



**MIGRANTS AND
POLISH POLICE:
EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS,
CHALLENGES AND AVENUES FOR
RELATIONSHIP-STRENGTHENING**

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IOMPOLAND 2024

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EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS,
CHALLENGES AND AVENUES FOR
RELATIONSHIP-STRENGTHENING**

May 2024
IOM Poland Data & Research and
Immigration and Border
Governance Units

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
1. Introduction	5
Background	5
Research questions	6
Definitions	6
2. Methodology	7
Key informant Interviews	7
Police Surveys	7
Surveys with Migrants	8
3. Findings Overview	9
Key findings	9
4. Migrant Perceptions of Law Enforcement	10
Sample overview	11
Migrants' experiences with Polish law enforcement	11
Migrants' perceptions of Polish law enforcement	12
Areas and methods for improvement	14
5. Key Informant Perspectives	15
Key informant interview findings	15
6. Police Perceptions of Migrants	18
Sample overview	19
Polish police' experiences with migrant communities	19
Polish police's perceptions of migrant communities	21
Areas and methods for improvement	23
7. Recommendations	25

I. INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Following the migration prompted by the onset of the full-scale war in February 2022, the largest migrant group in Poland comprises Ukrainians, including both refugees who fled the war in Ukraine and those who migrated to Poland prior to February 2022. The estimated 1.5 million Ukrainian citizens make up over three-quarters of the migrants holding valid residence permits in Poland¹. Polish law enforcement played a crucial role in supporting Ukrainian nationals after the refugee influx, and the dynamics between Ukrainian migrants and Polish law enforcement were explored in a previous report.

However, as of April 2024, there are 413,000 non-Ukrainian foreign residence permit holders living in Poland, marking a notable increase from 392,000 in 2023 and 298,000 in 2022¹. Conversely, the number of Ukrainians in Poland has not experienced a comparable increase during this period. The largest national groups among non-Ukrainian foreign citizens are Belarusians (128,000), Georgians (27,000), Indians (22,000), and Russians (19,000)². These individuals include both temporary and permanent residents, as well as EU citizens who have registered their stay in Poland. In 2023 alone, over 130,000 positive decisions were made regarding temporary residence permits for non-Ukrainian migrants¹, with the largest national groups being Belarusians, Georgians, and Indians³. Consequently, with the rise in the number of migrants, the number of migrants under police investigation has also increased (from 16,000 in 2022 to 17,000 in 2023, including Ukrainian citizens)^{4,5}. It could be assumed that the number of interactions the Polish Police have had with migrants, as suspects, reporters or victims of crime, or otherwise, has increased.

As the number of non-Ukrainian migrants residing in Poland continues to rise, there is a pressing need to explore various aspects of integration processes, including interactions with and perceptions of law enforcement. Conversely, questions arise regarding the attitudes and potential biases from the perspective of Polish law enforcement. This study aims to provide insights into interactions, perceptions, and potential areas for improvement in the relationship between non-Ukrainian migrants in Poland and Polish law enforcement with a specific focus on the Polish Police. The report encompasses our main research findings as well as recommendations for both Polish law enforcement's engagement with non-Ukrainian migrant communities and future humanitarian programming.

POLAND

¹ Office for Foreigners. 2024. *Report on the Citizens of Ukraine (as of 30 April 2024)*.

² Data from migracje.gov.pl. Retrieved: 14 May 2024.

³ Data received from Office for Foreigners.

⁴ Data received from Polish Police.

⁵ However, in the case of certain offenses the number decreased, e.g. Article 178a § 1 of the Criminal Code, i.e. driving under the influence of alcohol.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1	What types of experiences have migrants in Poland had with Polish police?
2	What types of experiences have Polish police had with migrant communities?
3	How do migrants perceive Polish law enforcement agencies?
4	How do Polish police perceive migrant communities?
5	What do both groups perceive as the greatest issues/areas for improvement in the interactions/relationship between the two groups?

KEY DEFINITIONS

Migrant:

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines a migrant as any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a state away from their habitual place of residence. This movement can be regardless of the person's legal status, whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary, what the causes for the movement are, or the length of stay. The term "migrant" is thus an umbrella term that encompasses various types of movements and reasons for moving, including economic, social, political, or environmental factors.

For the sake of this research, only migrants not of Ukrainian nationality were included in the study scope, as the [previous IOM Poland report](#) on this topic focused solely on Ukrainians in Poland.

Polish Police:

A uniformed and armed formation intended to protect people's safety and maintain public order, subordinated to the Poland's Minister of Internal Affairs.¹

Municipal Police:

A uniformed unit established by the municipal council to protect public order within the municipality, subordinated to the local government authorities.²

Key Informant:

Individuals in leadership or community-facing positions within the non-governmental organization (NGO) humanitarian and diplomatic communities who have frequent contact with and experience in supporting migrants in Poland.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, which combined online surveys (49 surveys with migrants and 239 surveys with police officers) with key informant interviews (5 interviews). All surveys were conducted anonymously through an online survey tool. Data was collected between December 2023 and April 2024.

SURVEYS WITH MIGRANTS

The survey targeting migrants was promoted through posters in public spaces, shared with affected communities supported by IOM and partner organizations, and publicized through a targeted social media campaign. These surveys were entirely anonymous, and data collected via the online Kobo platform were securely stored on a server. The survey was available in 16 languages (Arabic, Bengali, English, French, Georgian, Hindi, Kurdish, Pashto, Persian, Polish, Russian, Spanish, Tajik, Turkish, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese). It commenced with a brief introduction, and only individuals aged 18 and above who provided consent could participate. No personally identifiable information was collected. For this study only non-Ukrainian migrants and refugees were included, as the previous study on law enforcement relations solely focused on the experiences of Ukrainian nationals in Poland. The previous study can be found here on the [DTM Poland website](#).

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with representatives of non-governmental organizations and diplomatic missions with experience supporting migrant communities. The selected key informants all work directly with migrants in Poland and have a strong understanding of Polish law enforcement agencies' mandates as well as the Polish legal system.

The interviews were anonymous, and each was carried out with one respondent and two IOM staff (one to guide the interview and one to take notes), provided the respondent consented to be interviewed after a brief introduction.

POLICE SURVEYS

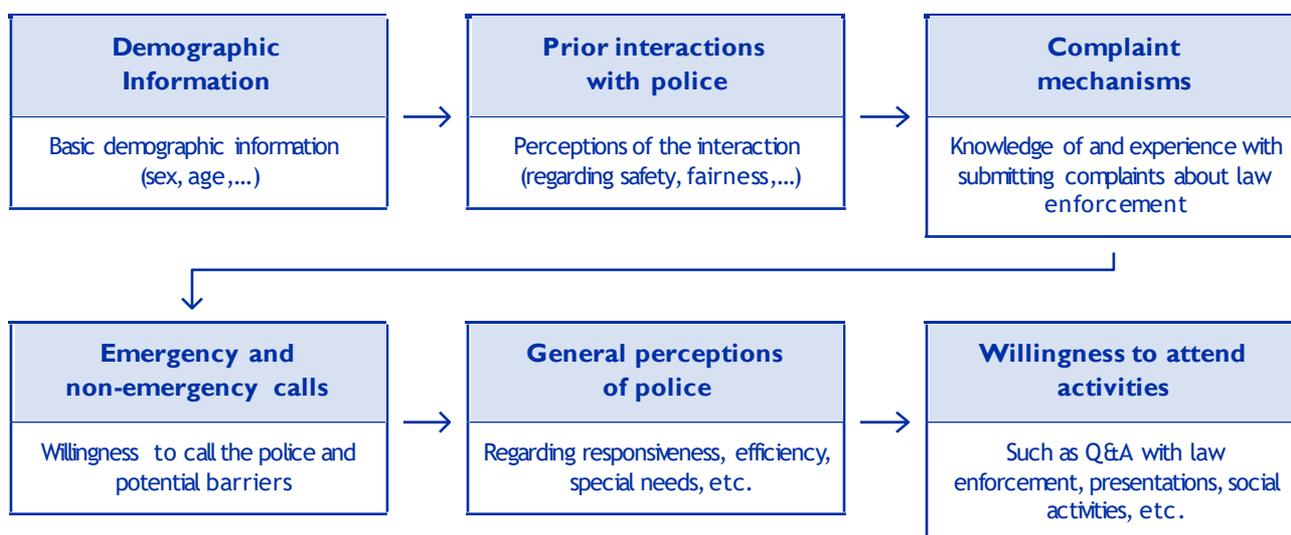
Online surveys were shared with police contacts across Poland, who then shared it with staff in their respective units at their discretion. The survey shared with police respondents was developed in consultation with representatives of the Polish police, who granted final approval before disseminating the surveys. The surveys were completely anonymous, and data collected online through the Kobo platform was stored on a secure server. No personal identifiable information was collected. The survey was only completed by respondents who provided consent.

GEOGRAPHIC COVERAGE

While the survey with migrants and key informant interviews primarily targeted participants residing or working in the Warsaw area, the survey with police officers gathered responses from units across Poland, with notable contributions from Gdańsk (45% of responses), Olsztyn (15%), and Rzeszów (14%). Warsaw police officers made up 8 per cent of total participants.

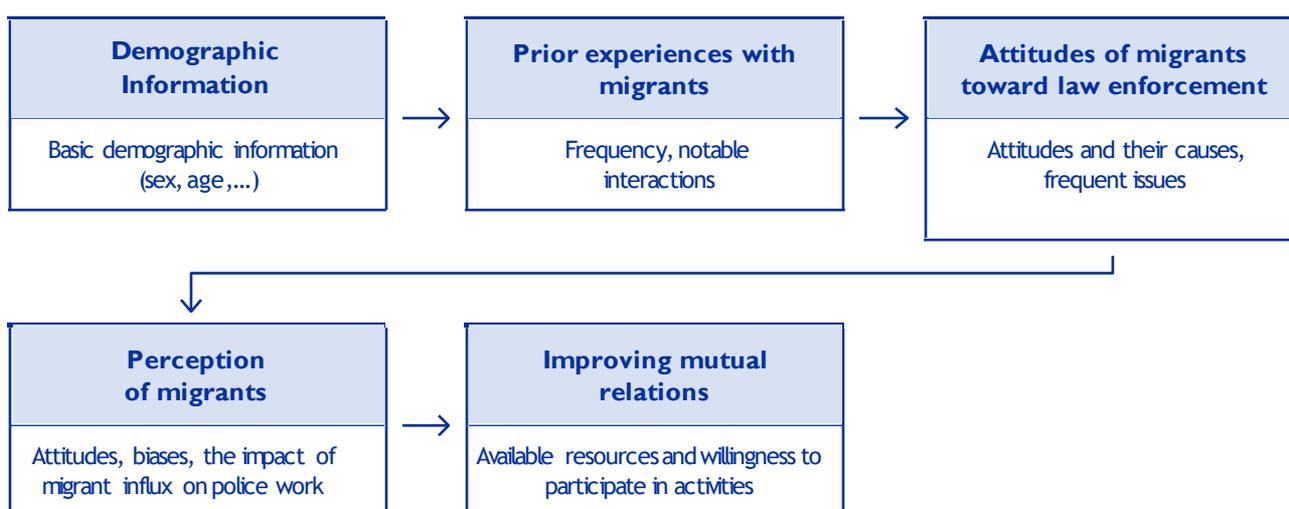
MIGRANT SURVEY COMPONENTS

A data collection tool was developed to survey migrants in Poland. The tool included modules on demographic information, past experiences with Polish law enforcement, knowledge of complaint mechanisms, willingness to contact law enforcement, perceptions of law enforcement, and interest in participating in potential future programming involving law enforcement.



POLICE SURVEY COMPONENTS

The survey for police officers consisted of five distinct modules. These modules covered demographic information, experiences working with migrants (including notable positive and negative interactions), perceived attitudes of migrants toward law enforcement, perceptions of migrants and their impact on police work, and suggestions for improving mutual relations.



3. FINDINGS OVERVIEW

KEY FINDINGS



Out of 49 migrant respondents, **11** had at least one interaction with Polish law enforcement agents. Of these, **10 of 22** reported interactions were initiated by migrants, while **12** were initiated by law enforcement agencies.



Men reported having interactions proportionally **more often** (9/30) than women (2/17).



The most common interaction types include **being written down or questioned (7/22)** and **reporting a crime** as either a victim or a witness (**7/22**).



Most interactions received ratings of having gone **mostly or very well**. **9 out of 22** of the interactions were rated positively regarding every attribute (safety, fairness, respect, communication).



Fourteen per cent of migrant respondents stated they would **not feel comfortable** calling police in an **emergency**, due to language barrier as the main reason.



According to key informants, migrants often felt **not taken seriously by the police**, encountered **language barriers or prefer to contact local migrant-oriented organizations due to previous negative experiences with law enforcement, either in Poland or in their countries of origin.**



Only 10 per cent of police respondents reported **existing initiatives to improve interactions with migrants**, such as anti-discrimination workshops and human rights training. A significant majority (90%) reported that no such initiatives exist



From the perspective of law enforcement officers, most interactions with migrants took place on the occasion of **interventions** followed by **traffic-related interactions** and **information sharing**.



Survey responses from police officers revealed **negative stereotypes and personal biases** held by many officers towards migrants.



Key informants reported routine **racial and social profiling** by police, targeting individuals with darker complexions for document checks and monitoring migrant-operated establishments like restaurants or delivery services.



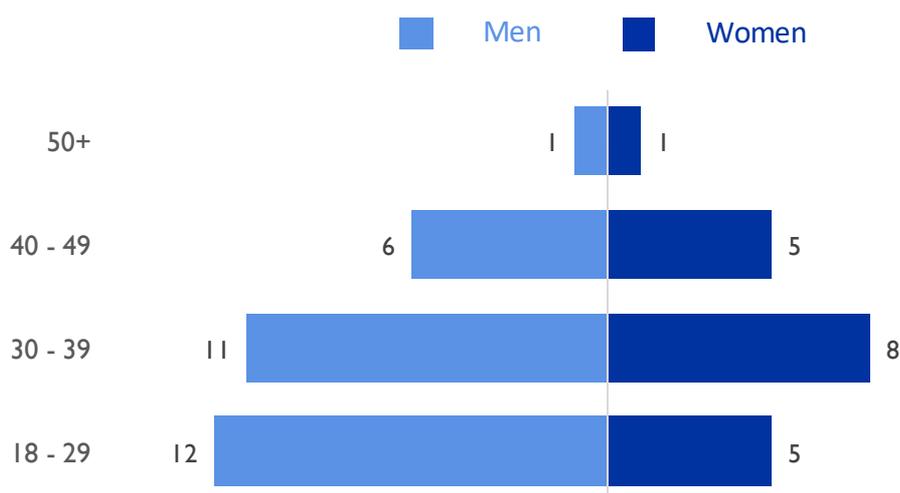
Recommendations for police included raising **cultural awareness and intercultural competencies**, establishing **police focal points for migrant groups**, keeping individuals who contacted the police regularly informed about their cases, offering **information in preferred languages**, and **hosting sessions on legal responsibilities** and local regulations.

4. PERCEPTIONS OF LAW ENFORCEMENT: FOREIGN NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

SAMPLE OVERVIEW

A total of 49 non-Ukrainian migrants participated in the survey between 26 December 2023 and 19 April 2024. Of these, 30 identified themselves as male, while 19 identified as female. Seventeen participants fell between the ages of 18 and 29, while 19 were between 30 and 39 years old, and 13 (about one in four) were 40 years old or older. Thirty-four participants reported having completed the first level of higher education or higher. Out of all participants, 27 reported working in some capacity, with the majority in full-time positions, while 12 respondents were unemployed and actively seeking employment at the time of completing the survey. The remaining 10 participants were either studying, occupied with family responsibilities, or unable to work legally.

FIGURE 1: RESPONDENTS BY AGE AND GENDER (N=49)



COUNTRY OF ORIGIN AND CURRENT CITY OF RESIDENCE

Out of the all participants, 8 originated from Türkiye, 6 from the Russian Federation, 6 from Belarus, 4 from Afghanistan, 3 from the Syrian Arab Republic, and 2 each from Nepal, Colombia, Egypt, India, and Italy, and the remaining 12 respondents were originally from other countries. Overall, the survey included 23 participants originally from Asia, 14 from Europe, 8 from Africa, and 5 from Central or South America. Thirty-seven participants reported having the ability to understand and use the English language, 21 Polish, 18 Russian, and 6 Ukrainian.

Out of the 49 participants, at the time of filling out the survey, 40 resided in Warsaw. Other locations mentioned included Konstancin Jeziorna, Kraków, Łódź, Grodzisk Mazowiecki, Przeźmierowo, and Żyrardów. The respondents reported living in their place of residence for periods ranging from 3 months to 37 years, while over half of respondents reported living in their place of residence for at least 2 years.

MIGRANTS' EXPERIENCES WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT

Out of all 49 migrants who participated in the survey, 11 had at least one interaction with law enforcement in Poland. Among those, 4 had only one interaction, while another four had experienced two interactions. Two persons reported three interactions, and 1 reported four interactions. A longer stay in the place of residence was associated with, on average, a higher number of interactions with law enforcement. Men had reported having interactions proportionally more often (9/30) than women (2/17).

Sixteen interactions occurred with the Polish Police, while in other cases, the respondents interacted with municipal police, or they were unsure about the agency with which they interacted.

FIGURE 2: RESPONDENTS WHO REPORTED HAVING AT LEAST ONE INTERACTION WITH POLISH LAW ENFORCEMENT BY GENDER

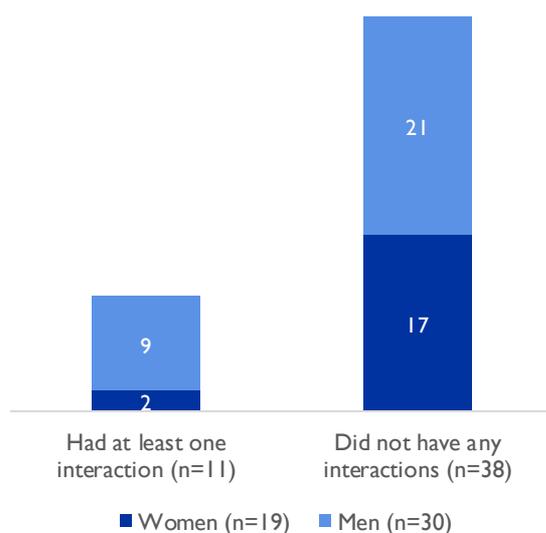
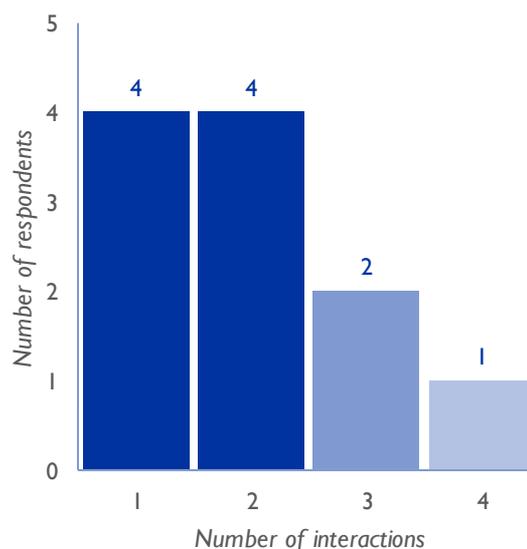


FIGURE 3: NUMBER OF INTERACTIONS PER RESPONDENTS AMONG THOSE INVOLVED (N=11)



Overall, 22 interactions with law enforcement were described by the participants. Among these, 7 included being written down or questioned, 7 reporting a crime, and 5 involved being pulled over in a car. Other types of interactions, such as being searched or detained, or seeking information, were reported less frequently. Based on this information, the interactions were categorized as being initiated either by law enforcement (12 out of 22) or by the respondents themselves (10 out of 22).

PERCEPTIONS OF EXPERIENCED INTERACTIONS

Respondents rated the reported interactions based on four attributes: sense of personal safety during the interaction, perceived fairness of treatment, respect, and ease of communication. The majority of interactions were rated mostly or very well. Fourteen out of 22 interactions were rated mostly or very well aligning with respect, safety, and fairness. The same was true for 12 interactions regarding communication ease. Nine out of the 22 interactions were rated positively regarding every attribute.

However, only 5 out of the 22 described interactions occurred without any issues. Overall, 31 issues were reported, with the language barrier (12) and lack of understanding of legal rights (6) being the most frequently reported. Excessive suspiciousness, abuse of power, and negligence were also reported by multiple respondents. When asked about possible improvements to the experienced interactions, three individuals were unable to offer any suggestions. Overall, 59 possible improvements were mentioned, with communication (15), attitude (9), and respect for the respondents' rights (6) being among the most frequently mentioned suggestions.

PERCEPTIONS OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

Regardless of whether they had any interactions with Polish law enforcement or not, survey participants were asked to rate their perceptions of Polish law enforcement on a five-point scale across three dimensions developed by Skogan and Hartnett:¹ politeness, responsiveness, and efficiency. An additional attribute regarding catering to specific needs was also included.

The majority of respondents reported their perceptions of law enforcement as mostly positive in terms of politeness, efficiency, and catering to specific needs. However, the responsiveness dimension received the lowest overall rating, with only 21 participants having reported a positive perception in this regard. Among all dimensions, the most frequently chosen option was a neutral rating - neither positive nor negative.

Out of all 49 participants, 14 rated their perceptions of Polish law enforcement as mostly positive across all four dimensions. However, among the 11 participants who had any interactions, only 1 respondent had positive perceptions of all four attributes. Additionally, men seemed to rate law enforcement more critically, accounting for 13 out of the overall 15 negative ratings across the separate perception dimensions.

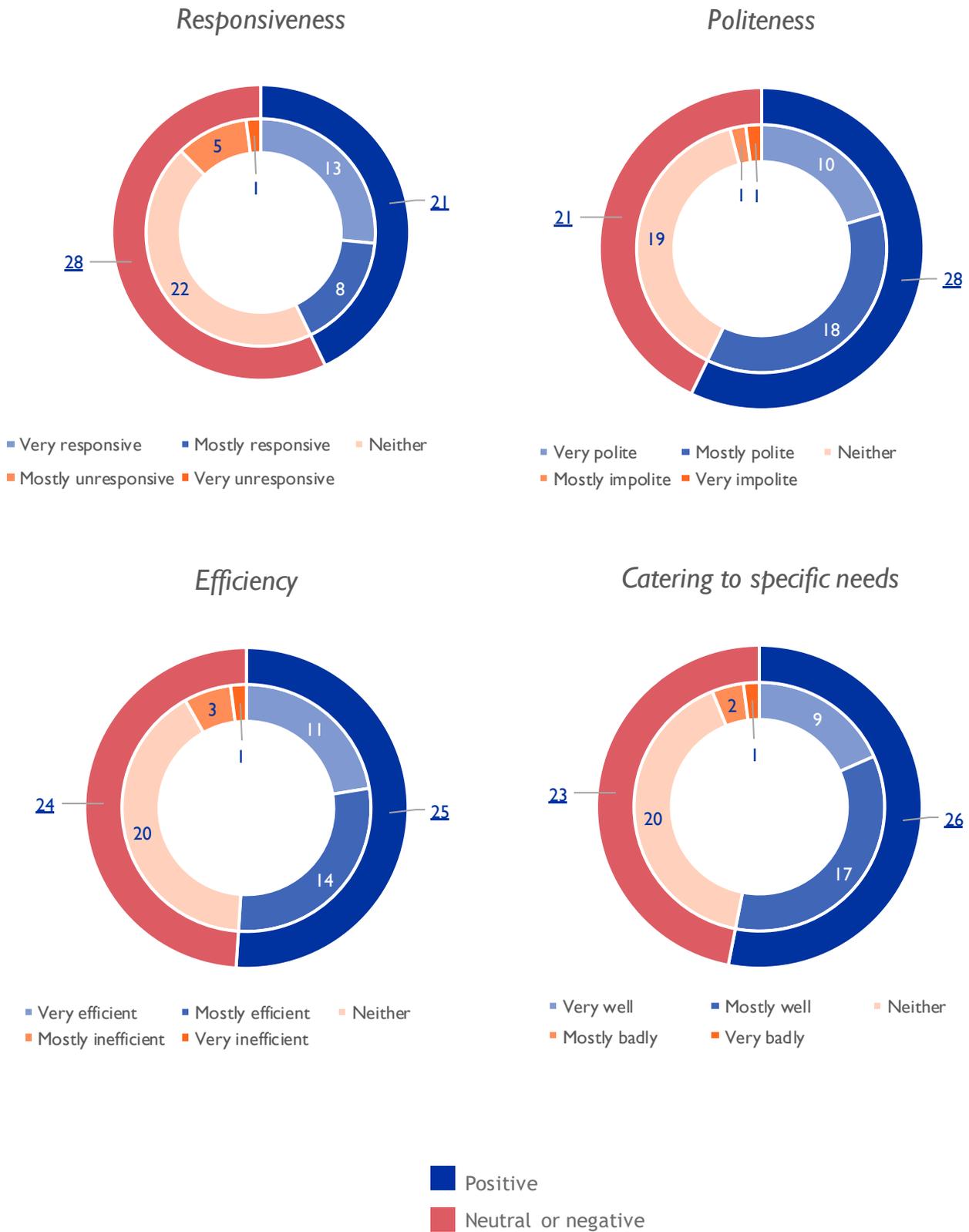
SUBMITTING A COMPLAINT

Seven respondents knew how to submit a complaint against a law enforcement officer, but none had done so in the past. Another 7 individuals, however, wanted to submit a complaint in the past but did not proceed due to various reasons: not knowing how (3), believing it would not change anything (3), facing a language barrier (3), lacking personal details of the officer in question (3), not feeling physically safe (2), and being discouraged by either a friend (1) or a law enforcement officer (1).

Fourteen respondents indicated that they would not consider submitting a complaint in the future, citing lack of knowledge on how to proceed (10) and language barrier (8) as the most common reasons. Among those who reported possibly considering submitting a complaint in the future (35), the top choices of modality for doing so included online (26) and in-person at the police station (21).

¹ Skogan, W. G. and S. M. Hartnett. 1997. *Community Policing*, Chicago Style. Oxford University Press, New York

FIGURE 4: PERCEPTIONS OF LAW ENFORCEMENT ON FOUR DIMENSIONS: POLITENESS, RESPONSIVENESS, EFFICIENCY, AND CATERING TO SPECIAL NEEDS (N=49)



WILLINGNESS TO CONTACT LAW ENFORCEMENT

Respondents were asked about their willingness to contact Polish law enforcement in case of emergency and non-emergency situations. Forty-two participants reported they would feel comfortable contacting law enforcement in case of an emergency, and 45 would feel comfortable contacting them in some way in case of a non-emergency. The most frequently cited reason for not feeling comfortable, both in emergencies (6) and non-emergencies (4), was the language barrier. Regarding an emergency situation, fear of being punished for an unjustified call (5), fear of being disrespected during the call (3), as well as of the interaction itself (3), were among the most frequently reported reasons for not being comfortable calling.

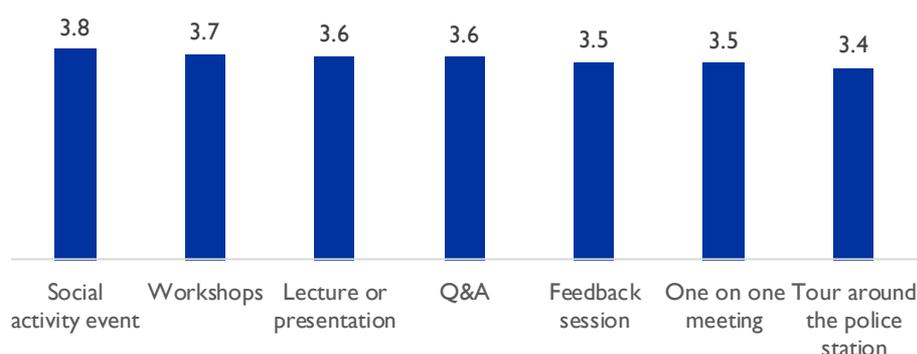
The top suggested areas of improvement regarding the emergency line included adding an English language option (31), providing information on what to expect after the call (20), ensuring anonymity (15), and ensuring callers understand their right to make the call (13). For non-emergency contact, top suggestions included providing interpretation (31), giving information on what to expect after the call (19), ensuring callers understand their right to make the call (18), and ensuring anonymity (16). Additionally, among female respondents, a notable suggestion involved being able to speak with a woman, both in emergencies (6/19) and non-emergencies (5/19).

“I have to be sure that English translation is available for me to communicate with law enforcement. Otherwise, I would never feel safe. I am very afraid of any kind of misunderstanding and not being able to understand them or defend myself.”

Thirty-three-year-old woman originally from Türkiye

Finally, survey participants were asked to rate their willingness to attend various activities with local law enforcement on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicated unwillingness and 5 indicated substantial willingness to attend. All of the activities were rated similarly high, with a social activity event being a slightly more popular option (3.8) compared to the others, and a tour around a police station being less popular (3.4)

FIGURE 5: AVERAGE WILLINGNESS TO ATTEND AN ACTIVITY WITH LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ON A 1 - 5 SCALE (N=49)



5. KEY INFORMANT PERSPECTIVES

PERCEPTIONS OF INTERACTIONS BETWEEN THE POLICE AND MIGRANT COMMUNITIES

Four key informants were interviewed to gain additional perspectives on the relationship between law enforcement and migrant communities. These individuals hold leadership and client-facing positions within the NGO humanitarian and diplomatic communities and provide support to migrant communities as part of their day-to-day work.

Nature of Interactions

According to key informants, interactions between migrants and the police are predominantly initiated by police officers, and mostly with male migrants. The interactions initiated by female migrants are often related to domestic disputes or abuse. It also appears that female migrants are more likely to call the police to report an incident and are more willing to file a complaint on a specific police officer. Interactions initiated by the police with male migrants typically revolve around claims of suspicious or disorderly behaviour and traffic law violation, and occasionally escalate to involve violent apprehensions and searches. A third category of interaction mentioned was indirect involvement with police as a result of witnessing a crime.

The analysis of interviews with key informants has identified several issues during interactions between migrants and police, including:

- **Social profiling** based on factors such as **skin colour**, **language**, often **gender** and **occupation**, particularly evident in cases of individuals engaged in low-income employment.
- **Inadequate provision of accessible information** in languages spoken or understood by migrants.
- **Lack of empathy and cultural sensitivity** towards migrants.
- Perceptions among law enforcement personnel that **migrants are here illegally**.
- Disinclination to assume responsibility for someone's incidents or cases involving migrants and **referring them to other institutions**, notably the Border Guard.

Most interactions that key informants have witnessed or been made aware of were of negative nature, however, some individuals observed that positive interactions typically involve migrants who have resided in Poland for longer periods of time (such as a decade or more).

Proficiency in Polish, a high level of **integration**, comprehensive **understanding of local regulations** and procedures and **familiarity with the functions** of various institutions emerged as key factors contributing to the prevalence of positive interactions with the police among this demographic. Effective police interventions mentioned were related to cases of domestic abuse and bullying of children at school. One respondent attributed this trend to two primary factors: the **involvement of minors** in such cases and the predominance of **female police officers** handling them.

Perception of Migrants Towards the Police

According to key informants, due to the perception that many police officers hold negative biases towards migrants, there is a hesitancy to engage in interactions with the police. In the view of key informants, many migrants may feel they are subjected to different treatment based on their country of origin or immigration status, or in many cases based on their inability to articulate themselves effectively in Polish or defend their rights in their native language.

It has been emphasized that migrants **do not perceive the police institution itself as inherently corrupt or incompetent**. This sentiment, however, does not extend to all individual police officers, as many reported negative encounters prompting considerations of reporting specific officers for misconduct. Almost universally, interactions shared with key informants by migrants had negative undertones, further reinforcing their distrust towards law enforcement.

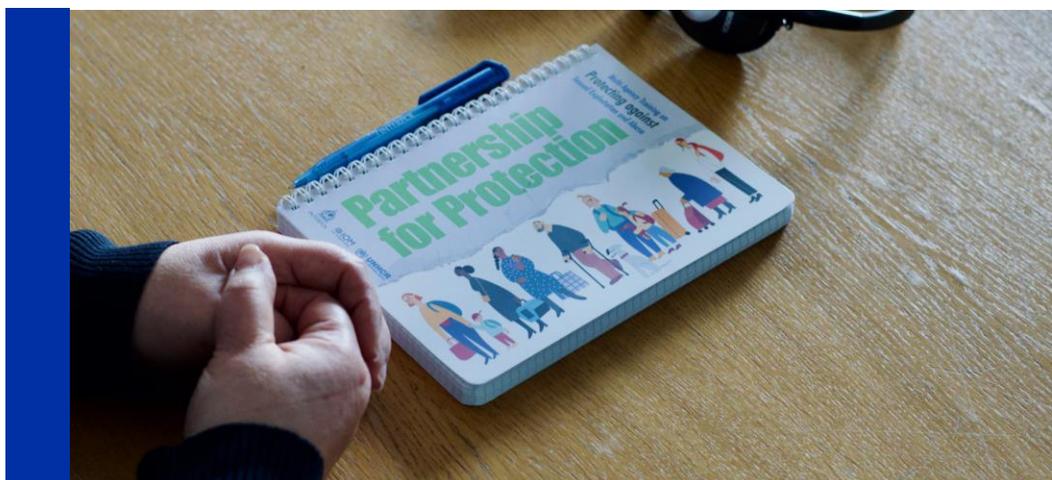
It was noted that, influenced by prior negative experiences with law enforcement in their countries of origin, as well as a prevailing sense of not being treated seriously when initiating contact and encountering language barriers, many migrants opt for contacting local migrant-oriented organizations rather than law enforcement. In situations where migrants do engage directly with law enforcement, key informants reported frequent disappointment expressed by migrants regarding the quality of response received, the way they were treated, or the handling of their incidents.

Perception of the Police Regarding Migrants

Based on the insights shared during key Informant interviews, several main issues came to light regarding the perceptions and behaviors of police officers towards migrants:

- Social profiling is behind many interactions between migrants and police, which is characterized by the routine targeting of individuals with darker complexions for document checks and the monitoring of migrant-operated establishments, such as restaurants.
- Assumptions regarding the correlation between low-paid employment within migrant communities and heightened susceptibility to criminal activity. Food delivery and rideshare drivers were mentioned as reference to these assumptions.
- Key informants cited frequent use by police of inappropriate language during interactions with migrants.
- Substantial instances of miscommunication arising from a lack of cultural awareness and language proficiency.
- Reluctance among officers to directly engage with foreign individuals, often opting to refer them to the Border Guard rather than addressing their concerns themselves.

All key informants interviewed highlighted perceived differences in the treatment of migrants compared to the treatment of Polish citizens. Key informants suggested that it is crucial for police to understand the importance of treating migrant communities with the same level of respect and dignity as they would treat non-migrant Polish individuals.



IOM police training materials, © Alexey Shvirin 2024

Key Informant Recommendations for Improvements

- Increase cultural awareness and sensitivity among police officers;
- Establish trust and cooperation by introducing police focal points to serve particular migrant groups, and establish relations with migrant community leaders;
- Provide regular updates on reported cases;
- Provide clear and accessible information in migrants' preferred languages, especially in police stations;
- Host regular information sessions on the legal responsibilities of persons living in Poland, and on local rules and regulations;
- Provide migrants with accessible methods for voicing concerns and asking questions.
- Conduct further research on the types and root causes of crimes committed by migrants, to explore potential causes stemming from socio-economic conditions and vulnerabilities of an individual, rather than their nationality or migration status.
- Increase empathy towards foreigners among police officers by emphasizing the extremely vulnerable circumstances of many migrants. Raise awareness of the challenges migrants often face to find employment opportunities, to follow legal procedures related to migration status, as well as the hardships that may have been faced within their countries of origin. Law enforcement officers should have greater empathy also for those who have resorted to working low-paid and often exploitative jobs due to their vulnerable positions, such as those in food delivery.

Additional Recommendations Based on Interview Results

The key informants interviewed expressed primarily negative views on the ways in which most police law enforcement officers interact with migrants. At the same time, key informants shared that they still have hope and see potential for improvement between police and migrant communities. Given the vital role that civil society organizations and the diplomatic community play in supporting migrant communities in Poland, it is important to foster trust and promote a positive working relationship between these actors and the Polish police. Therefore, it is also recommended that programmatic initiatives aimed at improving police interactions with migrant communities also include engagement with a wider variety of actors that support migrants in Poland.



IOM workshop with police, © Alexey Shvirin 2024

6. POLICE PERCEPTIONS OF MIGRANTS

SURVEY WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT: SAMPLE OVERVIEW

In March 2024, an anonymous online survey was conducted with the participation of 238 police officers from 11 units across Poland. The majority of respondents are Patrol Officers (178 responses), highlighting that front-line roles are heavily represented in the survey. Other roles such as Traffic Officer (13), Criminal Investigator (23), and Unit Supervisor (3) are represented in the survey as well.

FIGURE 6: RESPONDENTS' GENDER IDENTITY (N=238)

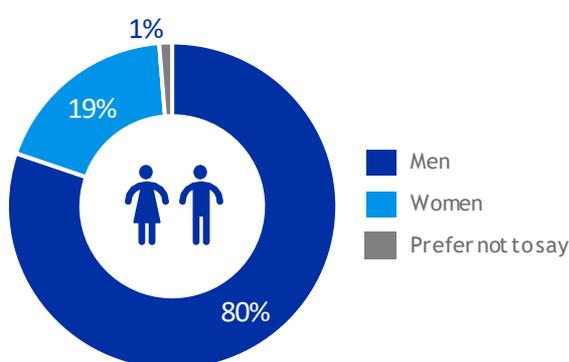
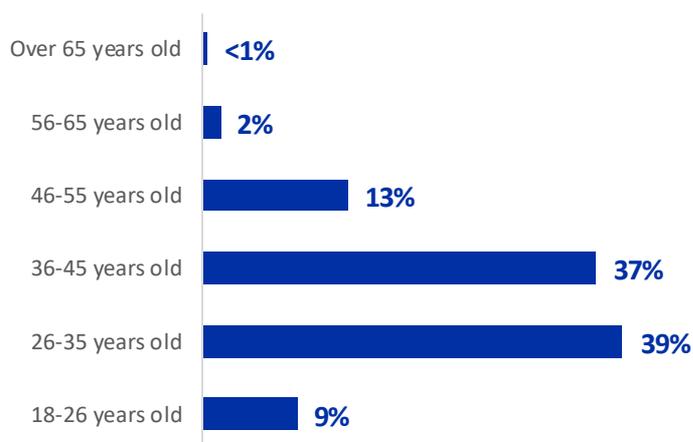
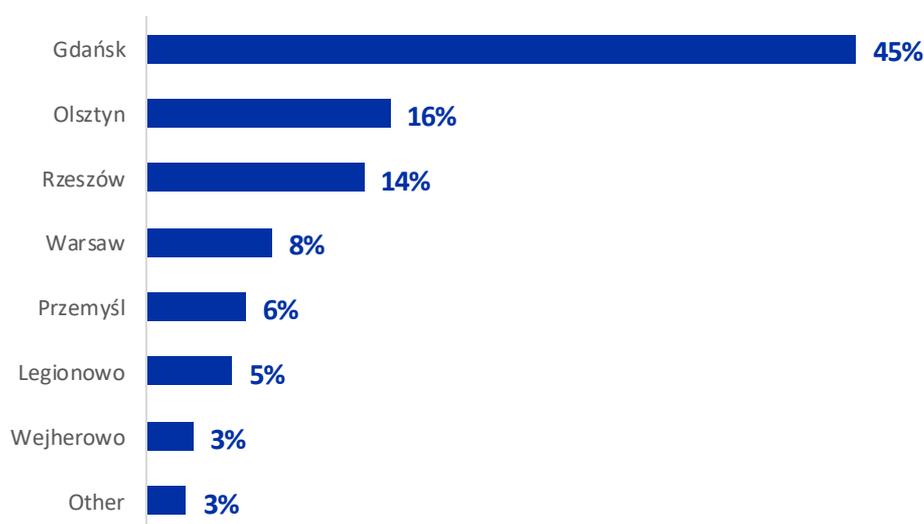


FIGURE 7: RESPONDENTS' AGE (N=238)



Respondents' level of work experience were varied, with a substantial share in the early to mid-stages of their careers. Thirty-one per cent reported having one to five years of experience, 40 per cent reported 6 to 15 years, and 26 per cent have over 16 years of experience in law enforcement. Gdańsk was the most heavily represented city with more than 100 respondents completing the survey, followed by Olsztyn (37 respondents) and Rzeszów (33 respondents).

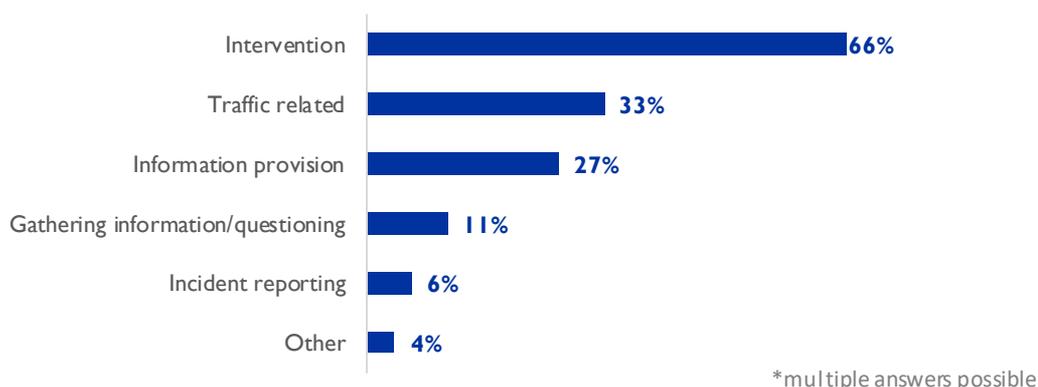
FIGURE 8: Share of respondents per city (N=238)



INTERACTIONS WITH MIGRANTS

Interaction frequencies with migrants varied. Twice per month (24%) and one or two times per week (22%) were the most common frequencies, suggesting regular but not daily interactions for many officers. Almost never (26%) and every day (9%) responses indicated significant extremes, with some officers rarely encountering migrants, with a smaller group interacting with migrants daily.

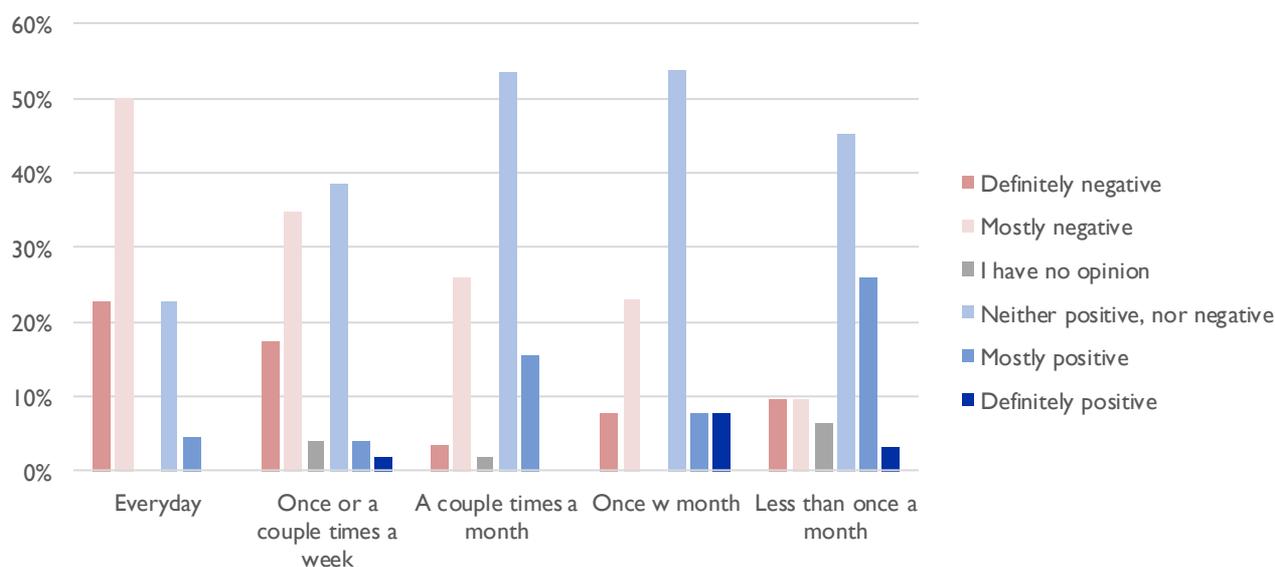
FIGURE 9: MOST COMMONLY REPORTED TYPES OF INTERACTIONS WITH MIGRANTS (N=176)*



According to 66 percent of police respondents, interventions – namely, enforcing laws or responding to emergencies – were identified as one of the most common types of interactions. Traffic-related interactions followed at 33 per cent, while 27 per cent of respondents reported giving information as a main form of interaction. Less frequent interactions included gathering information/questioning (11%) and incident reporting or assistance (6%).

The majority of interactions were described as neither positive nor negative (44%), suggesting a neutral experience in most encounters. At the same time, respondents who reported interacting with migrants most frequently also reported the most negative perceptions of these interactions, compared to respondents who interacted less frequently with migrant communities.

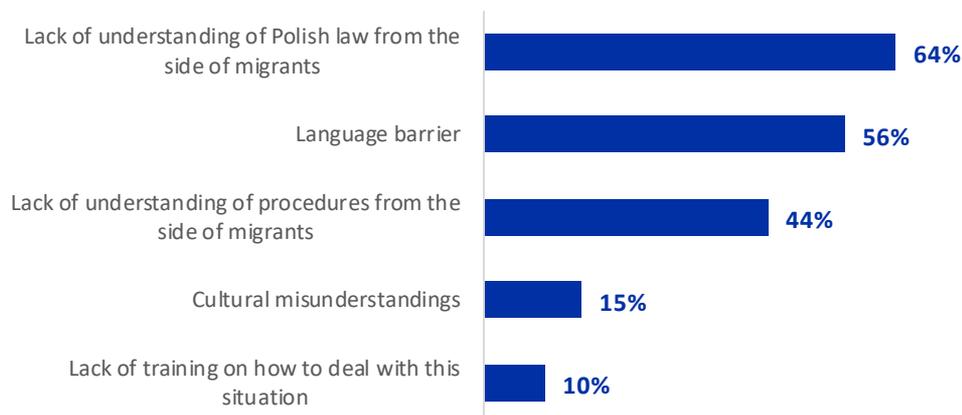
FIGURE 10: PERCEPTIONS AND FREQUENCY OF INTERACTIONS (N=176)



CHALLENGES IN INTERACTIONS

The primary challenges cited by police respondents involved a lack of understanding of Polish law by migrants (64%) and language barrier (56%). Procedural misunderstandings by migrants also featured prominently (44%), followed by cultural misunderstandings (15%). Ten per cent of respondents cited the lack of trainings on how to handle specific situations with migrants as a challenge.

FIGURE II: MOST COMMON CHALLENGES FACED IN INTERACTIONS (N=176)*



*multiple answers possible

NOTABLE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE INTERACTIONS

Positive Interactions



Out of all respondents, 5 percent, or 9 police officers, reported having a notable positive interaction with a migrant. The positive interactions between police and migrants, as described by survey respondents, included effective conflict resolution, expressions of gratitude, educational moments for younger migrants about local norms, and helpful guidance in locating important places. Respondents also noted instances of good sense of humor and successful collaboration on projects. The key factors that contributed to these positive outcomes were primarily politeness (7), effective communication (6), a willingness to collaboratively solve problems (4), trust (2), and a solid understanding of procedures and laws (1).

Politeness was the most frequently mentioned factor in contributing to positive interactions, followed by good communication and a willingness to find a solution. Trust and good knowledge of procedures and law were also mentioned by respondents.

Negative Interactions



Twenty-three per cent of respondents reported experiencing negative incidents involving migrants living in Poland, while the majority (77%) did not. Those who reported specific negative experiences frequently cited cultural and communication barriers. Of the 27 officers who shared comments on their negative experiences, 10 perceived that migrants do not respect Polish law and its enforcement agencies.

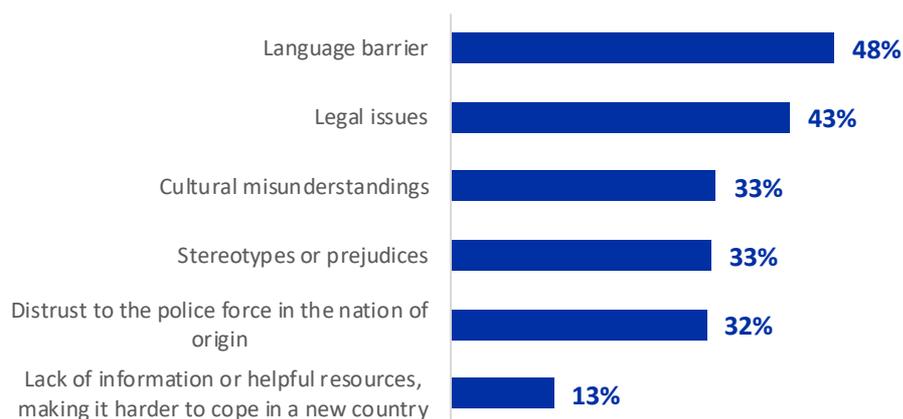
When respondents were asked about the main perceived reason for the negative interaction, 90 per cent cited aggressive behavior. This was followed by legal issues (39%), cultural misunderstandings (24%), and language barriers (22%).

Respondents were divided on whether these incidents could have been resolved better, with 22 per cent believing so, 32 per cent thinking not, with the remaining 46 per cent not expressing an opinion.

POLICE PERSPECTIVE ON MIGRANT PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS LAW ENFORCEMENT

From the perspective of the police, the general attitude of migrants towards the Polish police ranged from mostly positive (14%) to mostly negative (21%), with the largest segment reporting a neutral stance (41%). When respondents were asked about what influences migrants' perceptions of the police, the majority reported language barriers and legal issues. Thirty-three per cent of respondents cited stereotypes or prejudices as a factor, and 32 per cent cited distrust of police in the countries of origin.

FIGURE I 2: FACTORS BELIEVED TO INFLUENCE MIGRANTS' PERCEPTIONS OF POLICE (N=162)*



*multiple answers possible

POLICE OPINIONS OF THEIR COLLEAGUES' PERCEPTIONS OF MIGRANTS

Police respondents were asked how they think their colleagues view migrants living in Poland. The survey revealed mixed views among law enforcement officers, with 20 per cent viewing their colleagues' attitudes as mostly positive, while 28 per cent perceive the attitudes as mostly negative. The largest group, constituting 29 per cent, believe their colleagues hold neutral perspectives. Only a small fraction, 3 per cent, view it as definitely positive or definitely negative, with 16 per cent having no opinion.

Respondents believed these views were primarily influenced by personal experiences (53%), cultural differences (29%), and stereotypes and prejudices (25%). Additional factors included a lack of information or understanding (19%), and opinions shared in the workplace environment (14%).

Regarding agreement with these views, 24 per cent agreed based on their own experiences and views, 7 per cent disagreed and 69 per cent had no opinion. Those who disagreed with their colleagues' negative views of migrants often cited personal experiences abroad and an understanding of potential prejudices and biases towards migrants. Those who disagreed emphasized the importance of individual assessments over generalizations and called for greater empathy towards the challenges faced by migrants.

"In many cases, there is a lack of empathy and willingness to understand the situations and problems of migrants, who struggle in a foreign country. Often, they are treated subjectively."

Male Polish Police Officer from Olsztyn

LAW ENFORCEMENT BIAS AND NEGATIVE STEREOTYPING OF MIGRANTS

Police respondents were asked to describe a specific negative incident (if any) that they have had with a migrant in the past. While some respondents did share specific incidents, concerningly, a substantial number of comments shared by respondents reflected broad negative stereotypes, bias, and dehumanizing language used to describe migrants. Based on the responses provided by the police officers, several indicators of potential anti-migrant sentiment and xenophobia were identified:

Negative Stereotyping: The comments frequently generalized migrants as aggressive, disrespectful of the law, and prone to criminal behavior. Terms like "aggression," "failure to respect the law," and "entitled attitude" were among those expressed.

Generalizing and "othering": The language used to describe migrants, such as "migrant aggression," "aggression towards the nation" and "arrogant and dismissive attitude," generalizes and reduces their identity to their migrant status.

Cultural Misunderstanding and Bias: References to "cultural misunderstanding" and "different culture of coexistence" suggested a potential bias against migrants' cultural practices and norms. This bias can lead to intolerance and discrimination based on cultural differences.

Overlooking Barriers: Comments like "failure to comply" and "avoidance of accountability" imply that migrants are solely responsible for any negative interactions with law enforcement, overlooking potential systemic issues or barriers they may face.

Overall, these comments reflected a potentially biased perspective that portrays migrants in a negative light and contributes to the stigmatization and marginalization of migrant communities. These attitudes may be significant barriers in building mutual trust between migrant communities and Polish law enforcement.

Quotes from Police Respondents on their Perceptions of Migrants

"Lack of respect for our law, disregard for officers. Insults, swearing, general verbal aggression towards the nation."

"They claim they can do whatever they want."

"Too many of them."

"They are aggressive under the influence of alcohol or psychoactive substances because their god abroad does not see what they drink and take."

"They lie, are unruly, and there is a significant cultural gap regarding the treatment of women."

Impact of Migration on Law Enforcement Work

In terms of the broader impact of migration on the work of uniformed services in Poland, the most significant perceived effects included an increased workload (61%), changes in the types of incidents or crimes (36%), and a need for additional training and resources (26%). There was also a perception of strain on local community relations (17%). Several respondents observed a positive impact on community relations (2%).

EXISTING EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES

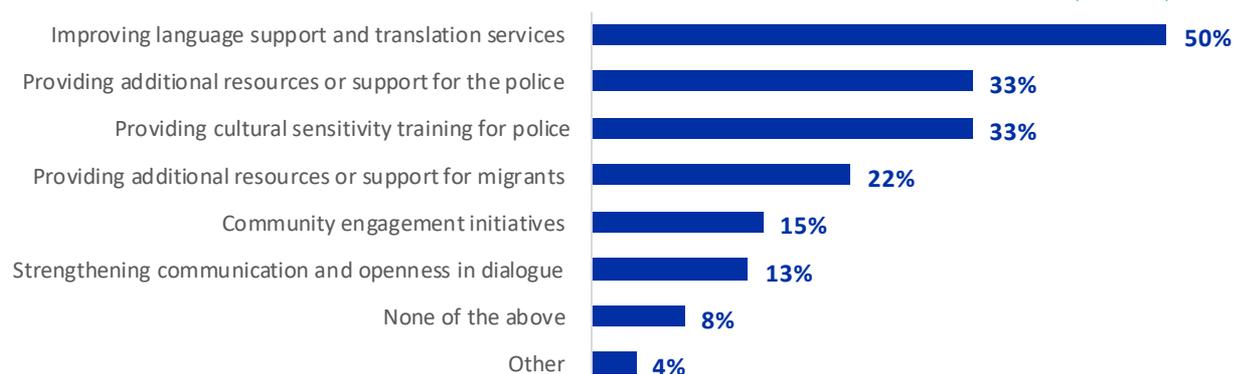
The responses indicated that there have been limited initiatives and policies within the Polish police force aimed at improving interactions with migrants. Only 10 per cent of respondents acknowledged the existence of such initiatives, while a significant majority of 90 per cent reported none. The existing initiatives mentioned included trainings (such as anti-discrimination workshops, human rights trainings, and programs on hate speech), direct support services (such as the Migrant Info Point in Tczew, which offers practical assistance to migrants) and engagement with international and local organizations.

In terms of resources specifically for police officers to better interact with and serve migrant communities, only 7 per cent of respondents indicated that such resources existed, with 93 per cent noting the absence of such support.

IMPROVING RELATIONS WITH MIGRANT COMMUNITIES

To further enhance the relationship and understanding between the police and the migrant community in Poland, several primary approaches have been identified based on the survey responses. These include improving language support and translation services, increasing cultural sensitivity training for police, and strengthening communication and openness in dialogue.

FIGURE I 3: METHODS FOR IMPROVING RELATIONS WITH MIGRANT COMMUNITIES (N=238)*



*multiple answers possible

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INITIATIVES TO STRENGTHEN RELATIONS

Joint trainings on integration and cultural awareness, -Polish law and procedures
24/7 access to translation and interpretation services
Language and dialogue training for the police (including free English classes for officers)
Additional educational resources and trainings for the police (including interactive and simulation-based trainings)
Regular meetings with specific migrant groups to strengthen relations between migrants and law enforcement

Twenty-three per cent of respondents were willing to volunteer an hour of their time to participate in workshops organized by IOM to strengthen relationships between migrants and law enforcement. Twenty-nine per cent did not yet have an opinion on their potential involvement in such workshops. Most respondents preferred volunteering either quarterly or once a month (61%), and 20 per cent were willing to participate at least twice per month.

GUIDELINES FOR NEW POLICE OFFICERS ON ENGAGING WITH MIGRANTS

When asked what advice officers would provide new colleagues regarding their engagement with migrant communities, respondents highlighted cultural awareness, respect, dignity, and communication as key recommendations. Effective communication, both in terms of language and interpersonal skills, is a crucial component that can facilitate positive interactions. Building trust, cultural understanding, communication skills, and a greater awareness of potential biases can be promoted through outreach initiatives, interactive trainings, and workshops designed to address specific issues and topics.

Cultivate empathy and respect, treat every individual with dignity, displaying patience and understanding.

Enhance communication skills, learn languages spoken by migrant communities and use interpreters to ensure clear communication.

Develop cultural awareness, engage in intercultural communication and anti-discrimination trainings to understand migrant perspectives and avoid biases.

Maintain professionalism, apply laws uniformly and handle documentation carefully.

Focus on safety and integration, stay vigilant, approach situations calmly, and participate in community outreach programs to build trust.



IOM training with Polish police, © Alexey Shvirin 2024

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

Improving the relationship between migrant communities and Polish law enforcement requires addressing several key issues through targeted recommendations.



Communication Barriers: Language support is crucial for effective communication. Many migrants face difficulties due to language barriers when interacting with the police. To address this, it is recommended to implement 24/7 access to interpretation services and consider offering free language classes, including English, to police officers. This will help bridge communication gaps and ensure that migrants can communicate their concerns effectively. Furthermore, ensuring the availability and accessibility of information about laws, regulations, and incident reporting processes in migrants' preferred languages is crucial. One potential solution could be the utilization of cultural mediators, who could assist both with interpretation as well as providing culturally-sensitive information and building trust between police and migrants.



Cultural Sensitivity: There is a need for greater cultural awareness among police officers to understand migrant perspectives and reduce biases. Regular cultural sensitivity and anti-discrimination training can help achieve this. Enhanced educational resources, such as interactive simulations based on real-world scenarios, will also prepare officers for diverse interactions, fostering a more respectful and empathetic approach.



Trust and Relationship Building: Building trust between the police and migrant communities is essential. Organizing regular meetings with specific migrant groups and encouraging police participation in community events will help build relationships and trust. Additionally, designating specific officers as contact points for particular migrant communities can facilitate effective communication and cooperation.



Reporting Mechanisms: Migrants often fear unjustified repercussions when reporting incidents. Adapting existing reporting mechanisms to be clear and accessible for migrants to voice concerns and report incidents is vital for building trust. These mechanisms could be designed with inputs from migrant-serving NGOs and migrant community members.



Empathy and Understanding: Police officers need to increase their empathy towards migrants by understanding the challenges they face, such as difficulties in finding employment and navigating legal procedures. Educational initiatives that highlight these challenges can foster a more supportive environment. Hosting regular information sessions on legal responsibilities and local regulations for migrants can also help them understand their rights and obligations, reducing misunderstandings and conflicts.



Community Collaboration: Building relationships with migrant community leaders can facilitate communication and address community-specific issues effectively. This collaboration can help the police better understand the unique needs and concerns of different migrant groups. Conducting interactive workshops that involve both police and migrants can address specific issues and foster mutual understanding.



Continuous Improvement: Gathering regular feedback from migrants about their interactions with the police would ensure continuous improvement in practices and policies. Frequent check-ins with migrant community leaders and migrant-oriented NGOs could also provide important feedback to help identify areas necessitating further attention and adjustment.



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