



CASE

POLISH MEMORIAL

STUDY

“New Narratives: Engaging Audiences on Refugee Integration

IN SHORT

Polish Memorial produced and launched the first elements of the documentary project “Między nami” (“Between Us”). The team conducted in-depth, on-camera interviews and collected contextual footage, recording four stories. Three feature people from Ukraine and Russia who were forced to leave their homes due to war or political repression and rebuild their lives in Poland.

ABOUT THE NEWS OUTLET

Memoriał Polska is part of the International Memorial network, which was established following the forced dissolution of the original Russian organization in December 2021. It strives to preserve the memory of political repression and defend human rights by sharing the personal stories of those affected by authoritarianism, war, and forced migration, from the past and the present.



PROJECT OBJECTIVES

To document the personal stories of displaced Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Russians in Poland and create an accessible documentary format that counters stereotypes, builds public understanding, and reaches younger audiences through a mix of long-form videos and short, high-impact reels.



IMPLEMENTED SOLUTIONS

The team produced interview-based episodes supported by rapid-testing reels, optimized thumbnails, captions, and hooks. They incorporated mentor feedback, strengthened visuals, created chaptered videos, and used TikTok and Instagram to expand reach, driving viewers toward the full documentary content.

Transitions

WHY THIS PROJECT?

Poland today is a melting pot of different nationalities. Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Russians have found their safe space in Poland but nobody was documenting their stories. Despite strong public support for Ukraine at the beginning of the war, no one was exploring questions like “How do these displaced people live in a new country?” To publicize these stories, Polish Memorial launched a project in 2024 specifically for Ukrainians. They talked to ordinary people such as drivers of public transport. In 2025 the team expanded the project to include other nationalities. They continue to document the stories of Ukrainians, but also Belarusians, Russians, and anti-war activists who fled Russia and the Poles who were hosting them.

HOW DID APPLYING DESIGN THINKING PRINCIPLES HELP?

The team used a light design-thinking approach. They produced long-form episodes, but led with short reels (30-60 seconds) to reach new viewers and funnel them to the full videos. Before releasing each episode, they first published and tested multiple reels cut from the raw interview — trying different 1-2 second hooks, caption styles, and thumbnails. This approach built trust, reduced reshoots, and accelerated reach: 1,500+ views across the first YouTube releases, and the top TikTok reel exceeded 140,000 views. Leading with reels helped open the door, while the long episodes delivered the depth and context audiences stayed for.

Outside mentoring supported the team tremendously with a couple of really useful insights and advice. The team was able to get feedback from the mentor and to implement some solutions and new considerations, such as the importance of graphics and visuals in the content. The team started to incorporate the photos and the short reels inside the longer videos, and started to produce chapters that worked really well.

DID POLISH MEMORIAL'S APPROACH CHANGE ENGAGEMENT WITH ITS AUDIENCE IN ANY WAY?

As a means of expanding its reach, the team turned to TikTok, which has the widest reach among the social media platforms. Polish Memorial was thus able to reach a younger audience, as more than half of TikTok users are under the age of 30.

WHAT CHALLENGES DID POLISH MEMORIAL ENCOUNTER AND HOW DID IT ADDRESS THEM?

The amount of hate speech and xenophobia was a major issue, with hateful comments appearing on Facebook but also on TikTok. The team tried to show the Polish public that there are different people living in Poland with different problems and perspectives.

Another challenge was balancing time pressure with quality. The team had an ambitious schedule but insisted on high editorial, ethical, and technical standards (accurate translations/subtitles, trauma-informed interviewing). They managed this by dividing the workflow into clear roles, assigning each stage an owner and a two-person cross-check.

HOW WAS POLISH MEMORIAL'S PROJECT RECEIVED BY ITS AUDIENCE?

The project was well received and the use of new social media platforms helped attract new followers. Longer interviews posted on YouTube each received more than 1,500 views, while the team created up to five reels for each to post on Instagram and TikTok. This shorter content reached 150,000 views.

WHAT INSIGHTS OR LESSONS DID POLISH MEMORIAL GAIN FROM THIS PROJECT?

In expanding the project to include Belarusians and Russians, as well as Ukrainians, the team heard stories from people with double immigration experiences, which is an interesting topic to explore in the future.

WHAT DOES POLISH MEMORIAL PLAN ON DOING NEXT?

The next goal for 2026 is to proceed with the interviews and to attempt to document stories of people with a double migration experience. The team also plans to speak with minorities within the displaced populations, such as Roma and Jewish peoples from Ukraine.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD POLISH MEMORIAL GIVE TO OTHER JOURNALISTS OR ORGANISATIONS CONSIDERING A SIMILAR PATH?

Don't be afraid to apply for the grant, no matter how slim the chance. The team was able to acquire the grant and complete an amazing project. Additionally, don't be afraid to share your stories even if you're afraid someone will take your idea, because in the end, you are the visionary.



VISUALS FROM THE PROJECT



Behind-the-scenes of Polish Memorial's documentary interviews capturing intimate stories of displacement and resilience.