market, but also contributes to their fuller integration into Polish society, helping them to build a stable future in their new country.

PCK offers psychosocial support to all those affected by the armed conflict in Ukraine. It provides information, but also helps cope with stress. Tools for this are the PCK Helpline and the Friend in Contact program, which aims to strengthen methods of coping with stress and improve the well-being of beneficiaries under PCK care, especially those affected by the armed conflict in Ukraine. Through regular contact with PCK's professional staff, beneficiaries can benefit from psychosocial support that can improve their well-being and reduce their feelings of loneliness. The "Friend in Contact" program is available free of charge to any adult Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. To take advantage of the program, one must register using an online form.

The PCK Hotline is part of the international #EU4Health project, which aims to provide psychological support to those affected by the armed conflict in Ukraine. Psychologists on duty at the Hotline will provide immediate psychological assistance to people in need, and in special cases, refer them to specialists. They have a database of contacts to organizations implementing aid projects for Ukrainians in Poland, which allows them to effectively direct those in need to the appropriate institutions. As part of the support, in the period until May 25, 2025, 50.7 thousand conversations were carried out on the PCK Helpline and 1 thousand conversations in direct contact in the program, "Friend in Contact." The assistance is anonymous and free of charge. PCK, in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), is helping to reunite families separated by the armed conflict in Ukraine.

The "Restoring Family Links" program supports finding and restoring contact with family members, helping refugees and internally displaced persons in Ukraine. So far, a search procedure has been initiated for 647 people, of whom 191 have been successfully completed. As part of the project, the Polish Red Cross is also providing assistance to elderly people with health problems in difficult life situations, for whom independent travel to relatives would be impossible. To date, PCK has conducted 105 such humanitarian transports. In addition, PCK provides assistance to people from Ukraine in difficult life situations in the form of purchasing rehabilitation equipment and covering the cost of transporting a corpse or urn from Poland to Ukraine.

The "Health Counts" program, implemented by the Polish Red Cross with the support of the German Red Cross, is a key relief measure for Ukrainian citizens residing in Poland after February 24, 2022. With funding of PLN 3.64 million, thousands of people in need of medication have been supported. The project primarily covers seniors, children and people with disabilities, providing them with access to essential pharmacotherapy. The program is being conducted in two stages, involving the registration and distribution of codes for the purchase of medicines in all 16 District Branches of the PCK. A total of 12,806 codes were issued, of which 10,791 went to Ukrainian citizens, and 2015 codes were issued to Polish citizens. Thanks to the "Health Counts" initiative, the Polish Red Cross is providing real support to refugees from Ukraine, ensuring their access to treatment and improving their health security in Poland. The project is the next step in a long-term strategy to help those who have found themselves in difficult health and living situations as a result of the war.

The Foreigner Integration Centers (CICs) in the formula implemented by PCK branches are a model of a space with multiple services based on cooperation between local government, government administration and social organizations. The concept of the Foreigner Integration Center is based on two key elements, which can be described as “We Require and We Support”.

The CIC is expected to provide the necessary services to enable foreigners to function in Poland, which will allow for the collection of data and a better definition of the social profile of migrants and the adaptation of services to their needs.

The offer and range of services available at the Foreigners' Integration Centres are mainly: learning Polish as a foreign language at A1/A2 level, including for children, information and counselling points, psychological care for children, support in the area of legalisation of stay provided by the Governor, legal support in the area of employment and labour rights, adaptation/orientation course, counteracting domestic violence. The activities of the CICs are places that are meant to bring generations together and help Ukrainians find their way in their new life situation., Through meetings at the CICs, refugees have the opportunity to gain new competencies and experience , while making contacts that help them better adapt to life in Poland. Nearly 4,000 people use the centers' services each month. The goal of the project implemented by PCK is to increase the independence and improve the employment of foreigners from Ukraine, as well as their functioning in local communities by providing holistic support in the form of educational services, information services, integration support and other accompanying services (therapy, rehabilitation). The activities of the Center for Integration of Foreigners provide the foundation for the creation of a local integration-adoption strategy.

As already mentioned, the first phase of assistance to Ukraine was spontaneous, spontaneous and uncoordinated. However, after just a few days, the first community crisis units began to be established, to associate refugee needs and cooperation was established between third sector organisations. Both the Polish Red Cross, Polish Humanitarian Action and Caritas Poland have focused on activities aimed at integrating migrants, providing food and shelter and providing psychological support, especially for children. The mission of all these organisations is primarily to help people affected by natural disasters and wars around the world. In response to the outbreak of the crisis across the country, PAH significantly intensified its activities. It became involved in supporting both Ukrainian refugees arriving in Poland and activities on the Polish-Ukrainian border and in Ukraine itself. In the period 2022-2023, PAH prepared more than 1million food , hygiene packages for the Ukrainian population. Cross-border transports were also organised on an ongoing basis. It continues to provide food and hygiene products, psychological and financial support, renovate private homes and social institutions, including centres for the elderly, through its functioning offices in Ukraine. Caritas Poland, in turn, in addition to standard humanitarian aid , provided on both the Polish and Ukrainian sides, carries out a number of aid programmes for Ukrainian individuals and families. These include long-term programmes, such as Family Assistance Centres and Family Support Centres, but also ad hoc measures, such as the renovation or reconstruction of houses and hospitals. Caritas Poland and diocesan Caritas have set up 28 Migrant and Refugee Assistance Centres. The centres provide refugees with free social and psychological assistance, Polish language courses, job placement, legal advice, translation of documents or play and

education facilities for children and integration for families and seniors. More than 102,000 people have so far benefited from the assistance of the Centres across Poland. Caritas responds to the needs of refugees on a daily basis, supporting their process of integration and finding their way in new conditions.

Polish NGOs constantly diagnose the real needs of Ukrainian refugees, becoming an unquestionable leader in the international arena in providing humanitarian aid. According to Lewis (2001), mutual cooperation of NGOs with other NGOs and the creation of NGO networks enable mutual support and problem solving, exchange of experience and thus foster effective and efficient assistance to those in need. In the light of the survey, third sector organisations most often indicate the following activities of their services: coordinating Polish language learning (16%), providing food (12.9%) and providing accommodation (12.3%). 10.4% of the surveyed organisations mentioned undertaking activities for the integration of refugees into the local environment and psychological support, as well as helping refugees find work. Organisations also provided products necessary for the daily functioning of refugees in the first days after crossing the border, such as clothing (7.4%), personal hygiene products (3.1%) or medicines and dressings (2.5%). In addition, they provided care for children and young people (6.7%), supported the implementation of official matters (4.3%) and organised transport and logistics (3.7%) (Charycka et al., 2022)

#### 4. Results

Every crisis, especially one that has its genesis in warfare, stirs up great public emotions. These emotions are all the greater when the effects of this crisis affect a neighboring state and society. This is also the case with Poland and Ukraine. Analyzing the issue of assistance to refugees from Ukraine, it should be noted that it is multidimensional and long-term, especially in the case of activities undertaken by NGOs. The results of the analysis show that the forms of support implemented by the Polish Red Cross for war refugees from Ukraine focus on a variety of levels aimed at meeting the needs of individuals and families affected by refugeeism (Adamczyk 2023). An analysis of the Polish Red Cross's individualised forms of assistance to Ukrainian refugees focuses primarily on meeting basic needs in terms of food and shelter and providing psychological support, mainly to Ukrainian mothers with minor children (Lipiec -Karwowska 2023: 106-110). The strategic model of the Polish Red Cross' program activities emphasized the implementation of humanitarian education and raising the emergency preparedness of Polish society, as well as enhancing the Polish Red Cross' capacity for rapid response and large-scale relief. The Polish Red Cross has become an inspirer and strategic partner of social change in Poland in response to humanitarian challenges and the Ukrainian refugee crisis.

The catalog of benefits for the assistance provided to refugees from Ukraine concerns many aspects of their functioning, both socially and individually, and in particular focus on issues of implementation of programs for migrants, such as the creation of integration centers, distribution of medical vouchers, housing support, psychological support, building social resilience through activation in the labor market and integration activities, organizing psychological assistance on the territory of Poland and Ukraine, education, including

learning the Polish language, information support with legal assistance, support for people with disabilities, integration assistance, career counseling

Research on the integration of foreigners has been conducted for a long time and concerns various areas of life (Wójcik -Żoladek 2014: Castels 2011, Ahmed S., Castaneda C., i in 2011, Baran et al :2022, Staniszewski :2025 ). Comprehensive integration programmes based on language learning, access to the labour market and education have been successfully implemented in many European countries for years. Research and socio-political discourse around the issues of assistance and support for migrants tend to use the term integration and all activities that are supposed to enable this process in the context of a concept based on a sense of belonging to society and functioning in a safe environment where one's own needs, values, belief in equal treatment and confirmation of acceptance are respected, without being judged or criticized (Duszczyk, Kaczmarczyk 2022:9).

The literature on the subject as well as numerous recommendations from long-term studies on the integration of refugees, e.g. in Germany, show that multidimensional integration programmes based on psychological-therapeutic support, language and vocational courses, the possibility of obtaining social housing and the mandatory compulsory school attendance of immigrant children increase the scope for adaptation-integration possibilities and consequently increase family and professional stability.

The Polish Red Cross continues to develop activation programs to provide Ukrainian refugees with stability and social integration. Aid did not end after the first years of the humanitarian crisis - the focus is now on long-term support, enabling Ukrainians to become independent. Three years on, the challenges remain enormous. Millions of people are displaced, struggling to rebuild their lives in their new countries of residence. With no savings and a rising cost of living, many have no other choice but to return home. But returning is no longer the same as before - homes, schools, hospitals and livelihoods have been destroyed. Access to health care and education is a daily struggle for them. That's why it's so important to help both in the countries where the refugees are staying and in Ukraine itself. Thanks to the support of donors and business partners, aid to Ukraine continues through long-term programs.

The PCK organization focuses on vocational activation, integration support, and psychological and health assistance. The Polish Red Cross has received the prestigious International Humanitarian Service Award from the American Red Cross in Washington for its work. As a member of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the Polish Red Cross operates within the global IFRC movement, which greatly facilitates international cooperation, the exchange of experiences, and the transfer of various types of initiatives. Expert circles are engaged in a social discourse reflecting on the replication of the strategic model of assistance and integration of the Polish Red Cross in other places. Third sector organizations, in cooperation with local governments, are attempting to implement an integration model based on the inclusion of refugees in terms of social benefits, financial assistance, housing, and the labor market.

In Poland, the Polish Red Cross is rapidly expanding its network of integration centers (including in Białystok, Łomża, Suwałki, and the newly opened center in Mszana Dolna).

It turns out that the adaptation-integration model based on providing financial, housing, and psychological support is very beneficial and can take a flexible form, tailored to the selected category of migrants and their place of residence.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

The influx of migrants and refugees in such numbers urgently requires the delegation of professional humanitarian aid services. A number of entities belonging to the so-called “third sector” have been involved in the organization of humanitarian aid for refugees from Ukraine, in addition to the Polish government and local government units. They undertook relief efforts immediately after the Russian aggression against Ukraine both in the center of the humanitarian crisis (on the Polish-Ukrainian border and in the border strip) and throughout the country.

Non-governmental organizations working on behalf of migrants include, for example, the Polish Humanitarian Action (hereafter PAH), Caritas Poland, the Polish Red Cross (hereafter PCK), the Rescue Foundation, the SOS Children's Villages Foundation, the Foundation Center for International Aid (hereafter FCPM), the Society of Friends of Ukraine, UNICEF Poland, or the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, and many others.

There are many organizations providing humanitarian aid on the international stage, including UN agencies such as UNHCR, but there are also numerous grassroots initiatives by third sector organizations. In Poland, there are many humanitarian organizations helping Ukraine and its inhabitants, which, alongside the Polish government and local government units, have taken effective aid measures, both at the center of the humanitarian crisis (on the Polish-Ukrainian border and in the border zone) and throughout the country. The main institutions coordinating humanitarian and migration aid include: Polska Akcja Humanitarna (Polish Humanitarian Action), Caritas Polska, the Polish Red Cross, Polska Misja Medyczna (Polish Medical Mission), Polskie Centrum Pomocy Międzynarodowej (Polish Center for International Aid), UNICEF Polska, Fundacja SOS Wioski Dziecięce (SOS Children's Villages Foundation), the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, and many others. In the first phase of the war in Ukraine, Polish non-governmental organizations and the unaffiliated local community and its leaders were involved in helping refugees. The tasks of NGOs in the first days of the war included: providing shelter for asylum seekers, ensuring the well-being of those hosting war refugees, helping people with disabilities, supporting LGBTQ+ people, organizing psychological, legal, linguistic, and logistical assistance, helping animals, and collecting blood, material donations, and money.

In democratic countries, we are dealing with a natural process based, among other things, on the assumption that individuals and local communities are bailing out central institutions, i.e. deinstitutionalization (Grewinski 2024). This is the case in social policy with regard to the elderly or disabled, refugees, for example. However, this assumes that central institutions appreciate the activities of civil society and support them accordingly. From the very beginning, Poland has provided Ukraine with multifaceted support in many areas: political, humanitarian, financial, and military. Our country is the undisputed leader in terms of state budget funds allocated to aid Ukraine (Chalupczak 2018). Noteworthy is

the fact that this support was overwhelmingly in the nature of grassroots social initiatives, relying on the involvement of individual citizens, community groups and NGOs. Their activity was an essential part of the refugee assistance system, co-organized by local authorities and government administration. The activities of Polish migration policy, selected areas of social policy and humanitarian law see a huge role in partnership with NGOs due to their long experience in working with migrant communities and greater knowledge of the needs of their environment. Poland is the only country from Central and Eastern Europe with a large number of NGOs operating abroad and which are not only located in the capital, but also in other regions of Poland, which translates into their experience in activating minorities, migrants and refugees for the benefit of the local environment.

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