



**Shelter.  
Home.  
Community.**

**Toolbox from the  
Conflict Kitchen**



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In the Conflict Kitchen we believe that every person on the move deserves a place they can call home, that would provide a supporting community. We believe that creating an accommodating environment and providing comprehensive support allows residents to not only find a job and accommodation of their own, but can also restore their agency and sense of safety. These values can bring about a lasting change.

The Shelter could not come into being without the participation of the whole team of the Conflict Kitchen. It is their commitment that makes the success of the project possible. Everyday steps add to progress. The mindfulness and determination they exhibit, often under difficult conditions, is a great source of awe and inspiration to me.

Today, after over a year from opening the Shelter, we are sharing our experiences, believing that openness and sharing practices can allow us all to perfect our tools for building inclusive communities.

*Jarmila Rybicka*  
*Founder and chairwoman of the Conflict Kitchen*  
*Foundation*



Suarez, captain of the foundation team that competed in the Ethnoliga 2023-2024 competition. Photo: Adam Durjasz

# 1. Summary and key recommendations

This Toolbox report documents good practices and challenges in the everyday work of supporting people on the move in Poland, including those from highly vulnerable groups. In the report we present our experiences in creating a Shelter programme intended mainly for young, racialized men, who crossed the Polish-Belarusian border. Majority of these men has experienced violent treatment from officers and had been kept in refugee detention centers for many months. Our report focuses on good practices employed by our team with a goal of supporting people on the move in restoring their independence. The main methods of action are: providing safe accommodation, psycho-social support and help in finding legal employment.

**The success rate of our Shelter programme is 80%:** that is the percentage of residents, who succeeded in gaining independence after receiving comprehensive support through the programme. That to 80% of Shelter residents found employment and independent accommodation **within two months of entering the programme.**

The target group of our programme faces many challenges in accessing the job market and safe housing. Since 2021 we have observed an increase in labour exploitation and housing discrimination towards people on the move. Moreover, an increasingly visible double standard is applied to refugees from Ukraine and those crossed into Poland through the Belarusian border. Programmes like ours are endangered by the lack of long-term systemic funding and the fact that international humanitarian organization seem to be phasing out their support in Poland.



The findings of this report clearly show that safe accommodation is a foundation for any casework and other efforts aimed at beneficiaries regaining independence. Any casework designed to help refugees gain independence makes little sense if a person does not have a safe place to stay. And vice versa, providing accommodation without a thought-out plan and opportunities for help can lead to a loss of potential. Without appropriate support, the clients can lose motivation for gaining independence, and their psycho-social wellbeing might deteriorate. Effective support requires a clear, well-communicated plan.

This Toolbox report presents all the stages a resident goes through when gaining access to the Foundation's support: from recruitment and application to completing the programme and moving out of the Shelter. Coordination between the caseworking team and Shelter coordinators is crucial throughout the process. The Toolbox presents rules, procedures and agreements framing the casework and collaboration between the foundation's team and residents. It also details good practices and continuous feedback collection and community building during and after the residents' participation in the programme. The report also includes an evaluation of different areas of the Foundation's actions from the perspective of the team as well as the beneficiaries.

An independent researcher, experienced in the field of migration, prepared the methodology of the evaluations, collected and analyzed data. The idea of undergoing evaluation was implemented from the start of the Shelter's operation, with the goal of providing insights, that would allow us to improve our work, for the sake of beneficiaries, as well as inside the team.

The recommendations and good practices we share with you are meant for non-governmental organizations, international organizations, public institutions, who collaborate, or plan to collaborate with the NGO sector.

## Our Recommendations

### **1. Local organization should work out, put into place and adhere to:**

- a coherent set of rules regulating the work with beneficiaries;
- a clear division of work inside the team;
- transparent feedback mechanisms;
- an unambiguous protocol for working with beneficiaries;
- clear-cut rules for the recruitment of beneficiaries, as well as employees.

### **2. Representatives of state authorities and public administration officials should:**

- provide personnel, language and administration resources in order to prepare public institutions for a smooth collaboration with non-governmental institutions;
- implement good practices in collaboration with NGOs;
- regularly provide training for the employees of public administration sector in the proper support of refugees, including people from racialized and other vulnerable groups.

### **3. International organization and partners should:**

- provide paths to funding and long-term support, based on a need analysis, for vulnerable groups exposed to homelessness, discrimination, worker exploitation;
- avoid double standards, uphold impartiality in providing humanitarian aid to refugees.

## 2. Glossary

- **Beneficiary** – a person who benefits from the foundation's help. Not a perfect term, but far better than “ward” (“podopieczny”) used by some organizations, a term conveying lack of agency.

- **Casework** – individual work with a beneficiary; it can consist of mentoring, professional or administrative support

- **Community building** – practices aimed at creating and strengthening a community, including among people who experienced being a refugee. Community building can take different shapes, for example animation of free time.

- **Double standard** – a gap in humanitarian response or integration offer, which contradicts basic humanitarian standards and is rooted e.g. in systemic racism. Can manifest as lack of access or uneven access to accommodation, other forms of humanitarian aid. An example of a double standard: gaps in humanitarian aid to migrants crossing into Poland through Belarusian and Ukrainian border after 2022.

- **Feedback** – evaluation of organization's actions; it could be positive, negative, or constitute a suggestion for change.

- **Housing discrimination** – systemic barriers to access to safe and quality housing, often tied to identity or migration status of the person needing housing (e.g. people from the Roma community, other racialized people).

- **Labour exploitation** – systematic and purposeful exploitation of employees from underprivileged groups or in bad material situation; this term also refers to an organized network of “agents” who recruit people for work in bad and dangerous conditions.

- **LGBTQIA+** – umbrella term for non-heteronormative persons, e.g. homosexual, bisexual, asexual, transgender, non-binary people etc.

- **People on the move** – a person who has experienced migration, usually forced migration. This category refers to the whole spectrum of migration and legal status of people (refugee, tolerated stay, economic migration etc.).

- **Refugee center / Detention center** – there are two main types of refugee centers in Poland: open and closed. The difference between them is the scope of freedom of movement (in and outside the center) granted to their residents. Human rights organizations refer to residing in a closed refugee center (SOC) as detention.

- **Shelter** – in Polish: Mieszkanie Interwencyjne (term used by the residents and internal team of the Kitchen of Conflict).

- **Shelter Community** – group of people residing in the Shelter. Also a term for people taking part in a group chat for residents of the Shelter.

- **Shelter Fellows** – group of people who had lived in the Shelter. Also a term for people taking part in a group chat for ex-residents of the Shelter.

- **Work permit** – a document allowing a migrant to work legally. A work permit is a prerequisite for employment for most migrants in Poland, excluding people from Ukraine with temporary protection UKR PESEL. Migrants in the process of acquiring refugee status usually wait about 6 months for a work permit in Poland.

### 3. Report methodology

This toolbox was created based on an analysis of ten in-depth interviews with the foundation's beneficiaries and team members, analysis of source materials, correspondence and anonymous feedback from beneficiaries. The interviews were conducted live in August and September 2024 and authorized. Interviews were based on two scenarios, different for beneficiaries and team members. The evaluation part of this report is based on 56 evaluations and 276 pieces of feedback, collected between January and September 2024). Every resident of the Shelter was asked monthly to fill out an online questionnaire, which provided a 1 to 5 scale of satisfaction. The research team collected and analyzed research material in a safe, anonymous way (questionnaires, feedback, success stories, follow-ups from beneficiaries graduated from the programme). The evaluation referred to two areas: the Shelter and casework. The report was authored by Sarian Jarosz, research coordinator in Konsorcjum Migracyjne and Paulina Piórkowska, the coordinator of the Shelter.

### 4. Shelter. Home. Community

**The Shelter is our response to the feelings of helplessness and hopelessness we felt. Before we created the Shelter we only had casework: we did what we could to quickly find any room or apartment for our beneficiaries. There was no long-term solution.**

*(caseworker)*

#### The idea of the project: actions and motivations of the team

In media communications, we often hear the phrase *people, who had to leave their homes and families*. It is not a coincidence that home and community are the main mentioned factors. A person who loses these resources often loses their sense of value, experiences an overwhelming sense of danger and insecurity. Their goal is survival.

As a Foundation, we worked with people on the move for many years. We knew that supporting them in finding a temporary job or accommodation can be of big help, but ordinary casework was still not a long-term solution. So we focused on the fundamentals: providing them with a home. We knew this key factor, an element of stability, would enable them to regain their sense of safety, their wellbeing and agency, and allow them to adapt to the conditions of a new country.

In 2022 the Foundation started a project which allowed us to create a Shelter for men on the move, located in Warsaw and combined with comprehensive support in the form of independent social work. So far

62 people have benefitted from the programme. In our actions we focus on community building among the residents and graduates of the Shelter, as well as creating connections between them and local communities.

## What is the profile of the Shelter residents?

Our project's beneficiaries are men leaving refugee centers, open and closed; people from vulnerable groups, including LGBTQIA+ people, mostly between the ages of 18 and 40. They come in through Ukraine, Belarus and other migration routes. The residents of the Shelter so far come from Afghanistan, Algeria, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Iraq, Iran, Yemen, Cameroon, Uganda, Ukraine, South and North Sudan, Somalia, Syria, Ivory Coast, Turkey, and Turkmenistan. Beneficiaries of the project speak many languages, including: Amharic, English, Arabic, Edo, French, Kurdish, Polish, Russian, Somali, Swahili, Turkish and Tigrinya.

Many residents of the Shelter experienced prolonged detention in overcrowded closed refugee centers, where they were held with no consideration for their medical needs or being part of a vulnerable group. According to a [2024 PFM report](#), people in refugee centers have no access to any type of psychological or psychiatric support, which often results in a deterioration in their psychological wellbeing, including suicide attempts and PTSD.

Our program is dedicated to men because they are excluded from most aid programs offered by humanitarian aid organizations. Majority of aid is targeted at women and children from Ukraine. The image of a young, racialized man is being used as a tool in debates about the shortcomings of Polish migration policy. This discourse has been

I've lived in Poland for thirteen years. The kind of help that the foundation offers – I wish I could get something like that [back when I needed it]. Why? Because from my perspective, they have everything. When I was in their shoes, no one could help me. I had to stand on my own two feet, and that is very difficult. And here we can help them with finding a job, an apartment, with putting their life together. And most of all, we help them feel better.

*(community assistant)*



present in public life at least since 2016 and it has fueled the efforts of several governments to build up anti-refugee attitudes in Poland.

**Many of the people who are coming through the border are just young boys. They are just the strongest person in their family, who can actually survive such an exhausting, difficult and dangerous journey.**

*(caseworker)*

The foundation aims to support men-refugees in overcoming the crisis of houselessness. It strives to prevent such crises by providing temporary housing, help in job searches, opportunities for social life, professional psychological help, and individual support from caseworkers.



Birthday celebration of the Shelter coordinator Paulina. Photo: Adam Durjasz

## Key tenets of the Shelter

The Shelter is located in Warsaw, in a house with a garden. There are five bedrooms, three bathrooms, a kitchen and a living room. There are two beds in each room, so that two people can stay in one bedroom. There a maximum of ten Residents living in the Shelter at one time. The address is not publicly stated to ensure the safety of the residents.

### Caring for the shared space

The residents are responsible for keeping the Shelter clean, which is made clear to them from the very beginning. Taking care of the house is meant to build up a sense of community, foster independence and strengthen a sense of agency in people who had spent long periods of time in refugee centers. There is a schedule for cleaning shared spaces; and each resident is responsible for their own room.

### Caring for the local community and neighborhood

Building good relationships in the neighborhood is key to the proper functioning of the Shelter. Spending time in the local community allows for dismantling of popular stereotypes and prejudice. The Shelter coordinator stays in contact with the closest neighbors; the Residents can also talk to the neighbours independently for example if they want to borrow a lawn mower, or need help with an electricity malfunction.

In a wider context, it is also important that the foundation has good visibility in social media, and that the team takes part in or organizes events in Warsaw.

### Safety, comfort, privacy

The Shelter is often the first place where the residents experience safety, privacy, support in planning their future, after their experiences crossing the border and staying in refugee detention centers.

There are mandatory safety protocols, obligatory for residents, as well as the foundation team, in case there is an unforeseen situation (e.g. evacuation, or personal data of one of the residents being published without their consent). The residents agree to not receive guests at the Shelter. There is also a ban on alcohol and other substance use, as well as being under the influence.

The Shelter is thought of as the first home the residents have in Poland. It is different from impersonal and crowded detention centers. The team respects the residents' privacy, does not enter their rooms, and the residents create and decorate the common spaces together.

## Participation

The Shelter community is created by its residents, with support from the foundation's team. While the residents work intensively on searching for jobs and taking stock of their individual resources, there is also free time, which they organize and spend together. Regular meetings and various feedback mechanisms allow the residents to come up with ideas for group outings or evening cooking sessions. Free time is as important to the residents, as their job and apartment searches. After they leave the Shelter they can lean on the friendships made during their stay.

## A shared goal and fulfilling basic needs

All the issues mentioned earlier: safety, caring for a common space, and community building, are very important. However, the main goal of the Shelter project is to provide refugees with shelter for a transitional period of time, to empower them for their future. The priority of the project is to enable residents to leave the Shelter and be independent, which requires intensive work on the part of the resident, as well as the project team, during these transitional months.

The Shelter project fulfils basic needs: provides psychological and psychiatric help, food vouchers, tickets for public transportation,

I am proud that we succeeded in creating something so effective, something that works like a trampoline. And I am proud that the residents of the Shelter also co-decide on what they are going to do and how.

*(caseworker)*

As the project team we never visit the Shelter unannounced, because we are trying to build this place, and the relationship with residents, based on trust.

*(Shelter coordinator)*

a freeshop. The Shelter is equipped with a little library (a gift from Library Without Borders), a small vegetable garden, a spacious kitchen, and a cleaning supplies closet (supplies are brought in by the project team). The residents also have access to bicycles, which they are very keen on using to go on job searches or to get groceries.

**This is a kind of a first stop, where they can live rent-free, and have the time to make enough money that they can afford to pay their first rent.**

*(caseworker)*



## Mutual respect between the residents and the project team, overcoming stereotypes

**We were wondering if a woman could be a coordinator of a Shelter designated for men. And the answer is yes. In the end the gender issues seem to be much less of a problem than we anticipated.**

*(caseworker)*

Mutual respect and creating a safe space was an issue often mentioned in the interviews, both by the residents and by the project team. A safe space should be free from discrimination, and that applies both to the residents and the team. This requires a constant process of learning on both sides; creating a space for honest feedback and reparative action has been a priceless lesson.

## Continuous feedback and mechanisms for making complaints

The beneficiaries of the foundation are informed at the beginning of collaboration about how to provide feedback, and that it is anonymous.

Feedback about the project can be given orally, on WhatsApp, or on a piece of paper, through a *feedback box*. The Shelter coordinator gathers, organizes and analyzes the feedback pieces. If there is any negative feedback, the coordinator goes over the next steps during a meeting with caseworkers. A good example of a correction after negative feedback was introducing infographics after a note about house rules being unclear. The residents also have an option of lodging an anonymous complaint about the employees of the foundation, which is described in detail in the foundation's policy on client and employee protection.

Photo: Agata Kubis for Oko.press



# Preliminary stage: the path for becoming a resident of the Shelter

A person looking for information on housing support and social assistance may find out about our program from various sources:

- From other people taking part in different programs in Kitchen of Conflict;
- From non-governmental organizations supporting people in need;
- In the Office for Foreigners (Urząd ds. Cudzoziemców) or from posters in refugee centers;
- From Shelter graduates, called Shelter Fellows.

## Step 1: Contact

People interested in becoming residents in the Shelter contact the Foundation team through phone or e-mail, usually to inquire how to apply for a place in the project. The team answers inquiries from the whole country.

In the period of half a year, between March and October 2024, the Foundation has received over 100 applications for emergency housing.

## Step 2: Questionnaire

A person applying to become a Shelter resident fills out a questionnaire, which allows the caseworkers to learn about their individual situation; assess if they are eligible to take part in the project; and decide whether their resources are insufficient to allow them to find work and rent an apartment.

It is important to assess whether the applicant has a work permit (crucial for gaining independence), is able to communicate in English, whether they require specialized support.

## Step 3: An online conversation

The first meeting with a potential Shelter resident is carried out online. Main goals are to get to know each other, and make sure the potential beneficiary understands the rules and framework of the project. The conversation takes place online, because the potential residents usually live in refugee detention centers.

## Step 4: A meeting at the Foundation's office

The first in-person meeting usually takes place on the same day as the resident is moving in to the Shelter. The resident meets with the foundation's team, they discuss details of the project's rules, and fill out all remaining paperwork. The main rules of collaboration are:



Photo: Agata Kubis for Oka.press



consenting to the rules of the Shelter; being ready to make a plan and put into reality, in collaboration with the team; verifying the possibilities of communication (being able to communicate in English is not a requirement). The goal of the first meeting is to verify if a new resident understands the rules of the Shelter, agrees to them, and is willing to respect the safety of comfort of other residents.

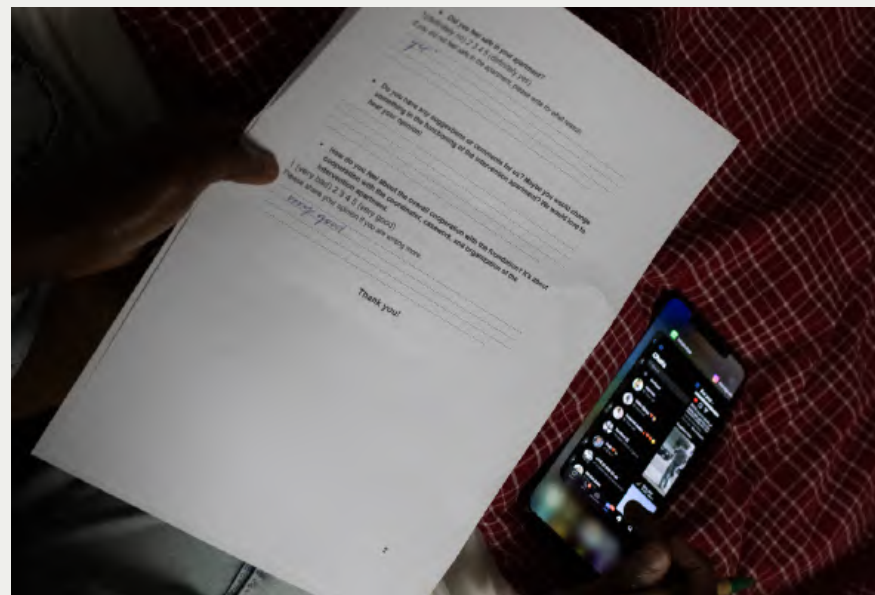
During the first discussion I communicate the goal of this whole stay [in the Shelter], before they start staying there. I tell them: hey, this is a place where you can feel safe, but also—you will have to engage. I will ask you about your job search, until you find something.

*(caseworker)*

## Step 5: Final decision

- **Negative decision:** The team decides to reject an application and direct a person to other organizations or institutions for example when a more specialized kind of help is needed. That applies for example to people in a serious mental health crisis, or having a type of disability that would require appropriate, specialized support, beyond the foundation's capabilities.
- **Positive decision:** The future resident is informed about a positive decision as soon as it is made. Next, the team takes immediate steps in order to provide support to a new resident.

Photo: Agata Kubis for Oko.press



# Participation in the programme

## Signing agreements

A resident and the Foundation sign two agreements, regulating the resident's stay in the Shelter, collaboration with the team and individual casework. The two documents are:

- Agreement on collaborating with a caseworker;
- Agreement on residency in the Shelter home, combined with a consent for data processing, in line with RODO regulation.

The period of residence is one month, with the possibility of prolonging it to two months. The casework agreements describe the rules of collaboration between resident and caseworker, the obligations of each party and the mechanisms for monitoring and feedback.

The contents of these agreements are discussed with new residents with care and in great detail, to ensure that all the rules and



Preparations for the Iftar celebration. Photo: Agata Kubis

## Key rules of the Shelter:

**1. I will treat all other residents, neighbors and the employees of the foundation with respect.** I will not discriminate against anyone on the basis of race, ethnic background, nationality, religion, ideology, disability, age, sexual orientation or gender identity.

**2. I will not use violence.** All violence will result in disciplinary action, including having to leave the Shelter.

**3. I will maintain confidentiality.** I will not discuss the other residents' matters outside the Shelter, in order to protect their right to safety, privacy and well-being.

**4. The foundation's team also cannot pass any information about a resident of the Shelter to people from outside the Foundation without written consent from the resident.** Anything a resident says, does or expresses is confidential, with the exception of an intent to harm someone or oneself.

obligations are clear. The team provides agreements in many language versions, depending on the need, including Arabic or Somali; they also provide a translator to help during this meeting, if necessary. Understanding and accepting the rules of the Shelter and the casework process is a requirement for taking part in the programme, as well as a key factor in a beneficiary's success.

A simplified version of the Shelter rules hangs on the wall in the Shelter home, in the form of infographics. Some of the rules are non-negotiable, as they ensure the safety of the beneficiaries. Others can be modified if the residents bring them up during meetings and have a suggestion on how to change them.

### First steps in the Shelter home

After the meeting in the office, the new resident goes to the Shelter, accompanied by the coordinator or a community worker. The foundation team explains the main rules again and provides the new resident with necessary things, such as towels, linen, toiletries. On arrival the new resident is given access to the confidential address, plus access to two group chats: "Shelter Community" and "Shelter Fellows".

New residents often need time to rest and adapt, so the team tries not to overwhelm them with information. New residents often feel lost at the beginning. Getting to know the other residents, who had also lived in refugee centers, positively impacts their sense of safety. Once they have rested, a new resident makes an appointment with a caseworker to go over the details of their work together and start looking for a job.

### Living in the Shelter

The team responsible for running the Shelter supports the beneficiaries and their community in organization and logistics tasks. The main goal of every beneficiary is to find a job and save enough money for their first rent and deposit in a new rented apartment. The beneficiaries are being supported in achieving these goals by a team

Being in the Shelter allowed me to catch my breath. It gave me time to regain my strength, find a job. To find friends. I am alone in Poland [my family isn't here]. Here, you can just meet people during dinner: there is always a language two people can understand, English, Turkish... It's a good place, it allowed me to take off, you know, like a plane.

*(interview)*

of caseworkers, a type of non-governmental social workers, working for the Foundation.

## Leaving the Shelter

The last stage the participation in the Shelter programme is an evaluation meeting, during which a resident gives their opinions and reflections on their stay in the Shelter. The Shelter Coordinator reminds a resident one week ahead that their stay is coming to an end. However, moving out of the shelter does not mean losing touch with the team and other residents: a beneficiary enters a community of Shelter Fellows, graduates of the programme.

## Crisis situations in the Shelter

Emergency situations which warrant an intervention usually have to do with residents breaking the rules of the Shelter community (stated in the agreement between each resident and the foundation). The Shelter team have managed to develop protocols for instances of rule breaking. Each case is discussed during a meeting with the Shelter community.

The warning mechanism divides crisis situations into two types: major rule breaking and minor incidents.

**1. Serious rule breaking** results in an immediate decision to expel a resident from the Shelter. Before the expulsion the whole situation is discussed at the project team meeting. The decision to expel someone is usually motivated by the imperative to protect other residents' safety.

**Example:** In August 2024 one of the residents had three guests staying overnight in the common area, which was reported by the other residents. The person in question was informed that he has to leave

the Shelter, which he received with understanding and admitted he understands the decision.

**2. Less serious instances of rule breaking** result in a reminder, a conversation with the resident who broke minor rules, as well as coming up with reparative plan. If the resident's behavior does not change, he receives a second admonishment, the agreements is being severed and he is being asked to leave the Shelter.

**Example:** In August 2024 one of the residents left the Shelter and did not inform the foundation. He left behind his belongings. The resident declared he would come back in two days, but he did not. Due to a high demand and a long waitlist, the team decided not to keep the place waiting for him.

The rest of "emergency situations" had to do with the house, the residents' well-being, or with conflicts between residents. Those are events such as loud behavior during sleeping hours, destruction of Shelter equipment, stealing of food or personal items or a resident having a mental health crisis.

In the period between November 2023 and August 2023 the team reported 20 cases that warranted an intervention.

## Stay in the Shelter: Evaluation

*I feel truly happy for having a home. The Shelter became home to me and I will always be happy about that. This home helped me go through very difficult moments on my life. I feel gratitude.*

*(evaluation questionnaire)*



Analysis of evaluation questionnaires points to the residents' high satisfaction with their stays at the Shelter. The residents rated their stays at 4 or 5 ("good" or "very good") on a scale of 1 to 5. The lowest monthly average score was 4,6 (June 2024) and the highest was 5.0 (April and September 2024). The residents stressed the importance of feeling safe, appreciated the décor at the house, and overall expressed gratitude to the team for providing support and creating conditions that fostered community building.

**Thank you for your kindness and accepting me at the Shelter. In my eyes, you are like lotus flowers, growing on the swamp that is this system.**

*(evaluation questionnaire)*

The in-depth interviews and correspondence with people who were Shelter residents in the past elicited decidedly positive responses. The Shelter was often called a "home" or "home after prison" (it was like home after camp, after prison). The project team and other residents were described as a "family" or "my new family". All respondents lived at the Shelter for two or three months. In their evaluations they compared the Shelter to the detention centers, in which they experienced very poor conditions, and a cold, impersonal attitude. This applied to closed and open refugee centers. The Shelter was described as a place where they could regain their sense of agency, and accept support from the project team as well as from other residents.

In the in-depth interviews the residents talked about the atmosphere of the house itself, its décor, the well-designed layout (e.g. the common space).

**I couldn't ask for more. This is completely different from all the refugee centers. Even the open ones, there are always limits on everything you can do, like watching TV. I was scared [when I came here] and it turns out I couldn't ask for more. In the Shelter I had the peace of mind, so I could look for a job and an apartment.**

*(questionnaire)*

**The inside of the house already makes you feel better. You enter the house, and immediately you are in the shared living room, because the bedrooms are upstairs. So practically from the first moment you can get to know other people better.**

*(interview)*



Photo: Agata Kubis for Oko.press

## Understanding the rules

All residents rated their understanding of the rules as good or very good. The score was 5.0 in most months, with the lowest being 4.5 in February 2024. The evaluations stressed, that the rules enable residents to feel calm and safe, that the set of rules is comprehensible and available in several languages.

*The rules are ok. We can forget about them sometimes, for example how to sort things for recycling, but we can make it work. Sorry I am confused about the rules sometimes*

*(evaluation questionnaire)*

The analysis of in-depth interviews relied that having rules was conducive to feelings of safety and trust among the residents. The residents stressed that those who break the Shelter rules negatively affect the functioning of the Shelter and of the community.

*[the rules] were fully comprehensible and accessible. Honestly, it is annoying when some other residents don't do their chores, take care of cleanliness and calm.*

*(interview)*

The outtakes from interviews and questionnaires point to the importance of building a sense of responsibility for shared spaces. The rules were also mentioned numerous times as conducive to predictability and feelings of safety.



**All of these rules benefit me. They are all very clear and make sense to me. It is because of the rules, that I feel safer, to be honest.**

*(evaluation questionnaire)*

## **Safety and cleanliness**

The personal feeling of being safe was also reported as high or very high, with most monthly averages between 4.83 and 5.00. The lowest monthly average was 4.6 (August 2024). The residents reported feeling mostly safe and comfortable, although there were several reports of small food items being stolen.

The only controversial issue emerging from the evaluations (interviews and questionnaires) were varying standards of cleanliness among different residents.

**I feel safe here. It's not cold, the people aren't aggressive.**

*(questionnaire)*

## **Possibilities to give feedback**

When asked about possibilities to give feedback and take part in making decisions about the house the residents responded that they could give feedback at any time, which confirmed the findings from the questionnaires. Significant majority of the feedback was positive. The ratio of positive to negative feedback was from 12:3 to 28:0 depending on the month. Every negative feedback was analyzed by the Shelter coordinator and/or the whole team in a transparent way.

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One of the Shelter Fellows said in his interview: We had every opportunity to give feedback. And then you get to a point where you forget to “give feedback” because the Shelter coordinator is always there, available. And communication between us was flawless.

## **Communication with the Shelter coordinator**

The cooperation with the Shelter coordinator was also rated as good or very good: from 4.8 (May 2024) to 5 (most months). The residents valued her ability to communicate, being ready to work with them, and other interpersonal skills. “She is kind, it is easy to talk to her and she can really support you”—wrote one resident in his questionnaire.

We didn't feel like strangers with her—another added. The coordinator herself points to the crucial role of constantly improving house rules, and enabling the residents to have a say in how it is run. Both the coordinator and the residents said openly, that frequent visits by the coordinator served to build trust, continuously gather feedback and monitor residents' needs: “I pay attention to the questionnaires, feedback, all of it. Residents can meet up with me in the office, or when I am in the Shelter. And we never come over without an announcement, because we want to build relationships based on trust”.

## 5. Caseworking

The primary goal of the cooperation between the caseworking team and the beneficiary is for the new resident to secure employment within the first month of their stay in the Intervention Apartment. This allows them to gather the necessary funds (rent and deposit) to move into independent accommodation after leaving the shelter and to sustain themselves. The efforts of the caseworking team have achieved a success rate of over 80%.

Many people come to the Foundation thinking they have no skills or experience useful for work. Therefore, during the initial phase of a person's stay in the apartment, the mission of the caseworkers is to identify the resources they possess. Often, individuals with extensive professional experience are forced to look for jobs below their qualifications due to a lack of Polish language skills. It is important to make beneficiaries aware that before pursuing their dreams of education or working in their trained profession, they must first meet their most urgent needs.

The team supports the beneficiary by comprehensively introducing them to the local job market, helping them write (often their first-ever) CV, showing them how to search for jobs on specific websites and social media platforms, and assisting in contacting potential employers. The Foundation team also provides very practical support to enable employment, such as equipping the apartment with bicycles and helmets available to anyone who wants to start working, for instance, as a courier.

However, securing employment is just one of the tasks of the caseworking team. From the very first days, they support beneficiaries in obtaining legal and administrative assistance, medical care, including access to psychological and psychiatric care (in collaboration with

Some individuals, for example, have no work experience at all, even in their home country. We have to think and act broadly.

*(caseworker)*

Most often, finding a job so quickly is successful. With our help, and sometimes with the help of the other residents of the apartment. It often happens that within a week or two of moving in, the guys are hard to catch because they're working almost all the time.

*(caseworker)*





A trip around Warsaw organized by the Foundation.  
Photo: Adam Durjasz

professionals specialized in working with people on the move). In the next step, caseworkers work with beneficiaries to find accommodation they can move into after leaving the Shelter.

The form of cooperation used by case workers is assistance and providing solutions. The work plan for each beneficiary depends on their needs and resources, but the tools used remain the same. The case-working team maintains constant contact with beneficiaries staying in the apartment, performing various motivational and follow-up actions, such as asking if they have created an account on a job portal or sent their CV to the discussed places.

Beneficiaries are also obligated to maintain regular contact and engagement through a cooperation agreement, which is a condition of acceptance into the program. This agreement serves as an effective activation tool, even for beneficiaries with low motivation levels, as it entails a form of commitment.

**Regardless of the psycho-emotional state of the individuals, it is our duty to respect their autonomy—the fact that they are capable of making their own decisions and taking control of their lives. Our role is not to make decisions for them.**

*(caseworker)*

Our experience shows that the low level of motivation exhibited by some beneficiaries stems from their belief that achieving their goals is unattainable. Their psychosocial condition often leads to a diminished sense of self-worth, which, in turn, results in a lack of agency and a feeling of having no real influence over their own lives. The team's task is to support beneficiaries in taking independent actions, even those that might seem minor or simple, such as taking a photo for their CV.



This aims to restore their sense of agency. Small successes strengthen beneficiaries' proactive attitudes and gradually encourage them to take on greater challenges. This form of cooperation is all the more important because it involves motivating the beneficiary to act rather than performing individual tasks for them. This allows, in parallel to achieving the goal of finding a job, to strengthen their independence.

Resisting the temptation to carry out tasks for the beneficiary is not the only challenge in a caseworker's role. Some of these challenges are emotional. By clearly defining roles and maintaining a professional distance, the caseworking team minimizes the risk of beneficiaries developing emotional attachment. Such attachment could negatively impact the beneficiary's process of becoming independent and disrupt the functioning of the entire community. A breakdown in the professional relationship between beneficiary and caseworker could lead to emotional manipulation and inappropriate behavior.

Therefore, clear communication, adherence to established rules, and consistency in action are crucial aspects of a caseworker's job.

In addition to daily support and assistance in finding employment, an important task for the casework team is helping residents secure independent accommodation, where beneficiaries move after leaving the Shelter.

However, the team's work does not end when a beneficiary leaves the Emergency Housing. The caseworker stays in contact and monitors the process of becoming independent, providing support if necessary for another month. In exceptional cases, if a program graduate encounters a challenging situation, they can rely on the Foundation team's help even later.

## Supervision and Information Exchange

Every two weeks, or more frequently if needed, the team participates in psychological supervision to discuss challenges and their own well-being at work.

*This makes me feel like the psychotherapist is accompanying me in addressing ongoing matters and helping me articulate the situations I encounter. For instance, she explains that what a particular beneficiary experienced was minority stress. For me, substantive support is a priority, but everyone has the right to decide what they want to discuss during their supervision.*

*(Housing Coordinator)*



Christmas celebrations at the Shelter. Photo: Adam Durjasz



Weekly internal team meetings are also held, during which members share updates about beneficiaries and assess their resources. Current challenges, intervention situations, feedback from beneficiaries, and successes are all discussed.

I am aware, however, that the issues we face are also emotionally taxing. What makes it easier internally, within the team, is the trust we have in each other and the knowledge that we can rely on one another.

*(Foundation President)*



## Shelter Fellows and community building tools

My many years of experience in providing psychotherapy to individuals who have experienced trauma, displacement, including war trauma, have shown me that what we remember as the most wounding, painful, and ultimately devastating for our psyche is not the traumatic experience itself. Instead, it is the loneliness and lack of support during those moments.

The shelter created by the Kuchnia Konflikty Foundation is not just a place of refuge or a roof over one's head - although this is a fundamental existential need without which moving forward is impossible.

It is presence. It is a community. Presence and support allow us to rebuild humanity and a sense of dignity in a respectful manner. Because trauma is born in relationships and is also healed in relationships. Leaving one's home or country is the moment when control over one's life is lost. People who previously influenced their lives, made decisions, and shaped their daily reality, in one way or another, find themselves in a situation where they—often temporarily—lose their independence and agency.

Psychological rehabilitation and recovery from a crisis is a gradual process of regaining control. Even if it initially involves small matters or jointly made decisions within a temporarily created community. It is also a gradual

process of reclaiming self-respect and a sense of dignity. This happens when a person is met with acceptance, understanding, and healthy boundaries. It also occurs when one learns to listen to others and take their needs into account on par with their own.

This is why the work of the Intervention Shelter of the Kuchnia Konfliktu Foundation is such a crucial stop on the road to psychological rehabilitation for those with migration experience. It is much more than temporary accommodation. It is about relationships, respect, and reclaiming hope.

*Monika Szeliga*

*Psychotherapist supporting the Kuchnia Konfliktu Foundation team*



Photo: Agata Kubis for Oka.press

The Intervention Shelter provides an extraordinary opportunity to create a community that effectively strengthens the process of beneficiaries becoming independent. Strengthening relationships within the group is key. Both the Intervention Shelter team and caseworkers contribute to community building efforts. Together, they have developed shared goals and tools to achieve them:

- **Improving Psychophysical Well-Being:** A wide range of activities, from in-house initiatives to leisure activities and fostering a sense of belonging to the community, aims to empower residents.
- **Contextualizing the Situation:** Sharing the Foundation team's experiences helps beneficiaries to learn the sociopolitical context of life in Poland, making it easier to adapt to their new reality.
- **Cultural Education:** Organizing educational outings reduces confusion stemming from cultural differences.
- **Restoring Continuity of Life:** In the face of traumatic experiences, such as war, these efforts help rebuild a sense of "normalcy" by reclaiming agency, returning to daily activities, and overcoming difficulties.
- **Voluntary Participation:** Social activities are not a condition for staying in the Intervention Shelter, except for Community Meetings.
- **Inclusion and Integration:** Activities in the city and participation in cultural and educational offerings foster integration.
- **Support Networks:** Initiatives aim to strengthen relationships among project participants, leading to the creation of horizontal support networks. Knowledge shared by staff can be passed on by beneficiaries, covering topics such as formalities, finding housing, and improving mental well-being.
- **Reclaiming Agency:** Residents are involved in shaping the shelter's rules and implementing their own initiatives, such as creating a shared garden or a freeshop.



## Examples of Activities:

- **Community Meetings:** Weekly meetings where residents discuss issues related to the shelter, such as changes to cleaning duty schedules.
- **Co-Creating Spaces:** Residents participate in establishing rules and arranging common areas.
- **Collective Maintenance:** Coordinating efforts to maintain cleanliness and make minor repairs, supporting diverse gender roles.
- **Leisure Activities:** Organizing shared activities, such as forming a soccer team or visiting museums, to integrate residents with the local community.
- **Problem-Solving:** Shared activities also help address and understand situations arising from cultural differences.

**Case Study—Addressing Problems:** At the Intervention Shelter, one of the beneficiaries of Jewish origin reported feeling uncomfortable with the dominant Islamic iconography. Although the situation did not escalate into a conflict, the coordinator organized an art workshop to address potential tensions within the group. On large sheets of paper, participants left handprints and wrote messages to share with other residents. Every new arrival can add their own wishes, contributing their values to the community.

## Shelter Fellows: The Role of the Project Graduates

The role of the so-called project graduates is invaluable in building the community. They maintain contact with each other and, through the Shelter Fellows WhatsApp group, they also stay in touch with current beneficiaries living in the Shelter. The group now consists of over 50 people and is growing steadily. It provides an opportunity to exchange information about job offers, share news about interesting events, and offer support in difficult times. The relationships formed during the stay in the Intervention Shelter have, as residents themselves declare, become their new family—those closest to them.

You come here looking for work and a roof over your head, but you find so much more (...). I still remember when we went to the swimming pool together. At that moment, I felt happy because I realized that this team truly cares about us and can improve our situation.

*(Interview)*

My stay at the Shelter was important to me. Thank you so much, but this is not a goodbye! I look forward to staying in touch. Take care, and we will definitely meet again soon!

*(Interview)*

"I like my new rented room, but it's not the same as in the Intervention Shelter. There, I felt like I was with my family. We ate together just like in my home in Ethiopia."

*(Project graduate)*

Former residents also serve as positive role models for new participants. They encourage adherence to rules, care for the community, and job searching. Having already navigated this path, they have gained experience and are eager to share it, which complements the work of the caseworkers.



End of summer barbecue in the garden of the Shelter

## Evaluation of Casework and Shelter Fellows

### Cooperation and Communication with the Team

Cooperation with casework was rated positively or very positively in the survey, ranging from 4.66 (February 2024) to 5.00 (mostly). Residents appreciated the communication skills, engagement in job searching, and the ability to converse with employers. All written feedback regarding cooperation with the caseworker team was positive, and residents often emphasized that effective and regular communication helped them regain their sense of self-worth and agency.

The determination of caseworkers in job searching and overcoming administrative barriers together was also highly praised. *"They are wonderful; their work was amazing due to clear and regular communication, professionalism, effective problem-solving, and empathy,"* said one person in the evaluation survey. Another added their feedback on a specific caseworker: *"He was very kind, friendly, and put a lot of effort into improving our situation."*

The casework team also emphasizes that, aside from the qualities mentioned—determination and empathy—an essential skill is setting boundaries and supporting individuals rather than deciding for them what they should do in their situation. This is one of the foundations of the Foundation's work, highly valued by both the team and the beneficiaries.

*(caseworker)*

## Job Search

Beneficiaries highly appreciated the support provided by caseworkers in job searching, even when it was not successful within two to three months of the program. They valued regular meetings, assistance in creating CVs, adjusting expectations, and explaining Polish labor law. Practical advice was also helpful—links to job search platforms, contacts offered by the team, and joint development of digital skills. Posting job search ads on the Foundation’s social media and actively promoting them proved to be very helpful. Most people in in-depth interviews and evaluation surveys also pointed out that the prospect of finding a job in such a short time seemed impossible:

*I came to Warsaw and thought—how is it possible to find a job or a place to live here? When I spoke with the caseworker at the Foundation, she explained to me step by step how to find accommodation, a job, and how to take care of certain things. And I felt like I had been here for a long time. How do you manage to do this?*

*(evaluation survey)*

## Accommodation after the Shelter

The issue of searching for accommodation appeared less frequently in interviews and evaluation surveys with beneficiaries, but was an important topic in conversations with the team. The Housing Coordinator pointed to inspiration from the “Housing First” program, and the team emphasized that without secure accommodation, the chances for professional stabilization and a sense of security and motivation are significantly lower.

*When you leave the center, you need to understand your actual situation. In an open center, I felt this stress. They tell you that you have to find a room, you have to find a job, all within a month. I thought it was impossible. And when I came to the Shelter and met the caseworker, the way she explained everything made it seem achievable. They explain it all, and suddenly it's within reach. (...) The caseworker helped me create my CV, and then someone contacted me on Facebook. (...) I found a job within two weeks.*

*(Interview with a beneficiary)*

## Strengthening a Sense of Agency

Beneficiaries highly rated the rapid progress from meeting basic needs to achieving independence, gaining information, navigating Polish administrative reality, recognizing their own resources, and even reaching the stage of planning for the future and thinking about further development. They highlighted this as a distinguishing feature of the Foundation compared to other organizations.

Beneficiaries indicated that thanks to the support, they could stand on their own feet, plan a safe future, help others along the way, and even engage in the Foundation's activities in the future. From the perspective of the short duration of the program, this is a very positive result.

Thanks to you, I would like to have my own restaurant, but it requires patience and determination. It was an experiment, and I thought it would end in failure, but God helped me, and you too. One day, we will meet when I achieve my goal, and then I will help you.

*(evaluation survey)*

## Building Community

The final issue that former residents unanimously pointed to as a success was building community - both in the Shelter and in the Shelter Fellows WhatsApp group. They pointed out that the bonds formed with the team and other residents survived after their stay, and even then, they could count on the team or others.

When I arrived in Warsaw, I had problems getting a meal or finding basic things. I went to X [name of another organization], and they asked: What do you need? But you don't even know what you need. You don't even need a Biedronka voucher or a SIM card, but that's exactly what you get there. (...) But when I moved to the Foundation's Shelter, I stopped thinking about the next meal and started thinking about studies, work. I began thinking about the future.

*(interview)*





Christmas celebrations at the Shelter. Photo: Adam Durjasz

## 6. Challenges and institutional obstacles

The primary and described challenge is the need for a work permit, as well as the short duration of stay in the Temporary Housing. This requirement stems from the fact that without a work permit, individuals would not be able to become self-sufficient within two months. Other challenges include difficulties in securing stable funding, the rise of anti-refugee sentiments, lack of access to language courses, housing discrimination of the refugees, and the unpreparedness of public administration at all levels to support foreigners in Poland.

### Challenge 1. Access to funding and selective empathy

Securing funding, particularly for the operational costs of the Intervention Shelter and the Foundation (e.g., office maintenance and administrative fees), poses a significant challenge. Numerous difficulties arise, such as non-negotiable indicators and [a lack of understanding of the actual needs of local organizations](#) (e.g., the Kuchnia Konfliktu Foundation). In this context, one could speak of selective empathy and double standards in supporting non-white refugees in Poland:

**It's hard to convince donors that young men are the target group that needs support. These double standards are evident. We look at various grant offers, and they're usually clearly specified for women and children from Ukraine. The focus has shifted so heavily to one side that the boys, like ours, have been left out.**

*(caseworker)*

I would like a stable future for the Shelter. It's hard to build something when we know it could end in four months. You know, today you plant tomatoes in your garden, but you may not be able to harvest them. It's difficult.

*(caseworker)*

## Challenge 2. Measuring strenght against ambitions—the difficult art of saying no

Another challenge is being aware of our resources and the number of people who need our support.

*(caseworker)*

It is crucial to empower and help beneficiaries become self-sufficient through employment, which in such a short time is a serious challenge and requires the involvement of numerous resources. This means that despite a long waiting list and clear social need, only a small proportion of people can benefit from the program compared to the scale of the demand.

Another issue is setting clear boundaries and enforcing rules while considering the individual characteristics, experiences, and needs of the residents, including the question of women working with men. Creating a safe space for everyone in such a short time requires some rigor and discipline. The team also points to a sense of responsibility for those leaving the Shelter.

I try to remember that we're just a stop. That I have limited influence over what a person will do with themselves.

*(caseworker)*

## Challenge 3. When the system fails

The Foundation's actions support refugees in integrating with the Polish system (labor market, healthcare, public offices). The first challenge is the unpreparedness of state institutions to support refugees, and the second is stepping in when the safety or health of beneficiaries is at risk (e.g., after detention).

Systemic gaps arise already at the stage of information that is not available in languages other than Polish at key institutions, as well as in the training, attitudes, and procedures of public administration, and clear communication regarding formal requirements and next steps.

In most applications at the Office for Foreigners, the questions are in English and Russian, but at the end, there is a note in bold text: "Please respond in Polish." How? After all, only foreigners handle matters there.

*(caseworker)*

Between 2021 and 2024, anti-refugee sentiments increased, as did the risk of exploitation of workers, while solidarity with refugees and a sense of safety among Poles decreased. The Foundation's team often supports refugees in difficult interactions with employers, landlords, or public administration.

The daily dose of rejection, when making phone calls in search of a job or an apartment, is really high. It gives insight into what our guys have to deal with because the housing market and job market are not the same for them as they are for Polish people.

*(caseworker)*

Poland ranks very low in EU rankings for systemic support for the self-sufficiency of refugees, which means that the primary responsibility falls on the social sector or private individuals. The unprecedented mobilization of aid for refugees from Ukraine in 2022 led to what is now known as “aid burnout” among Poles two years later. In practice, this means that the team supports beneficiaries within a system that is often unprepared and unregulated, and at the same time, there are no alternatives for it.

## 7. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on our experiences, we have developed the following recommendations regarding systemic support and the effective implementation of similar support and accommodation programs for particularly vulnerable groups at the local organizational and community level.

This publication gathers the experiences of the team at the Foundation Kuchnia Konfliktu during the project implementation and focuses on best practices based on specific values and goals in working with beneficiaries.

### Systemic recommendations

- 1. Expanding the grant offer to include support programs for refugees**, regardless of their country of origin, taking into account the needs of particularly vulnerable groups. Such an offer could include dedicated medium- and long-term funds and expanded opportunities for renting municipal properties on preferential terms.
- 2. Training public administration and services** on best practices and procedures for working with refugees. Monitoring and counteracting discrimination, double standards, and hate speech in the public space, especially from representatives of public institutions (employment offices, healthcare, social welfare centers).
- 3. Taking on greater responsibility for humanitarian response** by central and local authorities and relieving civil

society. Providing real financial and housing support for pilot programs and ongoing programs addressing refugee housing discrimination.

**4. Using best practices and solutions from local organizations**—involving the social sector in the processes of designing local migration policies and systemic support programs.

## Recommendations for Social Organizations and Informal Groups

1. Highest attention to work standards and safety procedures.
2. Clear feedback mechanisms.
3. Active search for cooperation and resource sharing between organizations.
4. Access to supervision and a clear division of tasks within the team.
5. Defining and clearly communicating the principles and scope of the support we offer.
6. The ability to provide adequate psychological support, translation services, and career counseling for beneficiaries, as well as awareness of where such support can be found.
7. An inclusive approach for those receiving support. Focus on empowerment, building agency, and identifying and naming the resources of the beneficiaries.

## 8. Our team and the Foundation

The Kuchnia Konfliktu Foundation was founded in 2016 in Warsaw, where until 2021 it operated a bistro and a space for dialogue co-created by refugees. In 2021, the bistro was transferred to the refugee women's initiative – the Foundation of Women On The Move [Fundacja Kobiety Wędrownie]. Currently, the Foundation supports refugees in their personal development, helps with everyday challenges, and works in the areas of advocacy and education. Casework activities started in 2016 and consist of individualized support aimed at achieving self-sufficiency, such as helping to find work, rental housing, or arranging medical appointments.

Since 2022, the Foundation has been running the RefugeeFund program, which supports civic and social activity by people with migration experience. In 2024 alone, thanks to the support of RefugeeFund, migrant leaders organized nearly 200 events aimed at people from their communities.

Since 2023, the Foundation has been running the Intervention Shelter for people on the move. The Foundation focuses on supporting particularly vulnerable groups (LGBTQI+), both in guarded centers for foreigners and after their departure. Assistance includes psychological and psychiatric support, safe accommodation, food vouchers, and hygiene products. Since 2024, the Foundation has been monitoring and advocating for the support of LGBTQI+ refugees in collaboration with Save the Children/Humanitarian Leadership

Academy and Queer Without Borders. Since the beginning of the humanitarian crisis at the Polish-Belarusian border, the Foundation has been involved in the actions of the Border Group.





### **Jarmila Rybicka**

*Founder and President of the Foundation*

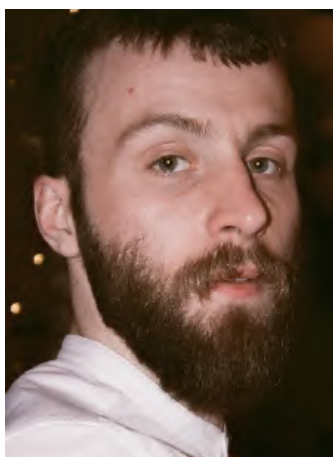
A sociologist and founder of Kuchnia Konfliktu, involved in human rights work for ten years. A member of the Warsaw Women's Council. Currently, she is responsible for creating and implementing new projects within the Foundation.



### **Paulina Piorkowska**

*Coordinator of the Intervention Shelter*

A graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts. She has many years of experience working directly with particularly vulnerable groups and people with migration experience.



### **Adam Durjasz**

*Caseworker at the Intervention Shelter*

Previously involved in the cultural sector, for the past two years he has been working with people with migration and refugee experience. A member of the BAZA Team football team and co-founder of the Free Group [Grupa Wolne], within which he co-led workshops for youth and young adults.



### **Natalia Kur**

*Caseworker at the Intervention Shelter*

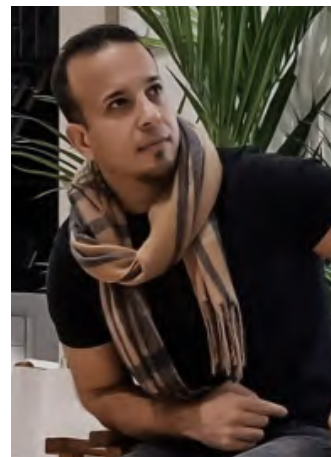
For seven years, she has been working to support people with refugee and migration experience. From 2017 to 2021, she worked with refugee children as a tutor and family assistant, coordinating the tutoring project within the Poland Hospitality Foundation.



### **Laura Kwoczała**

*Caseworker at the Intervention Shelter from 2023 to 2024*

Political scientist and human rights activist. From 2021 to 2023, she led the Emergency Team for Refugee Rights Protection at the parliamentary office of Dr. Tomasz Aniśko.



### **Abduljabbar Alnifawa**

*Community Assistant at the Intervention Shelter in 2024*

As a mentor, he directly supports refugees, works as an assistant, community animator, and translator for Arabic and Persian. In 2023, he cooperated with the Dobry Start Foundation.

**Umut Er**

*Community Assistant at the  
Intervention Shelter*

A doctor by education. He has worked for human rights in his home country. Currently a refugee in Poland. After years of supporting Syrian war victims in his country, he now has the opportunity to support refugees again.

Thank you for checking out our *Toolbox*!  
Please contact us:

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