2024 RRP WORKSHOP – Budapest, 26.09.2023

A planning workshop for the 2024 Refugee Response Plan (RRP) gathered 24 organizations among UN agencies, and international and national NGOs to collect lessons learned and priorities for the 2024 refugee response in Hungary. These are the key findings presented by the different thematic groups and discussed in plenary.

PROTECTION, including legal, GBV, ani-trafficking, Accountability to Affected Population, Communication with Communities.

Achievements / Good practices	▪ Providing Shelter and Cash Assistance for Protection through AMIF/MMAI funds have effectively addressed immediate protection needs. ▪ Raising awareness about protection from sexual abuse and exploitation, coupled with implementing complaint response mechanisms, has enhanced the safety of refugees in Hungary. ▪ Building upon experiences and lessons learned from the past two years has enriched the knowledge base for protection efforts by actors.
Gaps & Challenges	▪ The shortage of social workers poses a significant obstacle to effective protection efforts. ▪ There is a lack of comprehensive information and mapping of available shelters, both within the government and among NGOs, creating difficulties in responding to protection needs. ▪ The issue of family separation is a pressing concern that requires sensitive handling and intervention, particularly after new border control procedures and subsidized accommodation arrangements. ▪ Barriers to accessing the territory for TCN and family members eligible for TP hinder the delivery of protection services. ▪ Safe houses are often lacking, and inadequate information is available about their existence and location. ▪ Discrimination of refugees and specific groups among refugees continues to be a prevalent problem, necessitating targeted efforts for its eradication.
2024 Priorities	▪ Ensuring access to territory and protection is a priority to identify and reach vulnerable populations needing protection. ▪ Awareness and counseling on employment, work rights to employers, and referral pathways against labor exploitation. ▪ Strengthening protection monitoring mechanisms is crucial for ensuring the safety of affected individuals. ▪ Pursuing legal advocacy and strategic litigation efforts can help protect the rights of vulnerable populations. ▪ Efforts must be made to reach refugees living in remote locations, ensuring their access to protection services. ▪ Promoting digital security awareness, particularly against hate speech, is essential. ▪ Expanding access to healthcare and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), especially outside the capital city, is imperative.
Stakeholders	▪ Government, including municipalities, the Commissioner's office, the Commission for Disaster Relief, and the Defense Committee. ▪ International Organizations: UNHCR, UNICEF, international NGOs. ▪ Local Actors: Community-based organizations (CBOs), refugee-led organizations (RLO), private individuals, and schools. ▪ Legal Professionals: Lawyers offering pro bono services. ▪ Health and Social Workers: Health workers, social workers, and case workers are frontline responders.
Monitoring Framework	Efficient reporting mechanisms are essential to enhance protection efforts. These reports should focus on coordination, mapping, available resources, funding opportunities, safety audits, and improved information sharing, including monthly reports. Such reporting mechanisms will facilitate a more coordinated and effective response to protection challenges.

Regional Refugee Response for the Ukraine Situation

CHILD PROTECTION

Achievements / Good practices	- Positive Dialogue with Ministry of Interior established on concrete issues in 2023. - Leveraging humanitarian resources and cross-country knowledge and expertise has provided valuable support in past years.
Gaps / Challenges	- Interpretation of National Child Protection Act: There is a prevailing tendency to interpret the National Child Protection Act in a restrictive manner so as not to include refugee children and parents. - Overburdened Child Protection Systems: The child protection system, comprising social workers and other professionals, is stretched and the demand for their services consistently exceeds their capacity to respond effectively. - Lack of Skills, Attitudes, and Budget: Child protection authorities often lack the requisite skills and conducive attitudes needed to address these issues comprehensively for refugees. Additionally, a shortage of budgetary resources hampers their ability to provide accessible services. - Limited Access to Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS): Access to MHPSS remains challenging; this results in children with special needs having poor access to MHPSS in general. - Bullying in Schools: The issue of bullying in schools has been raised by numerous concerned groups, indicating a pressing need for intervention. - Capacity Building and Downsizing: While 2022 witnessed a significant scale-up in capacity-building efforts, some organizations are now downsizing. This situation calls for a reevaluation of best practices.
2024 Priorities	- Advocacy for Policy Improvement: Creating an advocacy list to drive improvements in guidance and policy related to child protection. - Strengthening Coordination: Strengthening the child protection system by enhancing coordination and connections with national actors. - Support for Local Authorities, such as in-kind assistance, human resources. - Language Access: Ensuring that translation and interpretation services are widely available to overcome language barriers.
Stakeholders	Ministry of Interior/ODS, Office of the Commissioner, UN, NGOs; Ombudsman's Office; Municipalities.
Monitoring Framework	To foster collaboration and knowledge-sharing, it is imperative to establish platforms for networking and exchange among stakeholders. These platforms should also facilitate dialogue with the government. Reporting and data collection are important components to address child protection challenges. Capacity-building initiatives should be implemented to equip organizations and staff with the necessary skills for collecting and analyzing data. Furthermore, ensuring that the signaling system and other relevant resources are easily accessible through the RCF to all partners, beyond CP actors, is essential for effective collaboration.

MENTAL HEALTH and PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT (MHPSS)

Achievements / Good practices	- Experience and knowledge of IASC/WHO MHPSS approaches. - Shift from specialized services to community-based MHPSS activities - Entry point established to national health care system through the national counterpart attending the MHPSS Task Force. - Strong RRP MHPSS monitoring and evaluation system since the beginning of the response
Gaps / Challenges	- National mental health care system lacks human resources, especially for psychiatric services; long waiting time for appointments with mental health service providers; language barrier during service provision; limited availability of specialized services for people with severe mental health disorders and children with disabilities. - Stigma: mental health stigma and bias among both host and refugee communities. - Funding: lack of funding for MHPSS projects.
2024 Priorities	Inter-agency coordination: MHPSS TF has 41 Members (2 Governmental organization, 4 INGO, 12 NGO, 4 UN Agency, and 1 University) and coordination needs to be ensured for 2024

	▪ Situation Analysis: a comprehensive research level qualitative situational analysis is needed to understand the perception of host and refugee community about MHPSS, coping mechanisms, preferred activities. ▪ PFA and Basic Psychosocial Skills Trainings: trainings should be two of the essential trainings for all staff of all humanitarian actors and should be delivered within the organizations with in-house capacity, in case of external support; MHPSS TF should support ▪ WHO's Scalable Psychological Interventions: to ensure the evidence based response in MHPSS, scalable interventions such as PM+, SH+. MhGAP needs to be integrated into the response ▪ Substance abuse, alcohol consumption, and suicide prevention ▪ Staff-care
Stakeholders	UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM, WHO, Cordelia, Menedek, TdH, IFRC, RC, Heim Pal Children Hospital, National Primary Health Care Directorate.

EDUCATION

Achievements / Good practices	▪ More trust, expertise and contextual awareness gained in 2023 ▪ Flexibility in terms of how to respond (e.g. due to flexible funding) ▪ Collaboration with municipalities established in 2023 ▪ Improved coordination and representation
Gaps / Challenges	▪ Good data on education remains difficult to obtain ▪ Low enrollment rate, around 1/3 is not enrolled in primary school ▪ Support required for systemic integration (e.g. Hungarian language courses) is human resource intensive (teachers, psychologists etc.) and it is difficult to attract language teachers as the private sectors offers better pay ▪ There is an opportunity to tap into government funds for language classes, but this has to be accessed through school districts, NGOs could perhaps support the organization of these classes based on pre-financing and invoice the school district which then requests the funds from MoI ▪ Difficult learning environment due to MHPSS needs and bullying. ▪ Feedback systems are not child friendly or accessible for people with low literacy. ▪ New legislation links eligibility for subsidized accommodation to school enrolment.
2024 Priorities	▪ Access to quality education ▪ Policy/advocacy for increased capacity of the education system, flexibility, accreditation/certification, access to funding etc. ▪ Monitoring and evaluation: for better data on outcomes of programming as well as increased access to official data ▪ Support to children with diverse needs (e.g. Roma)
Stakeholders	National government + background institutions, Municipalities, National expert networks, Academia and professional agencies, UN and international NGOs, National NGOs and charities, School districts (linkage with national government and academia).
Monitoring Framework	Population data is a gap that needs to be addressed.

Livelihood and Economic Inclusion

Achievements / Good practices	• Incentivizing Employment: Current policies that incentivize refugee employment, especially for employers, have shown positive results. Encouraging businesses to hire refugees can be an effective strategy. • Housing and Work Emphasis: There is a strong emphasis on housing and work components in successful livelihood and economic inclusion programs. • Labor Demand: Despite challenges, there is a high demand for labor in Hungary, even though refugees often access low-paying jobs with exploitative risks.
Gaps / Challenges	• Administrative Barriers: Refugees have the right to work, but administrative barriers often hinder their immediate access to employment. Enhancing counseling services among refugees is essential to address this issue. • Resident Permits and Temporary Protection: Resident permits typically do not grant the right to work, while temporary protection status does. This disparity creates confusion and challenges for refugees seeking employment. • Guest Worker Employment: Changes in legislation related to guest worker employment can impact the opportunities available to refugees. • Illegal Work: Some refugees resort to illegal work due to limited legal options, leading to potential exploitation and vulnerability. • Fear of Registration: Some refugees are hesitant to register and declare their presence in the country due to obligations linked to TP status.
2024 Priorities	• Awareness and Guidance for Employers: Initiatives should focus on raising awareness among employers about how to overcome administrative barriers when hiring refugees. Providing guidance and resources to employers can facilitate refugee employment. • Counseling for Refugees: Offering counseling services to refugees is vital. Adequate staff time and resources should be allocated to provide comprehensive support. Implementing mentoring programs can help refugees retain their employment. • Advocacy for Policy Change: Advocacy efforts should aim to convince the government to reform the system and further incentivize refugee employment. Additionally, advocating for affordable housing options can improve the overall livelihood of refugees. • Support for Local NGOs: Providing mentoring and support to local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can enhance their capacity to assist refugees in their economic inclusion efforts.

CASH-BASED INTERVENTION (CBI)

Achievements / Good practices	• Local Leadership in CBI: Utilizing local organizations with expertise and strong relationships with authorities has proven effective in leading CBI efforts. This approach fosters a more community-centered response. • Collective Response and Coordination: Coordinating various actors in a collective response enhances the effectiveness of CBI efforts. Coordination ensures that resources are utilized efficiently and avoids duplication of assistance. • Monitoring and Evaluation: Implementing an evidence-based approach, including post-distribution monitoring, has improved CBI responses. Data collected and analyzed after distribution helps fine-tune future interventions. • Protection Expertise: Tailoring CBI to address the needs of vulnerable groups, especially individuals with special needs, demonstrates the importance of integrating protection expertise into CBI initiatives. • Strengthened Coordination: Strengthening coordination mechanisms among organizations involved in CBI enhances the overall impact and efficiency of the response.
Gaps / Challenges	• Misuse and Duplication: Challenges persist regarding the misuse of the system and duplication of assistance, highlighting the need for stricter controls and coordination.

	- Targeting Vulnerable Groups: There is room for improvement in targeting vulnerable groups with protection expertise to ensure they receive the assistance they need. - Inadequate Transfer Amounts: Inflation and rising utility costs have made the current transfer amounts insufficient. Adjustments are needed to meet the evolving economic landscape. - Lack of Representation: Voices from Refugee-Led Organizations (RLO) and Community-Based Organizations (CBO) are often missing in CBI responses, signaling a need for more inclusive engagement.
2024 Priorities	- Precise Targeting: Improving the precision of targeting for assistance is crucial to ensure that aid reaches those who need it most. - Inclusive Approach: Taking an inclusive approach, especially for individuals with specific needs, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities, is essential. Focus on those who face challenges in accessing technology and consider a longer-term and sustainable approach to CBI. - Increased Transfer Values: Addressing the inadequacy of transfer amounts is a priority, particularly for individuals with disabilities. This should be closely linked to post-distribution monitoring. - Referral Pathways: Strengthening referral pathways among different organizations is vital. Establish stronger links between cash interventions and community outreach and engagement, with active involvement of Refugee-Led Organizations and Community-Based Organizations. - Involvement of Local Government: Collaborate with local government entities to improve the assistance process. Engage with community-based organizations to enhance the reach and effectiveness of CBI. - Cash-Based Interventions have the potential to be a transformative force in humanitarian responses when effectively implemented and coordinated. Addressing these lessons learned and prioritizing areas for development will help maximize their impact and reach in assisting vulnerable populations.

BASIC NEEDS

Achievements / Good practices	- Local collaboration in response between humanitarian actors. - 46,000 people reached with basic needs support as of Q2 2023.
Gaps / Challenges	- Gap filling of national response capacity due to lack of access to public services. - Lack of funding combined with eligibility constraints of donors in terms of who can be supported (e.g. in some cases TCNs or dual nationals are excluded). - Housing market does not favor short-term accommodation for households with many children, people from ethnic minorities or other vulnerable profiles, however, this can often be overcome by using personal networks - Uncertain and changing legal environment combined with slowly waning public support for refugees due to perceived competition with vulnerable Hungarians.
2024 Priorities	- Accommodation support (with a shifting focus from collective sites to individual apartments), requires casework and overlaps with other sectors (such as Protection and Socio-Economic Inclusion). - Strengthening coordination and collaboration with partners and public actors to improve the pooling of resources (especially in remote areas, e.g. in terms of transportation and storage of NFIs) and referral pathways to support the most vulnerable. - Identify sites and people not yet registered with the authorities and advocate for their support. - Advocacy and evidence-based programming.
Stakeholders	Important to provide employers with information on how to hire refugees, Local family support services.