

STUDY AND SOLIDARITY: Ukrainian University Students in Poland Supporting Ukraine

Jakub Dobosiewicz
Roch Dunin-Wąsowicz

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About the Authors

Jakub Dobosiewicz is Politics and International Relations BSc student at Department of Political Science, University College London, and 2026 Laidlaw Scholar at University College London.

Contact: jakub.dobosiewicz.25@ucl.ac.uk

Dr Roch Dunin-Wąsowicz is Associate Professor of Sociology, Politics and Public Policy at UCL Social Research Institute, University College London, Research Associate at the Conflict and Civiness Research Group at LSE IDEAS and Associate Member of the Center for Research on Social Change and Mobility (CRASH) at Kozminski University.

Contact: r.dunin-wasowicz@ucl.ac.uk

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Executive Summary

This report explores how Ukrainian university students in Poland have supported Ukraine following the 2022 full-scale invasion by Russia. Drawing on a mixed-methods study based on 25 semi-structured interviews¹ with actively engaged students, and over 500 online survey responses,² we offer an original analysis of the forms of engagement, motivations, and future outlooks of this group. Building on research on the development of civic ecosystems during conflict, our study sheds light on the role of an understudied group in support for Ukraine.³⁴⁵⁶ The key findings of our work are presented below.

1. **Types of support:** While almost **2/3 of survey respondents (64%)** declare their engagement in financial support and **44% in sharing content on social media, only less than 20% engage in other forms of support**, suggesting individual action as the dominant mode of engagement.⁷ On the other hand, interviews reveal that actively engaged individuals are involved in diverse organisational forms spanning formal civil society, student societies and informal groups, and are primarily engaged in educational and cultural activities, and support for Ukraine's war effort.
2. **Motivations:** **Social responsibility** towards Ukraine and **patriotism** are the dominant motivations for actively involved individuals. However, personal reasons, such as feeling of guilt, loss of someone close at the battlefield, and search for a community have also emerged as notable motivations.
3. **Future outlooks:** Over **50% of Ukrainian students in Poland see their immediate future outside of Ukraine**. In 5 years, 32% imagine themselves in Poland, 17% residing in a different EU country and 3% in a different non-EU country, with only 4% in Ukraine. Most actively involved individuals would like to use their professional experience for Ukraine's reconstruction – but do so only on their own terms, i.e. particularly without compromising their professional development. Almost **1/3 (28%) of survey respondents are uncertain where they would see themselves in 5 years**.
4. **Self-perception:** Ukrainian university students in Poland view themselves as a group “more diverse than any other” (JD_F_12). While some see themselves as active and politically and socially conscious, many acknowledge that this perception may simply be based on their closest environment. Asked about an average Ukrainian student in Poland,

¹ As of 21 September 2026.

² As of 23 August 2026.

³ Rangelov, I. and Therios, M. (2023). ‘Civic ecosystems and social innovation: From collaboration to complementarity’, *Global Policy*, 14(5).

⁴ Czerska-Shaw, K. and Jacoby, T. (2023). *Mapping Ukrainian Civicness Abroad in the War Effort: A Case Study of Poland*. Edinburgh: PeaceRep: The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform.

⁵ Czerska-Shaw, K., and R. Dunin-Wąsowicz (2024). *Business & Entrepreneurs: Transnational Networks and Civic Goals on the Frontlines of the Russo-Ukraine War*. Edinburgh: PeaceRep: The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform.

⁶ Czerska-Shaw, K. and Dunin-Wąsowicz, R. (2025). ‘Enacting the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) Triple Nexus: civic ecosystems at the frontlines of the Russo-Ukrainian war’, *Globalizations*.

⁷ Percentages do not sum to 100 as this was a multiple-choice question.

several interviews have described the group as mostly “living their own lives” (JD_F_5) and supporting only financially or sporadically.

5. **Anti-Ukrainian sentiment in Poland:** A theme that has organically emerged in interviews are the highly mediated anti-Ukrainian sentiments in Poland. Despite only a minority of interviewees directly experiencing hate motivated by their nationality, most young Ukrainians declared being aware of a rise of anti-Ukrainian sentiments in Poland in mid 2026. Nevertheless, most of them view only a minority of Poles as holding xenophobic attitudes; many consider Poles and Ukrainians as “being on the same side” (JD_F_6) and having a common enemy, Russia. Some have pointed to perceived anti-Ukrainian sentiments having an impact on their future, with most still planning to stay in Poland.

Introduction

Since the start of the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022, there has been a mass mobilisation in Poland in support of Ukraine and Ukrainian forced migrants, almost a million of whom currently reside in Poland.⁸ What emerged in the Polish-Ukrainian transnational space were networks supporting Ukraine's war and reconstruction efforts where loose and informal bottom-up connections play a crucial role.⁹ Current research on these diverse networks focuses on traditional civic actors such as civil society organisations, as well as entrepreneurs.¹⁰¹¹ However, an understudied group which we posit plays an active role in this space is almost 48,000 Ukrainian university students who have registered to study in Polish universities since early 2022.¹²¹³ Investigating the role of this group as members and co-creators of this space, this report analyses the ways in which Ukrainian university students in Poland have supported Ukraine and Ukrainian forced migrants.

The data gathered for this report consists of 526 complete online survey responses¹⁴, as well as 25 interviews¹⁵ with Ukrainians studying at Polish universities with a verified track record of engagement for Ukraine. This study does not aim to be representative in scope. Rather, it offers an overview of the forms of support this group engages in, explores its motivations for engagement, and examines the future outlooks of this group, including possible roles in Ukraine's reconstruction. The report consists of 3 sections: the first introduces the study; the second discusses the methodology and the sample; and the third presents the main findings of the study.

⁸ UNHCR (2026). *Ukraine Refugee Situation*, n.d. Available at: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine> (Accessed 8 September 2026).

⁹ Czerska-Shaw, K. and Dunin-Wąsowicz, R. (2025). 'Enacting the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) Triple Nexus: civic ecosystems at the frontlines of the Russo-Ukrainian war', *Globalizations*.

¹⁰ Czerska-Shaw, K. and Jacoby, T. (2023). *Mapping Ukrainian Civicness Abroad in the War Effort: A Case Study of Poland*. Edinburgh: PeaceRep: The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform.

¹¹ Czerska-Shaw, K. and R. Dunin-Wąsowicz (2024). *Business & Entrepreneurs: Transnational Networks and Civic Goals on the Frontlines of the Russo-Ukraine War*. Edinburgh: PeaceRep: The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform.

¹² Otwarte Dane (2026). *Liczba studentów z obywatelstwem ukraińskim w podziale na województwa - stan na 31.12.2025*. 2 January 2026. Available at: https://dane.gov.pl/pl/dataset/2704/resource/1009811/table?page=1&per_page=20&q=&sort= (Accessed 7 September 2026).

¹³ Otwarte Dane (2026). *Liczba studentów z Ukrainy z kierunku lekarskiego i lekarsko dentystrycznego - stan na 31.12.2025*. 2 January 2026. Available at: https://dane.gov.pl/pl/dataset/2704/resource/1009816/table?page=1&per_page=20&q=&sort= (Accessed 7 September 2026).

¹⁴ As of 23 August 2026.

¹⁵ As of 21 September 2026.

Ukrainian Students in Poland: A Study

Civic Ecosystems Framework

Since the start of the full-scale invasion by Russia in 2022, Poland has witnessed an unprecedented civic mobilisation in support of Ukraine and Ukrainian forced migrants.¹⁶ What emerged were informal, bottom-up and spontaneous activities spanning Poland, Ukraine and transnationally between the two countries and the region. These actions have engaged ordinary citizens, diaspora activists, entrepreneurs, informal groups and public sector entities in diverse forms of support, from delivery of material aid for war refugees to activities aiding Ukraine's war effort, with 77% of Poles engaging in support for Ukraine.¹⁷ Over time, these actors have become more specialised, leading to an organically established system of complimentary networks acting with a common set of goals and values.¹⁸ This is what Rangelov and Theros would categorise as a civic ecosystem, defined as 'self-organizing systems of diverse and interdependent actors held together by shared civic values', which goes beyond the concept of civil society to include all social actors working towards a common goal.¹⁹²⁰

Research on the Polish-Ukrainian civic ecosystem has focused on the engagement of traditional civil society organisations, as well as entrepreneurs.²¹²²²³²⁴ Studies on Ukrainian university students outside of Ukraine in general remain very scarce, with some analysing the experience of the war, among others, from the perspective of Ukrainian youth, and several general studies of Ukrainians in Poland offering limited insights on Ukrainian youth.²⁵²⁶²⁷²⁸ Nevertheless,

¹⁶ Jarosz, S. and Klaus, W. (eds.) (2023). *The Polish School of Assistance: Reception and integration of refugees from Ukraine in Poland in 2022*. Warsaw: Migration Consortium. Available at: <https://konsorcjum.org.pl/storage/2023/05/The-Polish-School-of-Assistance-Report.pdf>. (Accessed 23 November 2025).

¹⁷ Babiński, W. and Wyrębkowski M. (2025). *Polska pomoc Ukrainie 2022-2023*. Rada do spraw Współpracy z Ukrainą, Kancelaria Prezesa Rady Ministrów. Available at: <https://www.gov.pl/web/radaplua/prezentacja-raportu-polska-pomoc-ukrainie-2022-2023> (Accessed 14 September 2026).

¹⁸ Czerska-Shaw, K. and Dunin-Wąsowicz, R. (2025). 'Enacting the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) Triple Nexus: civic ecosystems at the frontlines of the Russo-Ukrainian war', *Globalizations*.

¹⁹ Rangelov, I., and Theros, M. (2023). 'Civic ecosystems and social innovation: From collaboration to complementarity', *Global Policy*, 14(5).

²⁰ Czerska-Shaw, K., and R. Dunin-Wąsowicz (2024). *Business & Entrepreneurs: Transnational Networks and Civic Goals on the Frontlines of the Russo-Ukraine War*. Edinburgh: PeaceRep: The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform.

²¹ Czerska-Shaw, K. and Jacoby, T. (2023). *Mapping Ukrainian Civicness Abroad in the War Effort: A Case Study of Poland*. Edinburgh: PeaceRep: The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform.

²² Czerska-Shaw, K. and A. Krzyworzeka-Jelinowska (2026). 'Unlocking Forced Migrant Agency in Civic Ecosystems: Local Mobilisation of Support for and by Ukrainian Forced Migrants in Poland', *Global Networks* 26(2): e70053. <https://doi.org/10.1111/glob.70053>.

²³ Czerska-Shaw, K., and R. Dunin-Wąsowicz (2024). *Business & Entrepreneurs: Transnational Networks and Civic Goals on the Frontlines of the Russo-Ukraine War*. Edinburgh: PeaceRep: The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform.

²⁴ Dunin-Wąsowicz and Czerska-Shaw (2026, forthcoming). 'Solidarity, Social Responsibility and Sovereignty: The Civic Values Behind Transnational Business in Wartime Ukraine', *Europe-Asia Studies*.

²⁵ Błaszczuk, M., Pieńkowski, P., Pachkovskyy, Y., Ilyk, K. and Felińska, M. (2026). 'Russia's Invasion of Ukraine as Witnessed by Ukrainian and Polish Students', *East European Politics and Societies*, 40(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/08883254251332297>.

²⁶ Kamionka, M. (2024). 'Attitudes towards refugees from Ukraine in Poland with special consideration of young Ukrainians in the eyes of Polish students, as exemplified by the Olkusz region', *Acta Paedagogica Vilnensia*, 53. <https://doi.org/10.15388/ActPaed.2024.53.5>.

²⁷ Kubiciel-Lodzińska, S. and Maj, J. (2026). 'What Will I Do When the War Ends? Return Intentions and Reconstruction Engagement Among Voluntary and Forced Ukrainian Migrants in Poland', *International Social Science Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/issj.70065>.

²⁸ Dudek, B. and Strzelecki, P. (2025). *Sytuacja życiowa i ekonomiczna imigrantów z Ukrainy w Polsce w 2025 r. Raport z badania ankietowego*. Warsaw: Narodowy Bank Polski.

given the lack of a Poland-wide study of Ukrainian university students in Poland – actors which we hypothesise may play a critical role in the future reconstruction of Ukraine – we turn to investigate the role of this group in the Polish-Ukrainian civic ecosystem supporting Ukraine, asking the following three research questions:

1. What types and forms of support for Ukraine do Ukrainian university students in Poland engage in?
2. What are the motivations for their engagement? What are the forms of engagement?
3. What are their future outlooks? How do they imagine their role in Ukraine's reconstruction, if any?

Ukrainian University Students in Poland

Ukrainians have been the largest group of foreign university students in Poland since at least 2019, with about 36,000 of them (42% of the foreign student population) studying at Polish universities as of 31 December 2021. Since the start of the full-scale invasion, the size of this group has increased to over 48,000 (47% of the foreign student population) as of 31 December 2022 and has remained relatively stable since.²⁹ In total, since early 2022³⁰ until 31 December 2025, almost 48,000 Ukrainians have registered to study at university in Poland.³¹³²

The data reveals that 83% Ukrainians studying in Poland are in full-time in-person study and that 80% of them are at an undergraduate level. Interestingly, as many as 52% of them study at non-public universities, in contrast to their Polish peers, only 35% of whom do so.³³³⁴³⁵ Over 1/3 (about 17,000) of the group are in non-Polish language study.³⁶³⁷ Region-wise, more than 66% of all Ukrainian university students reside in only 5 voivodeships.³⁸³⁹

²⁹ Radon.nauka.gov.pl (n.d.). *Studenci cudzoziemcy*. Available at:

https://radon.nauka.gov.pl/raporty/studenci_cudzoziemcy_2025 (Accessed 7 September 2026).

³⁰ 24 February 2022 or 15 March 2022 (data for Medicine and Dentistry).

³¹ Otwarte Dane (2026). *Liczba studentów z obywatelstwem ukraińskim w podziale na województwa - stan na 31.12.2025*. 2 January 2026. Available at: https://dane.gov.pl/pl/dataset/2704/resource/1009811/table?page=1&per_page=20&q=&sort= (Accessed 7 September 2026).

³² Otwarte Dane (2026). *Liczba studentów z Ukrainy z kierunku lekarskiego i lekarsko dentystycznego - stan na 31.12.2025*. 2 January 2026. Available at: https://dane.gov.pl/pl/dataset/2704/resource/1009816/table?page=1&per_page=20&q=&sort= (Accessed 7 September 2026).

³³ Radon.nauka.gov.pl (n.d.). *Studenci cudzoziemcy*. Available at:

https://radon.nauka.gov.pl/raporty/studenci_cudzoziemcy_2025 (Accessed 7 September 2026).

³⁴ Radon.nauka.gov.pl (n.d.). *Studenci*. Available at: https://radon.nauka.gov.pl/raporty/studenci_2025 (Accessed 7 September 2026).

³⁵ Non-public (private) universities are privately-owned institutions which charge tuition for all their programmes but offer many options for English-language study, as opposed to public (state) universities, which are funded by the state and offer free Polish-language studies to Polish citizens and foreigners who commence studies in Poland on terms applicable to Polish citizens. See more at: <https://study.gov.pl>.

³⁶ Otwarte Dane (2026). *Liczba studentów z obywatelstwem ukraińskim w podziale na województwa - stan na 31.12.2025*. 2 January 2026. Available at: https://dane.gov.pl/pl/dataset/2704/resource/1009811/table?page=1&per_page=20&q=&sort= (Accessed 7 September 2026).

³⁷ Otwarte Dane (2026). *Liczba studentów z Ukrainy z kierunku lekarskiego i lekarsko dentystycznego - stan na 31.12.2025*. 2 January 2026. Available at: https://dane.gov.pl/pl/dataset/2704/resource/1009816/table?page=1&per_page=20&q=&sort= (Accessed 7 September 2026).

³⁸ More than 1/4 (over 12,500) of all Ukrainian university students reside in the Mazovian voivodeship, with further 11% residing in the Lesser Poland and Lower Silesian, 10% in the Lublin, and 9% in Greater Poland voivodeships.

³⁹ Radon.nauka.gov.pl (n.d.). *Studenci cudzoziemcy*. Available at:

https://radon.nauka.gov.pl/raporty/studenci_cudzoziemcy_2025 (Accessed 7 September 2026).

Why Is It Important to Study Ukrainian University Students?

The importance of studying Ukrainian university students in Poland – as well as outside of Ukraine more broadly – is three-fold. Firstly, current research conducted in the Lublin voivodeship indicates that as many as 57% of them plan to stay in Poland permanently or for over a year, with only 1% planning to return to Ukraine.⁴⁰ Thus, studying this group may inform policy making aimed at fostering social inclusion and integration. Secondly, it is particularly crucial to understand this group given that a significant proportion of almost 200,000 Ukrainian youth enrolled in the Polish education system are likely to progress to higher education in Poland.⁴¹ Finally, this research may support Ukrainian university students' current engagement for Ukraine, as well as their potential contributions to future reconstruction.

⁴⁰ Dudek, B., and Strzelecki, P. (2025). *Sytuacja życiowa i ekonomiczna imigrantów z Ukrainy w Polsce w 2025 r. Raport z badania ankietowego*. Warsaw: Narodowy Bank Polski.

⁴¹ Otwarte Dane (2026). *Uczniowie uchodźcy z Ukrainy w podziale na typy szkół, klasy i powiaty stan na 31.12.2025*. 7 January 2026. Available at: <https://dane.gov.pl/pl/dataset/2711,uczniowie-uchodzcy-z-ukrainy/resource/1035625/chart?page=1&q=> (accessed 7 September 2026). Data as of 31 December 2025 includes kindergartens, elementary and secondary, including technical and vocational, schools.

Methodology

This mixed-methods study is based on an online survey (CAWI) and in-depth, semi-structured interviews.

The online survey, administered by Qualtrics, has accepted responses since 21 May 2026 and has remained open at the time of writing. It has been distributed primarily through internal university channels following researchers' request to share the survey link with Ukrainian students sent to 72 Polish universities which have accepted more than 2,000 students in the 2024/2025 application cycle.⁴² Survey data has yielded a sample of 1167 responses⁴³ from adult university students in Poland, 526 of which are complete and have hence been used in analysis. To verify participants' student status, respondents were required to provide of a valid university e-mail address. To allow for the inclusion of non-Ukrainian-born individuals supporting Ukraine, participants of any nationality were included in the final sample. 63% of respondents are female and 35% male, with over 2/3 (68%) of the respondents aged 18-21.

Between June and September 2026, 25 in-depth, semi-structured interviews⁴⁴ have been conducted with university students in Poland who are actively engaged in support for Ukraine. Interviewees have been selected from the survey respondents who have indicated a willingness to participate in an in-depth interview, their engagement assessed based on their survey responses and a short follow-up questionnaire via e-mail or phone, if needed. Only interviewees with a track record of active engagement for Ukraine have been invited to participate in an interview via e-mail or phone. 14 of the interviewees were female, 7 male and 1 indicated their gender as other, with the mean respondent age of 22. The vast majority of interviews were held in person and in Polish, with few interviews conducted online and in English. The interviews codes are formulated as follows: interviewer's initials [JD / RDW], interviewee's gender [M / F / O], interview number in chronological order [1-25]. A qualitative thematic analysis of the interview data has been used to formulate initial findings, with the interview process not finalised at the time of writing.

Data collection has been supported by the presentation of initial findings at a stakeholder meeting organised by the Jagiellonian University-led research group: 'The Development of Translocal Civic Ecosystems amidst the Geo-Politics of War' in Kraków, Poland, on September 18, 2026, which brought together civic entrepreneurs connected to support networks for Ukraine and Ukrainian forced migrants in Europe.

Ethical review of the project has been sought and obtained from the University College London Political Science Local Research Ethics Committee (project ID 2429).

⁴² Radon.nauka.gov.pl (n.d.). *Rekrutacja na studia: porównanie uczelni*. Available at: https://radon.nauka.gov.pl/raporty/porownanie_uczelnie_rekrutacja_2024 (Accessed 15 June 2026).

⁴³ As of 23 August 2026.

⁴⁴ As of 21 September 2026.

Ukrainian University Students in Poland Supporting Ukraine

In this section, we present our initial results based on survey data⁴⁵ which includes insights from over 1% of all Ukrainians who have registered at universities in Poland since early 2022,^{46,47} and the hand-coding of the interviews,⁴⁸ in the following 4 sections: Scale and Types of Support, Motivations, Future Outlooks and Further Insights.

1. Scale and Types of Support

Survey data reveals that 64% of respondents declare their engagement in financial support, with further 44% sharing information and content on social media, 19% using their academic or professional skills to support Ukraine and 19% engaging in volunteering.⁴⁹ Only 21% declare lack of engagement. The full-scale invasion was a critical juncture for our respondents, with 65% of them starting their engagement within the first year of 24 February 2022.

Based on the interviews, we find that the organisational forms of engagement of the studied group are very diverse, with neither grassroot initiatives, informal networks, volunteer groups, formal civil society/diaspora organisations or student/youth groups as the dominant mode of engagement.

Among the forms of support, humanitarian, social and integration activities as well as support for Ukraine's war effort dominate. Within the first category, actively engaged Ukrainian students are predominantly involved in educational and cultural activities, for example as part of the Ukrainian scouting organisation *Plast* Poland (JD_F_2; JD_F_10):

"I help adults in Plast raise children and organise various kind of trips like this (...) And these activities always have an element of patriotism in them (...). For example, in February we organised a hike in the mountains (...) in memory of my friend, who was killed in the war two years ago" (JD_F_2).

Among the latter category, direct financial support for the Ukrainian army and organising small fundraisers dominate:

"I also recently opened a small fundraiser specifically for one of the battalions which has its own fundraising hub, so to speak, and that hub was responsible for coordinating the fundraiser" (JD_F_12).

⁴⁵ As of 23 August 2026.

⁴⁶ Otwarte Dane (2026). *Liczba studentów z obywatelstwem ukraińskim w podziale na województwa - stan na 31.12.2025*. 2 January 2026. Available at: https://dane.gov.pl/pl/dataset/2704/resource/1009811/table?page=1&per_page=20&q=&sort= (Accessed 7 September 2026).

⁴⁷ Otwarte Dane (2026). *Liczba studentów z Ukrainy z kierunku lekarskiego i lekarsko dentystrycznego - stan na 31.12.2025*. 2 January 2026. Available at: https://dane.gov.pl/pl/dataset/2704/resource/1009816/table?page=1&per_page=20&q=&sort= (Accessed 7 September 2026).

⁴⁸ As of 18 September 2026.

⁴⁹ Percentages do not sum to 100 as this was a multiple-choice question.

2. Motivations

Ukrainian university students in Poland seem to predominantly be **motivated by civic values and social responsibility** towards Ukraine. As one interviewee explains,

“I feel a sense of duty towards the Ukrainian state as an entity which guarantees Ukrainians and other people living in Ukraine the freedom to live and the freedom to develop.” (JD_M_1).

Patriotism and anti-imperialistic stance, as well as a **zero-sum understanding of the conflict** also emerge as crucial motivations:

“(...) in my mind, acting for Ukraine is synonymous with patriotism, because to me, patriotism is worthless without action” (JD_F_2).

“If, in some situation, Russia were to take Ukraine, it wouldn’t... that wouldn’t be the end of it, it would go further, because Russia is an empire, and an empire must either expand or cease to exist.” (JD_F_16).

“Well, we have a concrete goal to bring the war to an end and we’re working towards it in various ways. Some people, for example, offer emotional support, others provide financial support. And in one way or another, they get involved.” (JD_F_10).

3. Future Outlooks

As much as **52% of survey respondents see their immediate future outside of Ukraine**, of which 32% do so in Poland, 17% in a different EU country and 3% in a different non-EU country. While almost **1/3 (28%) are uncertain where they see themselves in 5 years**, only 4% see themselves in Ukraine.

Asked to what extent they agree with statements on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 5 strong agreement, the majority of respondents have agreed with the following statements: “I see my future as being connected to both Poland and Ukraine” (mean score: 3.5) and “I want to actively contribute to the reconstruction of Ukraine in the future” (mean score: 3.4).

Interview data reveals that most actively engaged individuals are decided **to use their professional experience for Ukraine’s reconstruction – but only on their own terms**.

“I would like, for example, to get involved in Ukrainian diplomacy (...) but I would like to do so on my own terms” (JD_M_4).

What are those terms? Young Ukrainians would want to be professionally connected to Ukraine, however, they would not wish to compromise their professional and/or personal development by the move:

“100% would like to [have a role in the recovery of Ukraine] but it all depends on what it would cost me because if I couldn't be providing [for] myself and my family, at least financially, how can I, I don't want to sacrifice all of that just to recover Ukraine because it would not make sense if I couldn't be having a normal life” (RDW_F_15).

“(…) regarding my ambitions, unfortunately, in Ukraine, there is no space for that (…) risk analytics and quantitative finance field in Warsaw, it's in developing stage, but in Ukraine, there are no opportunities there, so I would come there, and I would be, my degrees, my knowledge, my experience, it would be some sort of useless.” (JD_F_8).

4. Further Insights

4.1. Self-perception of Ukrainian university students in Poland

Asked to describe Ukrainian university students as a group, most interviewees have shared the following view:

*“I think that, well, it's **a society more diverse than any other**, precisely because of this stress and experiences of war, which are so different.” (JD_F_12).*

Regarding their view of engagement of an average student, while some see themselves as active and politically and socially conscious, many acknowledge that this perception may simply be based on their closest environment. Asked about an average Ukrainian student in Poland, several interviews have described the group as “simply living a new life” (JD_F_5), saying: “I wouldn't think that that average student would be involved” (JD_F_8) or that an average student would only be engaged financially and/or sporadically.

4.2. Anti-Ukrainian sentiments, hostility and discrimination

A theme that has organically emerged in interviews are the highly mediated anti-Ukrainian sentiments in Poland. Despite only a minority of interviewees directly experiencing hate motivated by their nationality:

“In my environment, thank god, everything's okay and I've never heard any negative comments directed at me” (JD_F_16),

most young Ukrainians declare being aware of a rise of anti-Ukrainian sentiments in Poland in mid 2026:

“(…) over the past year, as you may have noticed, there's been this whole campaign against Ukrainians (…) we simply feel this psychological pressure, yes. And it's affecting our children.” (JD_F_17).

Nevertheless, most of them view only a minority of Poles as holding xenophobic attitudes:

“of course, most of the people are supportive, for example I never felt any negative communication like towards me from Polish people” (RDW_F_15).

Many consider Poles and Ukrainians as “being on the same side”:

“We’re on the same side of the barricades, on the same side, and we don’t want any conflicts because we have a common enemy, Russia. So we need to work together, rather than look for problems between us.” (JD_F_16).

Some interviewees have pointed to perceived anti-Ukrainian sentiments having an impact on their future, with most still planning to stay in Poland, and only a few saying that these sentiments make them more likely to consider moving to other EU countries or back to Ukraine.

“(…) if there are more and more of these beatings on the street, well, I don’t know if I will want to stay here. (...) I’m feeling less and less safe” (JD_F_10).

“Even if something happens, we’re staying. We’ll try to survive, as far as possible” (JD_F_17).

4.3.What surprised us?

One of the key findings has been researcher Jakub Dobosiewicz’s unique positionality in the research, with interviewees exhibiting a greater willingness to share their stories with him. For example, one interviewee comments on it, saying to Jakub:

“Because you, for example, as someone who’s also studying abroad, understand me better than, say, Poles, Polish students, for example.” (JD_M_7).

What do Ukrainian University Students in Poland Need: Conclusions and Recommendations

In this concluding section, we turn to the needs of Ukrainian university students in Poland according to our respondents. Almost 2/3 (64%) of them support Ukraine financially while only 21% are not involved in any forms of support. These headline findings show that while their forms and level of engagement vary, Ukrainian university students in Poland are an important actor in supporting Ukraine and will likely remain so in the future, particularly given that almost all actively engaged respondents would like to use their professional experience for Ukraine's reconstruction.

Our findings suggest that to incentivise their future engagement, opportunities which would allow them to combine support for Ukraine with their personal and professional advancement should be offered. Moreover, rather than requiring potential agents of reconstruction to come back to Ukraine and support recovery activities solely from within the country, forms of aiding reconstruction from outside of Ukraine should be encouraged to harness the experience of highly educated Ukrainians, a large section of whom will likely remain in Poland and other countries of their current residence. This approach could engage more Ukrainian university students than in-person reconstruction activities, aiding the development of an active transnational ecosystem of support for Ukraine.