Nowe Відносини
Нові Relacje

Feeling at home?

What we have learnt about building relationships and social inclusion of refugees aged 50+ from Ukraine

Programme executors

Association of Creative Initiatives "ę"

We started working on the NEW RELATIONSHIPS programme together with HelpAge International in spring 2022. It was a busy and intense period with hundreds of thousands of Poles across the country and in local communities becoming involved in helping refugees from Ukraine, often ahead of the Polish government. Each of us, individually and together, was learning what the refugee crisis is all about.Ever since its establishment, the Association of Creative Initiatives "ę" has been responding to emerging social challenges by creating space for innovative solutions and in-depth work with local communities. However, the challenges of the refugee crisis were new to us.

Undergoing accelerated education, through our cooperation with the Polish Migration Forum Foundation, using HelpAge's knowledge and support, as well as our own diagnoses and intuition for social action, we predicted that:

— the elderly, in particular elderly women, would represent a special group of refugees, affected by the risk of additional exclusion due to age;

— when the first wave of spontaneous aid came to an end, new problems and tensions would arise, facing us with the challenge of a long-term integration process.

We also had a feeling that, with our experience, we can propose and test solutions that are likely to serve as support for local communities and give those participating in the programme respite, new insights and openness to the place and people among whom they happen to live.

Following nearly eleven months of work, we certainly know that running the programme has been one of the most illuminating experiences in the history of our organisation. Our efforts in 10 communities allowed us to acquire practical and unique knowledge about what works and what does not work in integration projects involving the elderly from

Ukraine. This process went hand in hand with research in action – practices and experiences. Now we present its final effect, the result of our case studies and knowledge resources that we wish to share.

Feel invited to hear the honest and unembellished voices of local activity organisers, Ukrainian women and men, Polish women and men of all ages. We are convinced that by building local communities, as leaders, educators or citizens, we have the power to shape reality, including new relationships.

Marta Białek-Graczyk,
President of the Management Board of
the Association of Creative Initiatives "ę"

Polish Migration Forum Foundation

The Polish Migration Forum Foundation has been working for refugees living in Poland since 2007. The last year and a half have been the most challenging time for us so far.

Since 24 February 2022, some four million refugees from Ukraine have passed through Poland, receiving basic humanitarian aid in the country. Some one million six hundred thousand have applied for temporary protection. The statistics of the Ministry of Family and Social Policy show that 4.7% of them are aged 65+. The figure may seem small at first sight.

However, systemic support favours young people, who have no problems finding their way into the labour market. The situation of all the rest – the elderly, the disabled and women carers – has brought to stark light the gaps in the Polish social welfare system. We have too few social workers, assistants for people with disabilities and places in nursing homes.

"4.7%" is a figure that does not reflect our perspective as an organisation involved in field work and supporting those in need in our support

centre on a daily basis. One in two is aged over sixty-five. They are lost, excluded from access to healthcare and often at risk of homelessness.

We have still much to do. There is no doubt that it is essential to ensure the safety and protection of the elderly. This should go hand in hand with activation, building a support network and creating a sense of belonging.

Participation in the "New Relationships" project and working with the Association of Creative Initiatives "ę" has been a moving experience for us. We have been proud to participate in creating new bonds and friendships between Ukrainian women refugees and Polish elderly women. We ourselves have also had the great chance to meet wonderful organisations implementing projects, with communities full of strength and determination to provide assistance.

The most important lesson learnt from this project is the ability to work "step by step," adjusting the pace of our activities to the needs and resources of those whom we assist. Nothing that involves overcoming the trauma of war and the stress of displacement can happen quickly. Building relationships requires time, attention and sensitivity.

I hope you will enjoy reading this publication.

Karolina Czerwińska, Member of the PFM Foundation Board

About the New Relationships programme

The main objective of the New Relationships programme is to support local projects for social inclusion and adaptation in the new place of residence of war refugees from Ukraine in Poland, with a special focus on the needs of people aged 50+. Its pilot edition involved 10 organisations operating in different parts of Poland. For 8 months, they organised various activities with a view to fostering mutual understanding between participants from Ukraine and Poland, preventing discrimination and

promoting multiculturalism. All this was built on respect for individual autonomy and tolerance.

The programme was implemented by the Association of Creative Initiatives "ę" with funding from Help Age International and the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. The Polish Migration Forum was a partner of the programme.

Programme in figures

130 applications in the call for proposals

10 local initiatives implemented in different parts of Poland

541 700 PLN grants awarded

866 direct beneficiaries

274 refugee beneficiaries from Ukraine aged 50+

247 refugees, who benefited from legal, physiotherapeutic and psychological support

More than **1000 indirect recipients**

Places and organisations implementing the projects
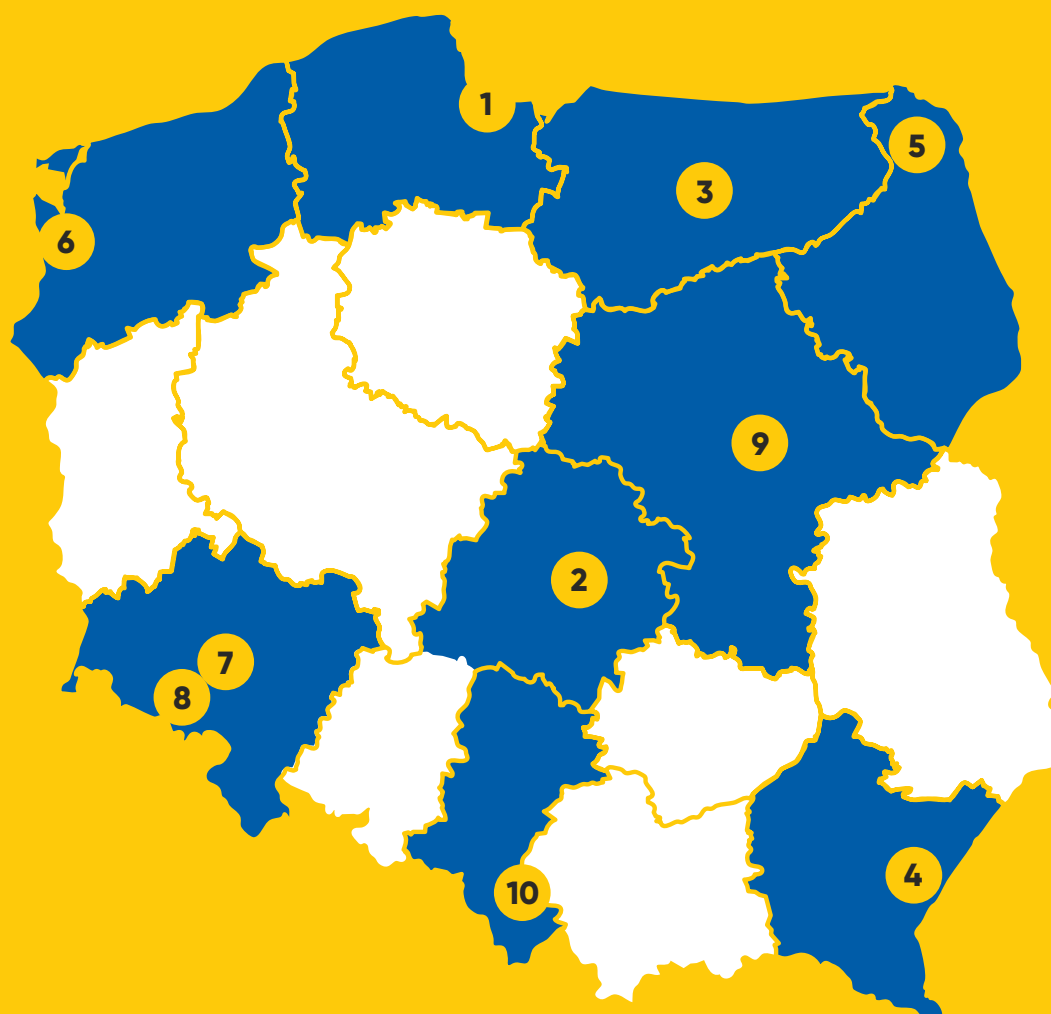
1. **Gdańsk**
   Gdańsk Archipelago of Culture
2. **Łódź**
   Ethnos Association
3. **Olsztyn**
   FOSA Federation of Social Organisations
   of the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship
4. **Przemyśl**
   Union of Ukrainians in Poland,
   Przemyśl Branch
5. **Suwałki**
   Union of Ukrainians in Suwałki
6. **Szczecin**
   Polites Association
7. **Świdnica**
   Ładne Rzeczy Foundation
8. **Wałbrzych**
   Radość Życia Association
9. **Warszawa**
   Theatre Pedagogues' Association
10. **Żywiec**
    Żywiec Development Foundation

How we implemented and summarised our research

The New Relationships programme involved evaluation and research as its vital part. We wanted to learn about the processes and challenges faced by the programme participants and, even more importantly, to get to know them and their coordinators, as well as the wider social environment of the projects. To achieve this, we conducted qualitative research in each of the ten projects, based on in-depth interview and focus group techniques. A total of nearly hundred people took part in the research. These were Ukrainian women refugees aged 50+, elderly Polish women and men, migrants from Ukraine before the escalation of the war in 2022 and/or from other countries, as well as project co-ordinators, heads of implementing organisations, representatives of public administration and other local NGOs, and people representing religious communities.

The surveys were carried out in a hybrid way, with most of them taking place in situ and a smaller proportion completed by telephone, from March to May 2023.

This publication is an abridged version of the report. The full, much more comprehensive, version is available online at www.nowerelacje.org. The report is composed of two parts. The first one summarises our research. This summary is used as a basis in chapters one and two for identifying the characteristics of the people involved in the project: elderly women refugees from Ukraine and Polish participants. Chapter Three describes the relationships between them and their surroundings, created and observed during the activities carried out in ten Polish cities.

In the second part (chapter four), we attempt to inventory the nudges, or incentives, supporting work towards integration. Finally, we propose issues for discussion and a list of challenges in the context of designing inclusive activities.

Intro-duction

or how to read the report

How do we understand the terms "integration" and "nudge" in this report?

In this report, we use key terms to describe the processes that took place as part of the programme. Two of these, integration and nudges, need to be explained.

The definition of integration provided by the Polish Scientific Publishing House refers to the "process of forming a whole from parts," social integration as both a process of "fusion at different social levels" and "alignment of people's behaviour within a group." So we are thinking about a process. But it is more about alignment than about forming a whole or fusion. This is consistent with the definition of integration adopted by the Council of Europe more than a quarter of a century ago in the context of migration, understood as "a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States." The two-way relationship of migrants and the host community and accommodation, working both ways, are of key importance here.

Plurality – this is how the number of integration theories can be summarised. We focused primarily on the two-way nature of the process, noticing the challenge for both sides: both refugees and us as the host society. In addition, we were deeply convinced that, even once the New Relationships programme was over, we would be still at the beginning of our journey.

This understanding of the integration process as one based on reciprocity guides this report and the whole concept of New Relationships. It is an unfinished process. We hope that the results of this programme and subsequent ones will foster its development.

When it comes to the concept of "nudging," we use it as the lens through which, in our view, we can most accurately describe the attempts at integration within the New Relationships programme.

In this respect, we were inspired by the book by Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein, entitled *Nudge. Nudge: improving decisions about health, wealth, and happiness*, published in 2008. Why?

The authors believe that people do not always act rationally, and that nudges are needed to encourage them to do so. What is irrational in the context of war refugees coming from Ukraine to Poland? For instance, disseminating anecdotal stories based on stereotypes and prejudices, fuelling hostility by referring to the difficult history between our countries. This builds walls instead of bridges, makes it impossible to provide good support in times of need, creates barriers in relationships and closes up communities. It makes our neighbourhoods incapable of civic engagement in a situation of crisis. Rationality is therefore the opposite of such conduct. It is where nudges can come into play, and nudges are understood here as designing activities, ways of "being with each other" and encountering each other and whole communities to promote behaviours and decisions that serve both individuals and whole groups. They benefit integration as a process of mutual adjustment.

The dictionary definition of the world "nudge" is "prod someone or something gently with one's elbow, stick end, etc." It should be made clear that the new relational understanding of nudges has nothing to do with this definition. In the report, nudges are understood as social, individual, institutional and organisational incentives and attempts to take part in a complex, long-term and – well, let us be honest – difficult integration process.

Part one

women protagonists and their stories
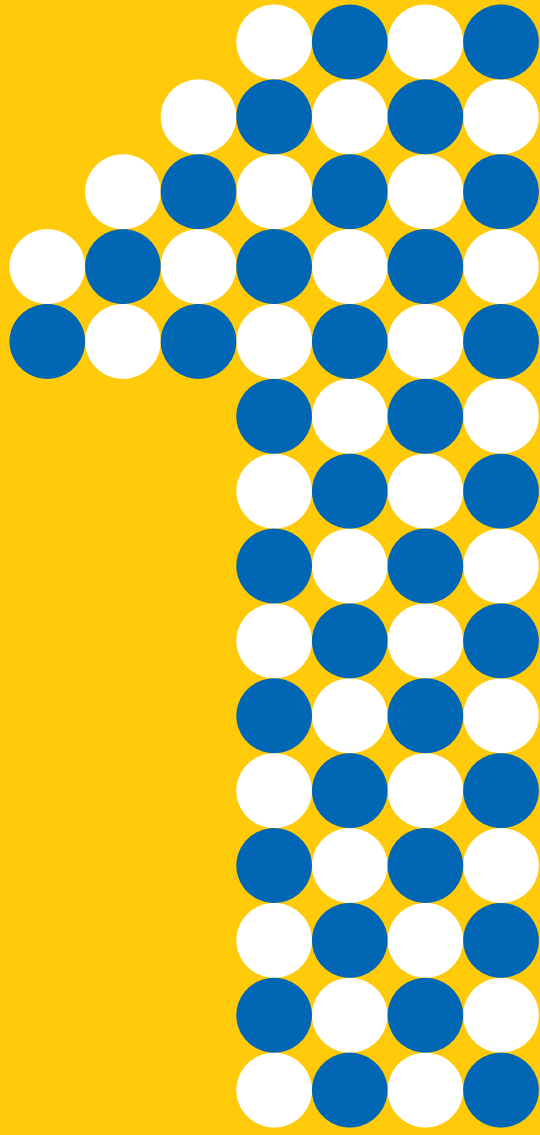
1. Women Protagonists Of The Programme: Main Paths

The participants in the projects were mainly women of both nationalities, but some projects involved also men, from both Poland and Ukraine.

1.1. People from Ukraine

Women and men from Ukraine come to Poland in very different social, geopolitical, but also personal contexts. What all these journeys have in common is Russia's armed assault on Ukraine on 24 February 2022. At that time, around twelve million people crossed the Polish border, including many women aged over fifty, a group that is crucial to the New Relationships programme. They came to Poland with a number of problems of their own, their families and also their animals. All this makes up a diverse picture, with several perspectives, ranging from geographic and social to economic, family and, unfortunately, also war ones. We have attempted to catalogue the main paths that led the elderly women participating in New Relationships to Poland, bearing in mind the context of their arrival.

Where to?	With whom?	With what?
— To family	— With the elderly	— With illness
— To familiar places	— With children	— With trauma
— Without any plans	— With family	

Feeling at home? What we have learnt about building relationships and social inclusion of refugees aged 50+ from Ukraine

Part one: Women protagonists and their stories

- **Path 1: To family**
  These are people whose family, already living in Poland for some time, invite them and help them on the spot. This is often how families are reunited and adult children come back to live with their parents.

- **Path 2: To familiar places**
  These are people who have already worked in Poland and sometimes have a network of contacts, helping them to find their way in the "Polish reality." Some of them speak Polish.

- **Path 3: Without any plan**
  They are fugitives who, having crossed the border, did not know where they were going and did not plan what to do next.

- **Path 4: With family (including multi-generational)**
  — with grandchildren – people aged 50+ cross borders with their children and grandchildren. They are additionally responsible for minors, sometimes small children.
  — with parents aged 60+ – it is not uncommon for people aged 50+ to arrive in the company of an older generation, people aged 80+, in various forms of dependence on their carers.

- **Path 5: With illness**
  Refugees aged 50+ often suffer from illnesses typical of their age that require specialised treatment. Coming to Poland is an opportunity for them to receive a higher level of medical care than in Ukraine, where more than half of the state budget is consumed by war spending.

- **Path 6: From the battlefields**
  Some participants in the programme have come from war-torn areas, experiencing fear and violence, having lost their life's possessions. This is a group that has to cope with PTSD symptoms.

Part one: Women protagonists and their stories

Feeling at home? What we have learnt about building relationships and social inclusion of refugees aged 50+ from Ukraine

1.2. People from Poland

The paths of the Polish participants leading to the New Relationships projects are related to their motivations that drove their involvement. For project recruitment, some organisations used their strong resources of the elderly, while others had more experience of working with the refugee community. We have identified the main paths for Polish participants to take part in the projects:

- **Path 1: Willingness and curiosity**
  Related to the willingness to provide assistance, to host someone, to show the local realities and to offer respite or to listen to a refugee, often your peer. It is also curiosity combined with the readiness to meet new neighbours, residents of your community or simply people who have been forced to flee the war.

- **Path 2: Memory of the war**
  "We know it pretty well" – this was a response often heard when asking about the motivation of the elderly. Sometimes it was about memory embedded in the stories of your late parents, and sometimes it was about your own memories of post-war childhood. The driving force, however, was not martyrdom, but simple human empathy and understanding of the *other*, specifically the *female other*.

- **Path 3: Friendship**
  Motivation based on inviting your Ukrainian peers, potential female colleagues, acquaintances or perhaps future female friends, to take joint efforts.

- **Path 4: Compulsion to respond**
  This is exemplified by the participants of the Third Age University for Communities, who are unable and unwilling to be indifferent. In their

Feeling at home? What we have learnt about building relationships and social inclusion of refugees aged 50+ from Ukraine

Part one: Women protagonists and their stories

case, the motivation arose from the need to respond to the situation of the refugees, from the "need to be supportive of them".

- **Path 5: Fun bringing respite**
  This path is related to the continuation of previous participation in the activities of a given organisation. One could hear: "if we're having fun with each other, we might as well keep doing it and help others." The word "fun" during wartime and among those sorely affected by it may appear quite controversial. Paradoxically, however, it gave respite to women refugees and an opportunity to partner in cooking, dancing or handicrafts to Polish women. Having a good time with each other can happen beyond language: in the form of communicating via sign language, taking delight in a dish prepared together or making gestures in dance, which is a strong social bond. Playing was also "liberating" and therapeutic, allowing women refugees to open up and, at times, cry.

- **Path 6: Simultaneously from here and there**
  It is based on the Polish-Ukrainian ancestry or Polish-Ukrainian citizenship of the participants. Those who described themselves as "from here" and "from there", i.e. from Poland and Ukraine at the same time, were participants who were aware of being ideal liaisons for refugees (knowledge of the Ukrainian language and local realities).

2. Women protagonists: living in a new situation – models of attitudes

When interviewing women refugees, one could sense repetitive, characteristic attitudes towards the ways of functioning within Polish society. They are a collection of characteristics and contexts that make up the social and psychological baggage of newcomers. The three most prominent models:

It's not
my world

I'm coping

I feel part
of society
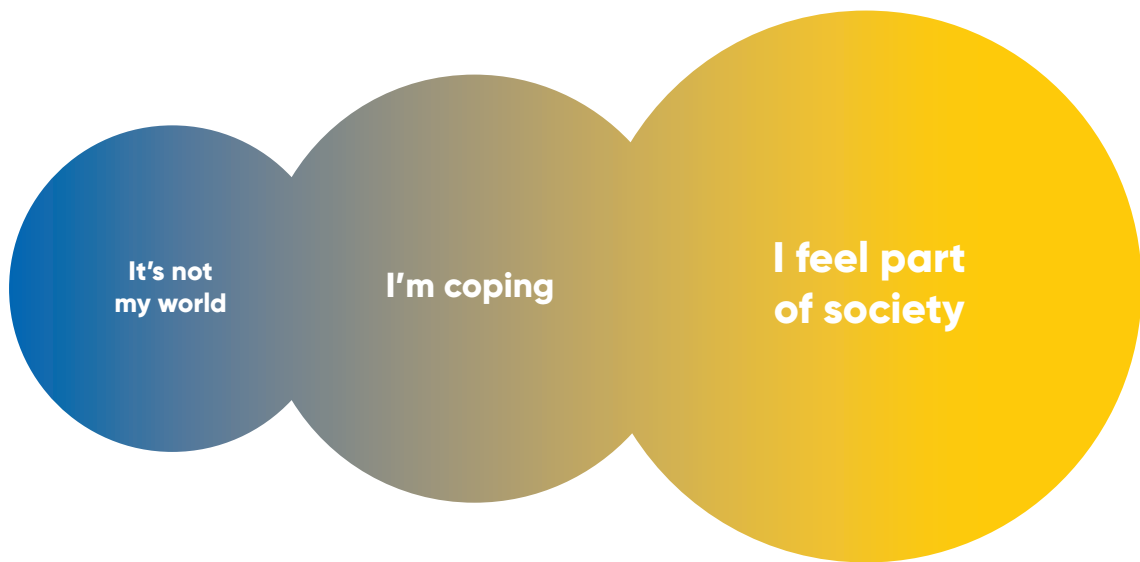
- **"It's not my world"**
  She stays in an almost exclusively Ukrainian group, she does not learn Polish, and she associates a sense of security and comfort here with being among "her own people." Poland and Poles are assessed positively, but Polish society is an entity that remains "outside me."

- **"I'm coping."**
  She is able to adapt well to the new reality and function efficiently within Polish society. At the same time, she spends most of her time in the "Ukrainian" circle, without improving her knowledge of the Polish language. She copes by using the social resources of the Ukrainian group as her main reference point. She does not plan well in advance and does not make the decision to settle in Poland on a permanent basis.

- **"I feel part of society."**
  She puts lots of effort into acquiring the cultural competence necessary to feel at home in the new place. She observes Poles, recognises the norms in Poland and wants to observe them. She is involved in providing assistance to other refugees. She tries to speak Polish and improve her command of the language. She is well adapted to the new situation. She encourages her compatriots to integrate into Polish society.

3. Relationships (new and old)

Each project involved building relationships between refugees from Ukraine and local residents. At the same time, it implied other types of interaction with different social actors. The following relationships are typical of the project:

3.1. Relationship 1: Ukrainians – Poles

The most obvious and expected type of relationship. Over the course of the project, characteristic issues came into view:

- **Concerns: barriers and needs**
Before women refugees decided to participate in a particular project, they had to overcome a number of obstacles. These included the language barrier and uncertainty about the requirements of the Polish side. People from Ukraine often mentioned loneliness, the need to connect with others, to recover from trauma, to cope and to make their presence known in the local community. As for the Polish participants, they emphasised the need to be useful and to learn new skills or develop them.

- **Taming and division**
Most women refugees describe the moment of arrival in the project group as fraught with tension, followed yet by great relief. However, the division into national subgroups was not easy to overcome. The activities taken not always led to the establishment of personal or lasting ties between the Polish and Ukrainian sides. They were often limited to the duration of the project.

- **Relationships – personal or ideological**

  Contacts between the women refugees with the Polish participants were built on an ideological level. On the Polish side, this was dictated by the belief in the need to transmit the values cherished in our country. That is a resource of knowledge and emotions that are important but not essential, i.e. relationships were not always related to the basic needs of the women refugees, those that are necessary for them to live here and now.

  The refugees often benefited by being able to encounter Polish culture and the Polish community, to act together and to receive practical advice. As for people from Poland, they were empowered by gaining the sense of being useful and having an impact on reality. In some cases, practical skills learnt from taking part in activities and realising yourself were also important.

- **The role of the host community**

  Without the active participation of the Polish side, i.e. the host community, positive interactions would not have been possible. Almost all Ukrainian women participants mentioned the need for a suitable "pretext" for meeting together, coming from outside, and being "led" by someone.

3.2. Relationship 2: Ukrainians – Ukrainians

For those from Ukraine, this was a key relationship.
Three themes are evident here:

- **Translating Polish reality**

  Close contacts in Ukrainian groups resulted in a process of translating "Polishness" or "localness" for refugees, carried out by Ukrainians for Ukrainians. Those who had lived in Poland before or were more experienced helped the newcomers to find their bearings in the new reality. Practical support played a huge role: knowing how to find a job, a doctor or accommodation.

Feeling at home? What we have learnt about building relationships and social inclusion of refugees aged 50+ from Ukraine

Part one: Women protagonists and their stories

- **Level "0"**
Close-knit relationships within the Ukrainian group are positive from the point of view of the overall goal, i.e. helping refugees to work through their war trauma and build a life (if only temporarily) in the new place. Even if this is at the expense of inter-ethnic relations. This demonstrates the need for a preliminary stage of integration processes – "level zero" – among the refugee group. It is a time when refugees become stronger internally and as a group make preparations to take the next step in the integration process.

- **Therapeutic aspect**
Interviewees from Ukraine underlined the importance of the therapeutic aspect of encountering other women refugees of a similar age. This is a remarkable success of any project. The Polish colleagues noticed and understood well that people from Ukraine were establishing deeper relationships among themselves.

3.3. Relationship 3: Organisers – Participants

This relationship is characterised by issues concerning the shaping of support, challenges and sense of security:

- **"First wave"**
Almost all of the ten organisations joined the aid efforts on the very first day of the war escalation, in many cases bearing the main burden of accommodating refugees in an appropriate way. The Polish state got involved with a slight delay, often drawing on solutions that had been already in place.

- **"Long wave"**
It became quickly apparent that what is needed is long-term assistance (living conditions, co-development of refugees and local communities).

The New Relationships programme was part of the next phase: integrating newcomers into the local reality. It allowed the organisations to fund projects already underway or planned to be implemented. According to the representatives of the third sector, the long-term character is one of the main elements that differentiates Polish/local organisations from global ones that were prepared for a short-term crisis.

- **Rootedness – challenges and burdens**
The organisations that took part in the programme are rooted in the communities and places where they work. After the escalation of the war, they were forced to meet challenges arising from external circumstances, and now they must continue to do so.

- **Spectre of the final**
The prospect of the project being completed, especially for the Ukrainian participants, generated some anxiety. Those taking part in activities with a predetermined goal were more at ease with the vision of "completion."

- **A sense of safety – taming and supporting**
The sustainability, long-term character and openness of the formula coupled with a casual approach to participation are synonymous with security for the participants. This involved, among other things, a process of "taming" the new reality. It was accompanied by a sense of relief, a therapeutic effect, openness to others and reflection. Each project included an element of peer support and each clearly boosted the participants' sense of security.

- **Gratitude**
People from Ukraine expressed their gratitude towards the organisers and the Polish society as a whole for their assistance almost every research interview.

Part two

Nudges, or incentives to integration

This part provides a preliminary list of ways of generating incentives to integration, or so-called nudges, based on the effects of the New Relationships activities. This opens a reflection on how social projects have a positive influence on the processes of integrating refugees into Polish society. We describe here the dynamics of action: it is what creates change and gives nudges to stimulate transformations, which, even if minor, have immense potential.

Method

People and organisations

Nudges

Intentionality

Time and place

Needs
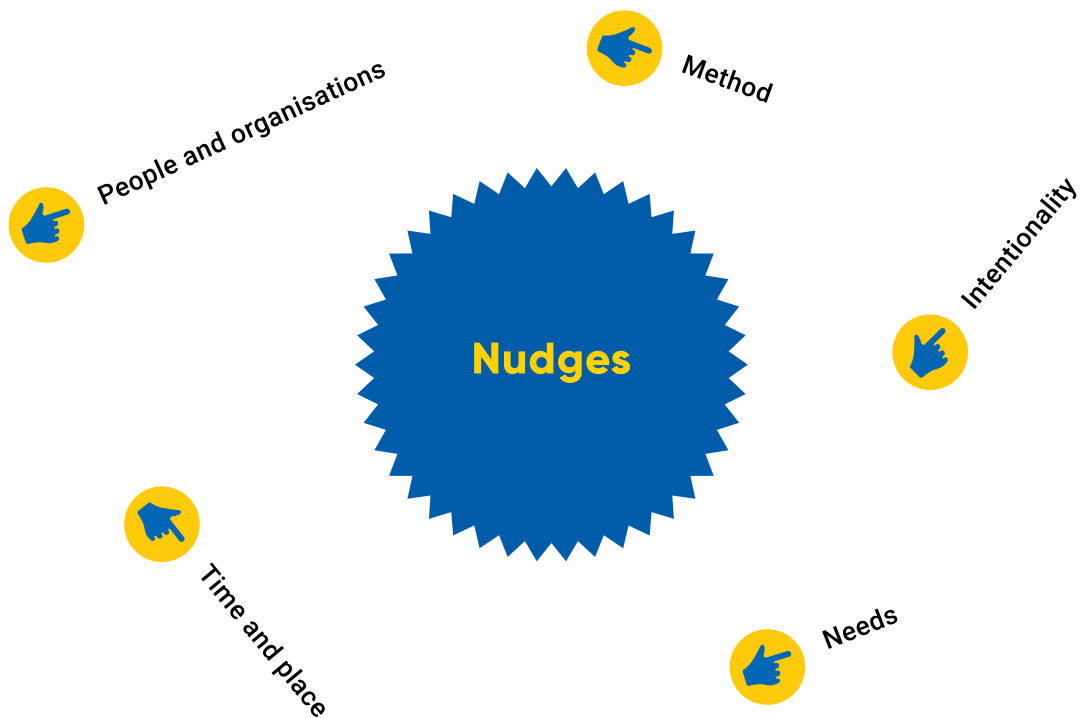
4. Inventory of nudges

4.1. Nudges from the point of view of different social actors

Nudgers vary in their level of involvement, function or knowledge of the activities carried out. But the vectors of nudges differ also between different actors in society. These include:

- **Polish-Ukrainian nudges**
  Some respondents note the significance of refugees learning how to "live in Polish conditions," making it clear that this learning should involve both sides: Polish and Ukrainian. In many places, public officials no longer speak of refugees, but of new residents.
  According to the organisers, the Polish elderly women themselves initiated various activities, e.g. learning poems or songs in Ukrainian. It was a kind of development for them. They also gained a better understanding of refugees.

- **Nudging participants and organisations**
  After the end of the programme, there was hope for future nudge directions. The relationships in question will result in a better integration of the refugee group into urban institutions (e.g. theatres, museums and concert halls).

- **Nudges from local organisations and programme executors**
  Activities addressed to people suffering from war trauma were stressful as a new and unpredictable experience. The Association of Creative Initiatives "ę" , the programme executor offered the teams a training and relaxation component to alleviate the effects of stress. People from Ukraine being members of one of the organisations also took part, something that did not happen in their previous professional experience.

- **Mutual nudges between the organisation and the social environment**
  The war in Ukraine and its consequences exemplify the unpredictability of our existence. This can be heard also in the voices of interviewees from the organisations: they bore the burden of providing assistance to a rapidly increasing number of refugees arriving in the city. Some interviewees, also those from an organisation not participating in the programme, noted the need for grassroots, sustainable work with Polish local communities when "the war lasts too long" and/or when its victims receive assistance

for "too long." It was also pointed out that the programme gave birth to a community that can learn from each other's activities in the area.

- **Nudges from the point of view of gender and class diversity**
Organisations succeeded in creating project groups involving a variety of people. For example, men were successfully encouraged to participate in cooking workshops. However, the vast majority of activities involved women, while reaching out to men remains a challenge.

According to one female interviewee, at the moment the sharpest divisions among the two nationalities and residents are not along ethnic lines, but along class lines: Ukrainian women and men who work are considered to be "good". Those who do not work are sometimes believed to display a "demanding attitude."

- **Nudges from the point of view of operating methods**
In this respect, it is crucial to listen to and meet the needs of refugees.

The organisers also mentioned the need for freedom in thinking about the pursuit of one's own goals, going beyond the dictates of "outcomes" and assumptions and responding to real needs. Sometimes, too, the project itself was not the first nudge. It was rather a boost of a nudge, its development on a larger scale.

Group instability related to the movement of people from Ukraine caused frustration in one of the project teams. Other options were considered during the discussion. In this context, one of the project coordinators played a vital role, using an agile management method:

— she modified the content of the announcements: she wrote them in a more friendly and approachable way,

— she dropped the term "project," replacing it with "meeting,"

— she adjusted the layout of the announcements to the group of the elderly by adding more photos of the meetings,

— she used the support of the Regional Volunteer Centre, which made information about the project available through its channels.

— she contacted the children of the elderly who could convince their parents to participate. All of this helped to increase the number of participants at meetings, especially from the target group.

4.2. Nudges – intentional and unintentional

Nudges in the programme were mostly intentional. But non-intentional ones were also addressed (including relationships continued outside of classes). As regards unplanned activities, we should mention excursions outside the city, something that Ukrainians themselves usually could not afford, also for financial reasons.

One of the representatives of public administration mentioned the positive aspect of the arrival of refugees from the point of view of demographics. A town which sees a massive outflow of young people is now attracting people from Ukraine. There are also some tangible benefits (revenue from PIT, CIT deductions or purchases driving local business).

4.3. Nudges from the perspective of history and place

- **Spread over time**
  Many projects involve a vision of integration that is spread over time and slow-paced, sometimes differing from assumptions. The organisers emphasise the need to verify methods of communication, mutual concerns and expectations on a regular basis. This is long-term work, measured by small steps.

- **From the perspective of the place**
  The importance of the human-place relationship in social projects is invaluable. It does matter where nudges may be made. In the course of

the activities, the list of places that the elderly could consider as friendly (thanks to, among other things, the walking trails prepared by the organisers) expanded. The elderly from Poland were also rediscovering the city and institutions hitherto absent from their daily lives). The sites of nudges improve the self-confidence of women refugees and help them integrate with Ukrainian migrants. They can also provide a safe space for sharing difficult emotions and experiences of everyday life. Churches, especially those of the Eastern rites, have a leading role to play here; they are more open to new believers than states or communities are to new citizens. Nationality is of secondary importance here.

- **Nudges from a historical and geographical point of view**
  People from Ukraine are much more visible in the public space today than before the escalation of the war, when they came to Poland mainly for temporary work. Those migrations were economic. This allowed war refugees to benefit from the networks that were already in place. After 24 February 2022, women with children were joined by the elderly and people with disabilities, representing a quite different migration pattern. In border towns and towns with a history of resettlement, the situation is beneficial for the newcomers. They can feel comfortable there because the inhabitants are not native to those towns either. This is also the case with localities that have always had minorities among their inhabitants. Multiculturalism is considered one of the important reasons for consolidated and plentiful aid addressed to refugees.

4.4. Nudges from the point of view of needs

- **Diversity of needs: visibility, language, exclusion**
  Being seen and heard is one of the most important needs of refugees. The success of the project activities is that they have been made aware that their presence is noticed and there is an offer addressed especially

to them. As a result, self-isolating tendencies are partially eliminated. It is also significant to learn the language to be able to communicate effectively, thus increasing mutual openness. One interviewee has noted that addressing the programme to people aged 50+ is important, as this is the group at risk of social exclusion due to age (difficulties in finding work and assimilation).

- **Nudges up the Maslow's pyramid (pyramid of needs)**
The needs of refugees in 2022 have evolved in several directions. In the first phase, livelihood needs were at the forefront. In the following months, more people began to think about living in Poland on a more permanent basis. Needs for integration, education or support on the labour market started to dominate. Attitudes towards learning Polish have also changed positively. The executers of the New Relationships programme have had similar observations at many points.

5. Summary, or nudging is not (despite appearances) so easy

Examples of the difficulties involved in nudging:
- The elderly from Poland limiting themselves to support activities instead of becoming involved in the project (in one of the towns).
- Low engagement and interest of the elderly from Poland (in another city).
- Refugees regarding the activities with suspicion, perceiving them as an attempt to make them more Polish. Excessive pressure for integration thus paradoxically reinforced the isolation of refugee groups. Most often, such reactions were not related to the programme (such comments were made, for example, about attempts to include Ukrainian children in the Polish education system).
- Instability of project groups – it was difficult to obtain regular attendance and commitment. Many people continue to move on in search of work.

Part two: Nudges, or incentives to integration

Feeling at home? What we have learnt about building relationships and social inclusion of refugees aged 50+ from Ukraine

Others go to their home country for a week or two. When they returned to Poland, it was necessary to do all the work necessary to get them involved in the activities once again.

- Encountering "excessively" active Polish women sometimes hindered integration nudges among older Ukrainian women refugees in one of the cities.

- It became more important to inspire Ukrainian elderly women to become active than to integrate them with Polish women (in one project). As for the integration, it was successful only to a limited extent. The reason was perhaps that the Polish elderly women are active people, who held important social functions in the past. This may have been a barrier for the elderly women from Ukraine.

- Women refugees gradually closing themselves off to the possibility of contact. Perhaps the initial need to learn more about formal matters was more likely to incite women refugees to stay in public space. Once that need was satisfied, they withdrew. Another interpretive clue is the suspicion that refugees are focused primarily on what happens in their homeland.

Whatever the difficulties involved in the nudges, it must be kept in mind, however, that older refugees are still in a very difficult situation: their pensions are insufficient to meet their basic needs, their housing situation is difficult and they seem likely to remain in an isolation that other age groups do not experience.

6. Issues – discussion prompts

- Does it matter who nudges? What encourages people to do this, and what prevents them from doing so?
- How does an unexpected development affect an organisation? How to prevent team burnout?

- What lessons can be learnt from working with large aid organisations?
- What have we, people from Poland and Ukraine, already learnt from each other? What helps us to learn from each other and what hinders us in this process?
- Pioneering activities such as support for refugees can be stimulating and inspiring. But they can be also another burden. How to face it wisely?
- How can you spot unintentional nudges? Are they a potential/inspiration? Or do you need to think about them differently?
- Can the location also be an ally of the project?
- Is it easy to find joy and satisfaction and feel pride in the fact that what we have achieved is only the beginning of the work of building deeper relationships?
- What does it take to stay in touch with the needs of participants while being in harmony with yourself and the mission of the activities?
- How to handle work in a bi-national environment in practice when integration processes tend to take place within one group?
- Can or should activities in support of relationships be conducted in parallel or rather only once the basic needs of refugees have been satisfied?
- The stress associated with an activity you are undertaking for the first time should be alleviated by supervision, tutoring or other respite activities. Is it easy to accept such support? What does it depend on?
- How should you work with a group burdened with a variety of responsibilities, such as Ukrainian women refugees? Or: what if they do not look "poor" enough? What to do then? How to deal with the stereotype of a "poor woman refugee" versus a "well-off" one?
- The experience of the project shows that ageing in Ukraine is more private, related to family. Can one turn this into success and, if so, how?
- What, besides the history of a village that has always/long been made up of "newcomers" and its location, e.g. near a border, facilitates the implementation of activities addressed to elderly citizens?

- There are some voices that excessive pressure for integration may re-inforce the isolation of refugee groups. How to face such a challenge?

7. Key takeaways, or challenges and recommendations

- **On involvement on the Polish and Ukrainian sides**
Over time, the involvement of Polish female participants in some projects was waning. On the Ukrainian side, by contrast, it was the other way around. Why?
This can be attributed to the following phenomena:
— Building strong ties within the Ukrainian group, which are more difficult to give up.
— A stronger motivation to participate in the activities on the Ukrainian side – they responded to the deep needs of Ukrainian people such as the need for social acceptance, contact, therapy and other. For Poles, participation in the classes was just part of their life.
— The difficulty of the challenges that always go hand in hand with long-term projects.

  Recommendations:
  When designing activities, it is advisable to think first about the needs of Polish participants and also to answer the question of whether Ukrainian participants can help meet these needs. It is also worth considering the immediate and long-term benefits for Polish participants. It is all about the "good reason" why they stay engaged.

- **About the language barrier**
Polish and Ukrainian are similar. The initial belief that it was easy to learn Polish disappeared in the course of the projects, being replaced by a belief to the contrary. In some cases, it led to the abandonment of attempts to communicate in Polish. We must not forget the language barrier, which

started to play, sooner or later, an increasingly important – in a negative sense – role in most projects. People from Poland tended to react negatively to the lack of progress in learning Polish on the part of their Ukrainian colleagues. All this undermined the momentum of project activities.

> **Recommendations:**
> When planning Polish-Ukrainian projects, it is advisable to think about a systemic solution to the problem of the language barrier and, more importantly, the need to overcome it. One should not rely on the belief that the languages are similar and that the problem will disappear on its own in the course of action.

- **About the form of classes**
  Some of the organisers stressed that the planned activities would take the form of a casual and no-pressure format, a fact that was positively perceived by the Ukrainians (no obligation to speak Polish, no assessment of progress, etc.). This approach is extremely effective in alleviating war trauma and encouraging those who are hesitant. However, it would be good to remember about possible downsides: the lack of control over the dynamics of the process and the difficult-to-measure effects of the activities, as well as the low motivation on the Ukrainian side to acquire new cultural competences.

> **Recommendations:**
> In most projects, the Ukrainian participants themselves made the most important discoveries. They enjoyed it and were more willing to take part in the activities. This approach had an enormous and undeniable therapeutic value.
> Apart from this, it may be good to consider the measurability and gradability of the effects of participation in projects. One example is the idea to enable people from Ukraine to develop in a chosen field and to create functions for them that require a certain level of competence to work as, for example, an intercultural assistant or a city guide, etc.

> This would be an option for volunteers and those who are willing to take part in training and have their skills verified.

- **On the division of project participants into national groups**
  The phenomenon affects refugees in particular, a fact that is fully understandable given the needs of this group, the context of the situation, the community of experience and many other individual reasons. The Ukrainian group often formed closer relationships with each other than with the Polish participants.

Such dynamics make it necessary to rethink the concept of integration activities, which envisage more or less equal participation of people from Poland and Ukraine. It appears that the strong participation of the Polish side, as an indispensable guarantor of the initiation of refugee integration processes, is overestimated.

> **Recommendations:**
> It is advisable to reflect on the scale of involvement of participants from Poland: their number and their role to play in the group. Poles are certainly indispensable as the party organising or initiating a given activity concept. Maybe their participation in the initial stage of integration processes should be limited to these functions.
> It is also necessary to prepare Poles for possible difficulties related to the lack of the expected level of interaction. When planning a project, it is good to provide for a variant in which no deeper relations develop between the Polish and Ukrainian groups.
> Perhaps it would be a good idea to organise workshops or training sessions on intercultural communication preceding the activities to empower the Polish participants with the necessary knowledge.

- **On the fear of the activities coming to an end**
  It affected female participants from Ukraine, primarily those who are no longer professionally active or who, for various reasons, have some

problems adapting to the Polish reality. As time went on, the classes became their daily routine. They spoke about their fear of the classes coming to an end.

Some participants were unaware of the formal, time and financial framework of the projects. Moreover, it appears that project thinking is not very popular in Ukraine and knowledge of this way of working may not be common among women refugees.

Recommendations:

It is worth planning activities by thinking from the very beginning about their completion, limited by a specific time horizon. Perhaps all kinds of "finals" of activities are helpful here. Perhaps it is also necessary to take some time to make the participants aware of the financial background of the venture, the planned scope and the time horizon they can expect.

- **On Polish–Ukrainian history**

  Whether we like it or not, the histories of our countries have been intertwined for centuries, although it has not always been an easy history for either side. We certainly still have a lot of difficult discussions ahead of us. Nevertheless, as Churchill would say, we can see opportunity where the pessimist sees difficulty. Instead of limiting ourselves to the tragedy of Volhynia, let us reach deeper in time, to a history that reminds us of good ties between neighbours.

  Recommendation:

  We would like to draw attention to the potential behind mutual Polish-Ukrainian education. The New Relationships project has demonstrated that meetings and conversations between elderly women from Poland and Ukraine can ignite mutual curiosity and a desire to create a new – good – history.

- **On multiculturalism**

    The identity of many of the localities in which the New Relationships organisations are located has been built on multiculturalism, an entanglement of cultures and nationalities. This is a great asset that can be turned into encounters between cultures, not only Polish or Ukrainian ones.

    > **Recommendation:**
    > We recommend promoting multiculturalism in further activities, going beyond the Polish-Ukrainian relations, with a view to getting to know each other's cultures. And with a view to becoming aware of the diversity of the world in which we all live today – whether through global or local processes.

- **On respect for time and small things**

    We approach the word "change" with great caution. We are well aware that social processes, especially those burdened by an uneasy history, take time. We would all like to see changes take place and close within the project timetable. But these are only our intentions, and the reality sometimes goes its own way – it needs time. Changes take place as a process, and process is time.

    > **Recommendation:**
    > We recommend continuing or starting activities with the elderly from Polish-Ukrainian communities, as well as with other age groups, using even the smallest ideas to get to know each other. The sum of small things can have a great effect. It works like compound interest and is very rewarding.

- **About working with people in trauma or crisis**

    New Relationships is a pioneering project. The coordinators of the activities as part of New Relationships have mentioned the stress accompanying projects so different from all other projects up to date.

Recommendation:

We can learn from the experience already gained, but we can also go one step further and develop in a new area. For many organisations, one of such areas is work with refugees or people experiencing trauma. We motivate teams to expand their knowledge in this area. In addition, we encourage them to reflect on the method and way of selecting participants in the future. Perhaps it is necessary to put a particular emphasis not so much on the key to common interests, but on bringing together groups with similar ranges of emotions. To bring them together, considering their age, illnesses, family and life situation.

- **On inner consent to temporariness,**
  or beyond the horizon of New Relationships
  The organisers have mentioned that instability of the target groups from Ukraine is a challenge. Some people travelled further away into the world, while others decided to return to their homeland, regardless continuing hostilities.

Recommendation:

Perhaps some of us have the wrong idea of refugees as a group moving only once from point A to ultimate point B, while in reality they take part in a chain of minor and major journeys in both directions. And refugees are sometimes in constant motion, a fact to remember when designing projects.

We also suggest reflecting on this challenge from the perspective of good and beneficial social contagion, i.e. behaviours and emotions that spread through a group or social network. If refugees have had the luck to experience inclusion and partnership in Poland, it is likely that they will seek them in other places of residence or try to create them at home. Could there be a greater benefit from our newly relational actions?

Let us keep our fingers crossed for them.

And let us be glad that we have been able to take part in it together.

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Feeling at home? What we have learnt about building relationships and social inclusion of refugees aged 50+ from Ukraine

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