



Regional Refugee Response Plan  
for the Ukraine Situation

**FINAL REPORT**

2023



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## REGIONAL CHAPTER

### Situation Overview

As the full-scale war in Ukraine continues unabated, record numbers of people have been displaced, both internally and abroad. As of the end of December 2023, 5.9 million refugees from Ukraine were recorded across Europe, almost 2 millions of whom were in the countries included in the Ukraine Situation Refugee Response Plan (RRP): Belarus, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, the Republic of Moldova, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.<sup>1</sup>

The application of the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) by the European Council and the Republic of Moldova's Temporary Protection regime provided favourable legal frameworks to ensure that refugees could find safety in the region and provided a legal basis for refugees to access rights and services.

In the two years since the Russian Federation's large-scale invasion of Ukraine, host governments, as well as local communities and civil society actors, have demonstrated great generosity, political will and effective support to ensure protection and meet the essential needs of refugees.

At the same time, humanitarian partners, under the overall leadership of the national authorities, have supported and complemented the national response through coordinated and inclusive interventions. This 2023 End of Year Report looks back at the achievements and challenges of the response to the refugee crisis, both at the regional level and within the countries included in the RRP.

The report is structured with a regional part organized around the four strategic objectives of the plan and 10 country chapters exploring highlights and achievements and gaps and challenges faced in the implementation of the response plan.

### **Strategic Objective 1: Ensure refugees' access to protection and assistance on a non-discriminatory basis, including the rights associated with temporary protection or similar legal statuses in host countries.**

In 2023, the Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) made significant contributions towards ensuring refugees' access to legal status on a non-discriminatory basis, including temporary protection and similar legal statuses in host countries. One of the plan's cornerstones was enhancing refugees' access to reliable and easily accessible information regarding their rights and the humanitarian services available, particularly emphasizing the rights associated with temporary protection or similar legal statuses.

The RRP's strategic direction was deeply rooted in enhancing refugees' effective access to legal status and rights, underscoring the importance of including refugees into national systems. This initiative was particularly bolstered by the application of the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) in the European Union and the similar protective regime in the Republic of Moldova providing a robust framework to ensure protection, access to rights, and services in host countries for refugees from Ukraine.

Through active engagement with refugee-led and community-based organizations, the plan fostered a two-way communication channel that played a crucial role in making these achievements possible. This approach allowed for a more inclusive and informed discussion about refugees' rights to temporary protection, ensuring that refugees were well-informed about their legal status and the protections afforded to them under host country laws and international guidelines.

Advocacy played a pivotal role in these achievements, with the RRP and its partners working tirelessly to ensure that refugee children at risk, including unaccompanied and separated children, were identified, included

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<sup>1</sup> The RRP also includes the population planning figures and financial requirements for inter-agency activities in Belarus.



in national child protection systems and received all required protection services in line with their legal status. This included advocating for the alignment of the applicability of child protection laws to include children with temporary protection status, thereby ensuring their rights and access to services were safeguarded.

Moreover, the plan's focus on livelihoods and socio-economic inclusion was instrumental in promoting the socio-economic rights of refugees, including those with temporary protection status. By providing comprehensive assistance in understanding labor and fiscal laws, labor rights, and advocating for the removal of administrative barriers, the RRP ensured that refugees had the necessary support to navigate their legal rights and obligations within the host country. This also included initiatives aimed at preventing labor exploitation and enhancing the legal understanding of refugees and employers alike.

In the health sector, the RRP's strategy to enhance access to healthcare services underscored the importance of recognizing the legal entitlements of temporary protection holders. By fostering capacity-building for health workers on the legal entitlements of these individuals, the plan ensured that refugees had equitable access to strengthened health services, addressing legal and administrative bottlenecks that previously hindered access.

The achievements of the RRP in 2023 demonstrated a comprehensive approach to ensuring refugees' access to legal status on a non-discriminatory basis. By focusing on information dissemination, advocacy, and capacity-building, the plan successfully navigated the complex legal landscape associated with temporary protection and similar legal statuses, providing refugees in host countries with the knowledge and support needed to exercise their rights fully.

## **Strategic Objective 2: Pave the way toward solutions and expand access to social and economic opportunities to facilitate social inclusion of refugees through a whole-of-society approach and in line with the Global Compact on Refugees, recognizing in particular the critical role played by national and local actors, including government ministries, municipal authorities, NGOs and RLOs.**

In 2023, the Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) for the Ukraine situation made pivotal advancements towards paving the way for sustainable solutions and broadening access to social and economic opportunities for refugees, thereby facilitating their socio-economic inclusion through a whole-of-society approach in alignment with the Global Compact on Refugees. A notable emphasis was placed on the critical role of national and local actors, including government ministries, municipal authorities, NGOs, refugee-led organizations (RLOs), the private sector and, where relevant, development actors, in orchestrating these efforts.

Partners promoted cross-sectoral coordination at the central and local level to optimize program and service delivery, make effective use of resources, improve data collection and information-sharing mechanisms, and tackle structural issues hindering progress in key inclusion areas such as housing, social protection, education, and decent work.

Given the widespread mismatch between refugees' job preferences and labour market needs, partners promoted enhanced access for refugees to skills-appropriate employment opportunities, via streamlined qualifications recognition, ongoing language training, career-targeted counselling, improved matching between local labour needs and refugees' skills, and job fairs catering to diverse profiles and specific needs. Emphasis was also placed on increased access to financial products and banking services.

A significant focus was placed on advocacy for the inclusion of refugee children in national education systems of host countries, increasing enrolment in host country schools, addressing barriers to enrolment, and ensuring the inclusion of refugees in formal education. These efforts were instrumental in promoting quality of learning, psycho-social stability, and social interaction, ultimately contributing to long-term stability in education and inclusion in host community settings.

Within the health sector, activities were directed at addressing the needs of refugees through strengthened health systems and complementary interventions. Training programs for teachers, social workers, and health

professionals aimed to enhance MHPSS for Ukrainian children, facilitating their access to national health services and medicines.

As more refugees transitioned out of state-sponsored accommodation into longer-term independent housing arrangements, partners have increased support to states to identify, and in some cases pilot, affordable longer-term housing solutions that benefit both refugees and the host community.

Finally, partners have broadened their engagement with municipalities throughout RRP countries, fostering collaborative efforts at the local level between government, business, and civil society actors, with a focus on achieving holistic longer-term inclusion support and social cohesion.

### **Strategic Objective 3: Ensure that refugees with specific needs continue to have access to targeted support and assistance, while also engaging with and strengthening community-level protective mechanisms.**

According to UNHCR's protection profiling and monitoring activities,<sup>2</sup> main difficulties in accessing services were long waiting times, lack of information on available services, as well as a language barrier. The efforts were therefore designed to complement and enhance the services provided by host countries, including through targeted assistance with case management, cash programs and effective inclusion into national social protection programmes, particularly for individuals facing gender-based violence (GBV), children at risk, older persons, ethnic minorities, LGBTIQ+ refugees, people with healthcare needs, including mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), or disabilities and/or other specific needs.

Significant effort has been made towards the inclusion of refugee children into the national child protection systems, with a particular focus on children at risk and those without parental care. The main efforts were aimed at ensuring that the services and protection of national child protection authorities are made available to such children. This was achieved through extensive coordination efforts and targeted interventions at national and regional levels.

Ensuring safe, high-quality GBV prevention and response services remained a critical focus. Collaboration with governments and local organizations, especially women-led organizations, was key to ensuring services were survivor-centered and in line with standards. Efforts to promote gender equality and women's participation while preventing GBV were supported through addressing cultural sensitivities and the conduct of awareness campaigns. Barriers to access medical services for survivors of GBV as well as sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services in general remained in several countries. Key actions to address this included, amongst others, Training of Trainers on mainstreaming GBV risk management as well as on clinical management of rape and a round table discussion with partners in Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia to develop country specific action plans.

RRP partners continued to advocate for the rights of LGBTIQ+ refugees, who often faced additional protection risks and barriers, because of restrictive legal frameworks and practices in some refugee hosting countries. Partners worked with the organizations led by LGBTIQ+ to ensure the access to sexual and reproductive health and other services.

Child protection activities aimed at ensuring the well-being of children, with a specific focus on intercultural family activities and positive child development. Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) activities at the community level allowed children to establish social ties and engage in creative activities, contributing to their holistic well-being.

Host countries made great efforts to provide access to health services for refugees in line with the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), despite this, 25 percent of respondents in need of healthcare reported difficulties

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<sup>2</sup> [Regional Protection Monitoring Fact Sheet - Dec 2023.pdf](#)

accessing the national system due, inter alia, to long waits, language barriers and high costs.<sup>3</sup> Challenges related to health system capacities, limitations in policy frameworks, other types of administrative and financial barriers, and information gaps on service availability. To address these issues, sustained efforts were required to ensure equitable access to quality services. This included strengthening health systems and workforce capacities combined with efforts to integrate Ukrainian healthcare workers in the national health workforce. Additional efforts focused on fostering the continuum of care especially for non-communicable diseases, HIV and tuberculosis, addressing persistent barriers to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health care, addressing policy and legal frameworks, and sharing information on service availability with refugees.

According to UNHCR data, 30 percent of households reported having at least one member of the family experiencing mental health or psycho-social problems, making the integrated delivery of MHPSS across the response essential. The main efforts involved ensuring the delivery of community-based psychosocial activities and interventions that built on existing individual and community resources, resilience, and capacities. Additionally, psychosocial support was provided through case management and scalable psychological interventions that could be implemented by both trained and supervised specialists and non-specialists, as well as access to clinical mental healthcare.

Further efforts were made for the identification and inclusion of refugees with disabilities in national services. This included recognizing disability certificates issued in Ukraine, ensuring accessible accommodation, identifying and mitigating barriers to services, ensuring the availability of accessible information, and engaging and working with organizations led by persons with disabilities.

Finally, efforts were also made to ensure access to social housing or targeted support to cover the costs of longer-term independent housing, particularly for vulnerable refugees. This involved the incremental closing of collective sites as longer-term accommodation arrangements were made available to refugees in collaboration with municipalities, ensuring actions were taken with the best interests of residents in mind. Further efforts are required in continuing to pursue access to the longer-term independent housing in the host countries.

#### **Strategic Objective 4: Advance social cohesion among refugee and host communities through targeted interventions.**

Significant progress was made under Strategic Objective 4, focusing on reinforcing social cohesion between refugee and host communities, achieving notable progress through innovative strategies and robust partnerships. The primary focus was to foster dialogue and mutual understanding, especially among youth, utilizing diverse activities like sports, social events, and cultural initiatives. This approach facilitated information exchange among refugees, government authorities, and the broader population, ensuring targeted service delivery tailored to specific refugee needs.

A pivotal element of the strategic objective involved supporting the integration of refugee children into national school systems. This comprehensive effort emphasized the development of intercultural capacities among teaching staff, creating an inclusive educational environment that acknowledged and accommodated the diverse backgrounds of refugee students.

Protection efforts remained a paramount priority, with continuous monitoring to assess the protection situation of refugees and ensure their access to legal status, rights, and services. Legal assistance was provided, and extensive efforts were made to disseminate information on rights, facilitating refugees' access to employment, education, healthcare, and social support. The approach emphasized community-based, age-, gender-, and diversity-sensitive initiatives, involving various stakeholders in the response.

The livelihoods program implemented comprehensive support, covering entrepreneurship, employability skills, and research for hiring refugees. Private sector outreach initiatives aimed to accelerate social cohesion,

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<sup>3</sup> [Regional Protection Monitoring Fact Sheet - Dec 2023.pdf](#)

recognizing the crucial role of employer relationships in assisting refugee job seekers. Guides were developed to provide job seekers with an overview of government employment assistance services and the processes and requirements for accessing them.

Innovative projects, such as the inclusion of refugees in community art events, involved local artists trained on community engagement and coaching. These initiatives focused on collaborative art-making experiences, strengthening mental health, social inclusion, and livelihoods.

Activities targeting vulnerable refugees, such as the inclusion of Roma refugees through partnerships with community-based organizations, aimed at strengthening inclusion, addressing stigma, empowering refugees, and enhancing their leadership skills in support of inter-community dialogue.

## Accountability to Affected People (AAP)



Depending on the operational context of each country, AAP activities were coordinated through dedicated AAP task forces, Protection Working Groups (PWG), or an Inter-Agency platform, given the cross-cutting nature of the topic.<sup>4</sup> Recognizing social media as the preferred method of communication for refugees to receive information, a Safe Online campaign reached 5.7 million viewers across 17 European countries. Its aim was to raise awareness about the safe usage of the internet and social media, particularly focusing on combating online scams and trafficking risks. Refugees were consulted via online and offline feedback forms, social media, focus group discussions, field trips, and suggestion boxes.

The 2023 MSNA results indicate an average 81 per cent aid satisfaction among refugees, attributed to ensuring AAP through the establishment of effective Feedback and Response Mechanisms, Participatory Assessment approaches, and stronger engagement mechanisms led by displaced and stateless individuals.

Notable good practices include AAP trainings for humanitarian workers in Bulgaria, Moldova, Poland and Romania, the establishment of a rumor tracking system in Moldova to combat mis- and disinformation on social media, the formation of a refugee advisory board in Bulgaria, the development of service advisory sites in Moldova<sup>5</sup> and Romania,<sup>6</sup> including refugee-/women- and/or community-led organizations in Hungary Inter-Agency service mapping, an inter-agency mapping of available community-based feedback mechanisms in Poland, and over 40 community outreach visits in Slovenia. In addition, A dedicated helpline in Hungary, with a focus on child protection and child well-being. Multiple communication channels to children and adults to hear and respond to their psychosocial issues have been established.

## Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse



Aside from being one of the largest forced displacement crises in the world, the Ukraine refugee emergency has been characterized by a number of heightened risk factors related to SEA, such as a high proportion of women and children fleeing alone, and a wide range of new and non-traditional actors involved in the response. National PSEA Networks in Bulgaria, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania and Slovakia continued to lead and maintain oversight of collective efforts to protect refugees from Ukraine from sexual exploitation and abuse. In January 2023, a Regional Network for Safeguarding and PSEA in the Ukraine refugee response was launched. Efforts to protect refugees from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) were comprehensive, including awareness-raising campaigns and training programs to recognize, prevent, and respond to SEA. This holistic approach aimed to create a safer

<sup>4</sup> Dedicated AAP task force in Moldova and Poland; PWGs in Slovakia, Hungary and Romania; Inter-Agency platform in Bulgaria.

<sup>5</sup> <https://moldova.servicesadvisor.net/en>

<sup>6</sup> <https://romania.servicesadvisor.net/en>



environment for refugees during their displacement. The Regional Network, co-chaired by UNHCR and Save the Children International, provided support to these national Networks, facilitated exchange and learning across refugee-hosting countries and promoted a coherent and survivor-centered approach across the region. In 2023, a series of workshops for NGO partners on SEA investigations reached over 100 partner staff from 60 NGOs.

## Mental Health and Psychosocial Support



In 2023, the focus on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) remained paramount in the region, with concerted efforts to integrate services across various sectors such as health, protection, education, and GBV. The emphasis was on ensuring comprehensive access to MHPSS services, including through strengthening supportive systems for families and communities, and providing focused psychosocial support through case management and scalable psychological interventions.

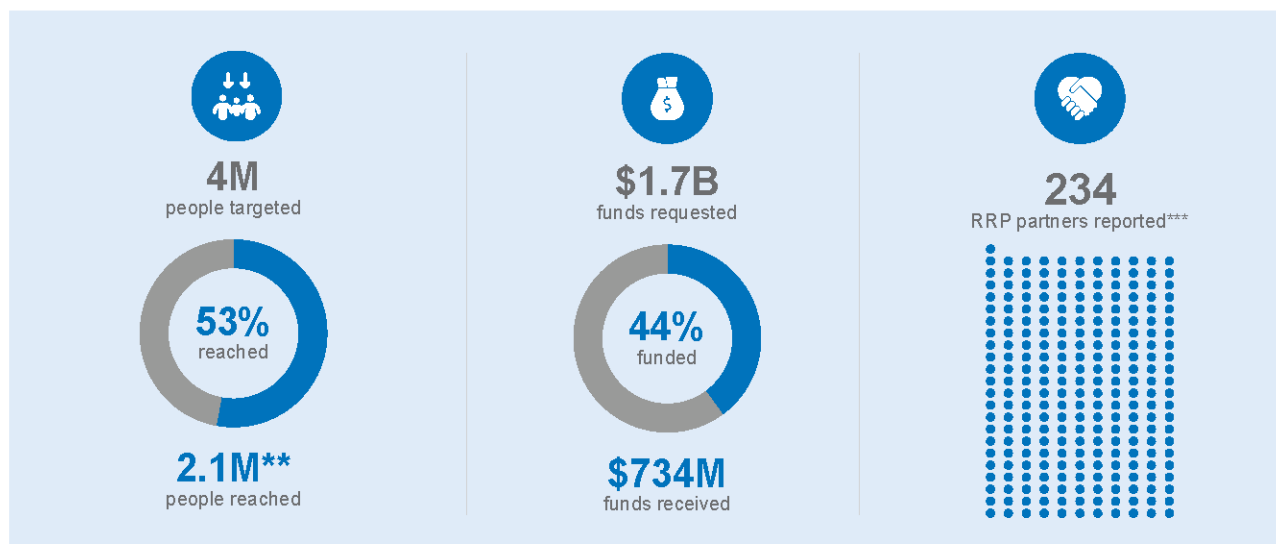
In total, 204,543 mental health and psychosocial support consultations were provided across the region, highlighting the commitment to addressing the mental health needs of individuals affected by the crisis. Additionally, results from the Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA) revealed that 95% of respondents who received MHPSS services reported some improvement in their well-being. This underscores the effectiveness of MHPSS interventions in addressing the mental health needs of individuals affected by the crisis.

Throughout the year, efforts were concentrated on capacity building and training on MHPSS, including providing basic psychosocial support, as well as scalable interventions. These included initiatives aimed at integrating practitioners from diverse backgrounds, further enhancing inclusivity in service delivery. MHPSS working groups also continued in all neighboring countries and played a vital role in coordinating national responses and providing technical guidance and advocacy. These inclusive and ongoing efforts underscored a continued dedication to promoting well-being and resilience among refugees and host communities, reinforcing the importance of prioritizing and integrating MHPSS in the regional response.

## REGIONAL END-OF-YEAR ACHIEVEMENTS (2023)

Within the framework of the 2023 inter-agency Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) for the Ukraine Situation, 243 partners joined forces, in support of government-led efforts, to provide protection services and multi-sectoral humanitarian assistance to refugees from Ukraine, third country nationals seeking safety and other persons in

need across ten countries in the region.\* Partners also focused their activities on promoting the socio-economic inclusion of refugees as well as social cohesion between refugees and their hosts. The figures were reported by RRP partners against the regional RRP indicators.



Sector		People reached	% reached	People targeted
Protection	Individuals supported in accessing protection services	878.4k	67%	1.3M
	Children provided with child protection services	477.7k	70%	678k
	Participants trained on child protection and children's rights	10.8k	69%	15.5k
	GBV referral pathways established and functional	34	76%	45
	Individuals reached through community outreach and prevention activities on GBV	481.4k	38%	1.2M
Livelihoods & Socio-Economic Inclusion	Individuals supported in livelihoods and socio-economic inclusion services and development programmes	207.4k	23%	910k
Cash	Individuals who received cash assistance	562.7k	61%	916k
Health & Nutrition	Consultations provided for mental health and psychosocial support	177.5k	38%	468k
	Individuals supported in accessing health care services	642.1k	91%	706k
	Individuals trained to provide health services to refugees and host populations	21.8k	100%	18k
Education	Children enrolled in formal education in host countries	300.2k	30%	1M
	Children participating in non-formal education programmes	874.2k	100%	304k
Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)	PSEA network members and partner personnel trained on SEA risk mitigation, prevention and response	4.7k	55%	8.6k
Basic Needs	Individuals who received assistance for basic needs	869.7k	57%	1.5M

\*Population planning figures and financial requirements for Belarus were included in the regional chapter.

\*\*The number of individuals reached is an estimate based on the highest number of individuals reached per activity, per sector and/or per region, to avoid double counting.

\*\*\*This figure is the total of all RRP partners reporting - one partner may therefore be counted multiple times if operating and reporting in more than one country.



## BULGARIA

### Situation Overview

By the end of 2023, Bulgaria recorded 67,000 valid temporary protection (TP) beneficiaries following a re-registration exercise from February to March. The State Agency for Refugees continued to process renewal applications at its six centers in the country. In addition to re-registration, there was an average of around 2,000 new applications per month. Bulgaria has extended the Temporary Protection Directive until March 2025, in line with the EU Council decision, and is planning a re-registration exercise to extend the validity of issued TP IDs in the first quarter of 2024. The Bulgarian Government grants TP beneficiaries a range of rights including access to employment, social assistance, emergency medical care and education.

The Government of Bulgaria has extended the national humanitarian programme for refugees from Ukraine several occasions in 2023, currently extended until end-April 2024. Under the programme, newly arriving refugees and TP beneficiaries are provided with government-sponsored accommodation in state facilities and hotels in coastal areas. At the end of 2023, 5,600 refugees remained accommodated in government-sponsored accommodation schemes and state-owned facilities. Most refugees from Ukraine reside in the coastal area as well as larger cities, including Plovdiv and Sofia. Government discussions are underway on a new humanitarian programme that includes key integration aspects for refugees from Ukraine. The inter-agency 2023 Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA) showed that the average stay of the majority of refugees in Bulgaria was 13 months,<sup>7</sup> indicating a stable population within the country with longer-term prospects. RRP partners also noted an increase in questions and requests from refugees about integration opportunities and obtaining permanent legal status.

Following the fifth parliamentary elections during the past two years that took place in April 2023, a new government was formed in Bulgaria between two leading parties. In the absence of a formal coalition agreement, the two leading parties will be rotating heads of Government for an 18-month period. The Council of Ministers has formed an operational task force for the Ukraine refugee response which focuses on inter-ministerial coordination. UNHCR continues to lead the Refugee Coordination Mechanism in support of the Government's efforts. Under the national refugee coordination forum, there are five working groups: Protection and Inclusion (led by UNHCR); Education (led by UNICEF with participation of Ministry of Education and Sciences experts); Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (led by WHO); Protection against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (co-led by UNHCR, UNICEF and Animus Association); and Cash (led by UNHCR and the Social Assistance Agency).

### Highlights and achievements

To complement the government's response, RRP partners reached more than 51,000 refugees with cash assistance for protection and basic needs. Cash and voucher actors conducted Post Distribution Monitoring, which showed that food, health, hygiene costs and clothing were the top areas of expenditures.

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<sup>7</sup> The 2023 MSNA surveyed 1,054 households representing 2,258 household members from Ukraine from July to August 2023.

Through the five Blue Dot Hubs run in collaboration with local authorities, partners provided information, key protection services and social support to access national services to refugees from Ukraine. These hubs also provided safe spaces for children and families, protection and legal assistance as well as mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS).

RRP partners reached more than 47,000 children with non-formal education activities – including Bulgarian language and catch-up classes as well as additional learning support – and supported caregivers with the kindergarten and school enrolment by providing information on the processes, facilitating translation of documents required for the applications into Bulgarian, and providing learning materials. The Ministry of Education and Sciences launched the official Bulgarian language textbook for refugee children in primary schools. Additionally, partners also launched the first supplementary Bulgarian language children's textbook, which will be used by teachers teaching Bulgarian language to refugee children.

Partners supported 59,900 refugees in accessing health care services and provided more than 11,200 refugees with MHPSS consultations. The MHPSS Technical Working Group shared guidelines and good practices, including guidance for detection and prevention of burnout to support frontline staff, and provided capacity building on the provision of MHPSS services.

Partners also reached 47,000 refugees with livelihoods and socioeconomic inclusion services, including entrepreneurship training programmes, information sessions with local employers and outreach with businesses in support of socially responsible integration initiatives.

From a coordination perspective, in 2023, UNHCR initiated regional inter-agency meetings in collaboration with key municipalities, including Burgas, Plovdiv, Ruse, Sofia, Varna, to discuss key issues and areas for coordination and share good practices on refugee inclusion initiatives.

RRP partners also provided recommendations and technical support to the Government's draft humanitarian programme for refugees from Ukraine. Several multistakeholder consultations were organized by RRP partners on key topics such as access to health services and child protection. The Ministry of Health and WHO in Bulgaria organized a roundtable<sup>8</sup> in March 2023 to discuss the key findings and recommendations of the inter-agency health assessment on the health systems and workforce providing services to refugee and host populations. The State Agency for Refugees and UNHCR and UNICEF held a Child Protection Roundtable in June 2023 on alternative care arrangements for unaccompanied and separated children. Participants shared valuable insights and best practices from municipalities, aiming to enhance care arrangements and social services for children at risk. This contributed to Bulgaria's 2023 Global Refugee Forum pledges<sup>9</sup> on child protection, namely to ensure alternative care arrangements for unaccompanied refugee children and maintain a database on refugee children. The Government also pledged to facilitate the socio-economic inclusion of refugees by providing assistance for employment – as well as to promote acceptance of refugees across various aspects of public life and develop a skilled workforce in education, social protection and healthcare.

## Gaps and challenges

Despite ongoing interventions, strengthening refugees' access to health services has been a continuing challenge. 2023 MSNA findings have identified that a quarter of households with health needs said they were unable to access necessary healthcare, with main reported challenges being the inability to afford the costs (including transportation expenses), to enroll in the national health insurance scheme,<sup>10</sup> and language barriers. Almost half of the surveyed households in the MSNA also said that they were not registered with a General Practitioner or a pediatrician in Bulgaria, which is a prerequisite to access the health system and enroll in the

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240070707>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.mfa.bg/en/news/39467>

<sup>10</sup> Health insurance is provided free of cost by the Government for 90 days upon refugees' Temporary Protection registration in Bulgaria, after which refugees ages 18-65 must enroll in health insurance. Health insurance for minors and women over 63 and men over 65 years of age continues to be provided by the state for the duration of temporary protection.



health insurance scheme. Half of refugee households in the MSNA indicated having at least one member with a chronic or serious underlying medical condition. This is also corroborated by the Protection Profiling and Monitoring findings from December 2023, where 43 per cent of respondents said that they have a family member with a serious medical condition which has required medical treatment for three months or more in Bulgaria.

Also, only 22 per cent of the school-age population have enrolled in Bulgarian schools for the 2023-2024 academic year according to the Ministry of Education and Science.<sup>11</sup> Obstacles to enrolment in schools include language barriers and limited space in Bulgarian schools. Refugee children also continue distance learning classes in Ukraine which may hold risks of learning losses and hinders full social cohesion within their communities.

Barriers to socioeconomic inclusion persist, including the recognition of diplomas held by refugee health care specialists and educational professionals, thereby limiting access to the Bulgarian labor market despite European Commission recommendations<sup>12</sup> for the rapid recognition of diplomas. Refugees outside of government-sponsored accommodation schemes have reported difficulties finding employment opportunities that sustain their rent and other living expenses. During the 2023 MSNA, some 17 per cent of households with youth between 16-24 years of age reported having a member who is not in education, employment or training.

More opportunities for refugees' self-reliance and livelihoods that enable them to meet their needs in a safe, sustainable and dignified manner are needed; additionally, enhanced social protection is crucial especially for refugees with disabilities, chronic medical conditions and those without support structures. In Bulgaria, a fifth of the refugee population consists of older persons and one-tenth indicated having a disability.

Furthermore, while community outreach and prevention activities on Gender Based Violence (GBV) continue to be provided by RRP partners, strengthening holistic referral pathways for GBV survivors including available state services remains a need.

In 2023, the RRP financial appeal for Bulgaria was 64 per cent funded, mostly for UN agencies. Despite fundraising efforts, civil society organizations struggled to raise necessary funding levels to implement appeal activities – for localization, it is becoming increasingly important to enhance financial support for refugee-led and community-based organizations.

### Localization and Coordination in up

The Varna regional inter-agency coordination forum was initiated in 2023. Following the first Varna inter-agency meeting in March, the municipality continued to hold regular coordination meetings with civil society organizations on key thematic topics, including access to education, livelihoods and Bulgarian language classes, health, as well as social services inclusive of refugees. The municipality shared their experience with a health project where a Ukrainian refugee doctor supports refugees in registering with a General Practitioner and assists Bulgarian doctors in medical examinations.

The municipality, in coordination with civil society organizations, conducted an intentions survey for caregivers on the enrolment of refugee children for the 2023-2024 academic year to prepare schools in Varna for school enrolment. Based on the challenges raised, the Varna municipality also committed to establishing mobile teams to reach refugees in remote state-sponsored accommodation sites who have difficulty accessing social services which are generally concentrated in city centres.

<sup>11</sup> The Ministry of Education and Sciences during the inter-agency Education Working Group meeting of 15 November 2023 presented that some 3,800 refugee children are enrolled in Bulgarian schools. There are an estimated 13,000 school-aged refugee children (around 25 per cent of the total population) in Bulgaria as of end-2023.

<sup>12</sup> <https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/guidelines-on-fast-track-recognition-of-ukrainian-academic-qualifications>

## Mainstreaming Mental health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS)

RRP partners made efforts to mainstream MHPSS across all sectors, reaching 30,000 refugees with focused psychosocial support consultations: 15,800 refugees with awareness raising sessions on MHPSS as well as 7,800 children through community-based psychosocial support child protection activities. Partners also reported that 1,200 humanitarian partner staff received MHPSS as part of staff care. Through the coordination of the MHPSS Technical Working Group, the National Centre of Public Health and Analyses in Bulgaria trained frontline staff of RRP partners and MHPSS Technical Working Group members on the provision of MHPSS services in the first half of the year. The national refugee coordination forum also supported on the Russian interpretation for refugee staff.

In the 2023 MSNA, among the households who expressed concerns about the risks faced by boys and girls, the most serious risks cited for boys were psychological harm and deteriorating mental health and psychosocial wellbeing for girls. The need for mental health and psychosocial support activities at the community-level and referrals to specialized care remains key to promote the wellbeing of refugee children in Bulgaria.



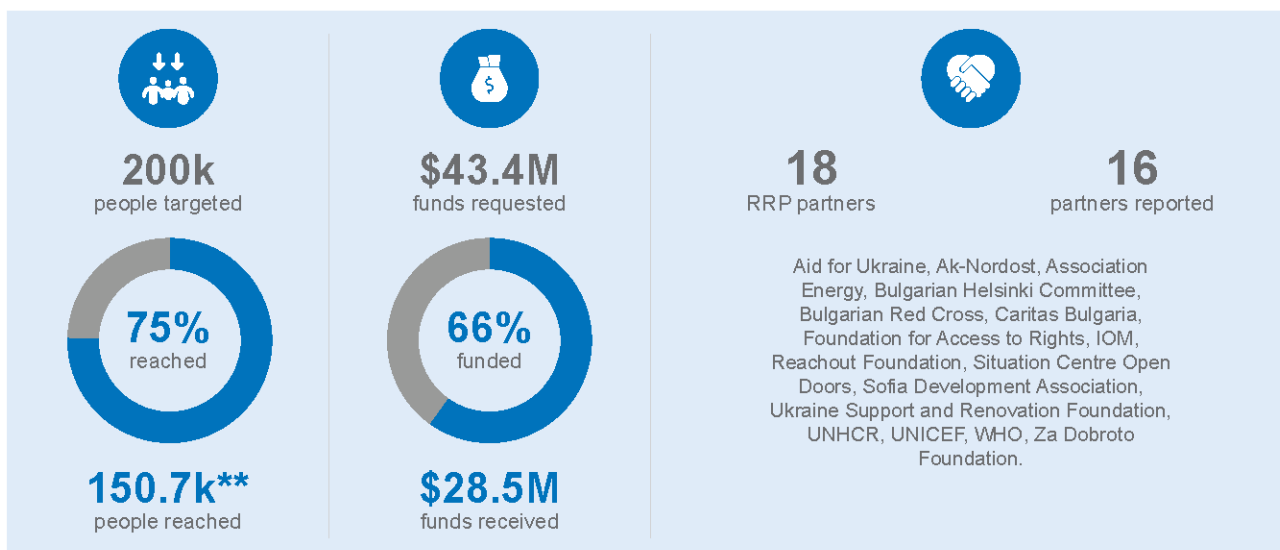
Bulgaria. The group of the youngest children in NRG's Integriko center (5-7 year olds) in Varna jointly with their teachers, crafted a globe as a symbol of unity, peace and cooperation in celebration of UN day. October 2023. ©NRG

# BULGARIA END-OF-YEAR ACHIEVEMENTS (2023)



Within the framework of the 2023 inter-agency Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) for the Ukraine Situation, 18 partners joined forces in Bulgaria, in support of government-led efforts, to provide protection services and multi-sectoral humanitarian assistance to refugees from Ukraine, third country nationals seeking safety and

other persons in need. Partners also focused their activities on promoting the socio-economic inclusion of refugees as well as social cohesion between refugees and their hosts. The figures were reported by RRP partners against the regional RRP indicators.\*



Sector		People reached
Protection	Individuals supported in accessing protection services	<b>150.7k</b>
	Children provided with child protection services	<b>17.7k</b>
	Participants trained on child protection and children's rights	<b>538</b>
	GBV referral pathways established and functional	<b>3</b>
Livelihoods & Socio-Economic Inclusion	Individuals reached through community outreach and prevention activities on GBV	<b>16.6k</b>
Cash	Individuals supported in in livelihoods and socio-economic inclusion services and development programmes	<b>47.0k</b>
Health & Nutrition	Individuals who received cash assistance	<b>51.6k</b>
	Consultations provided for mental health and psychosocial support	<b>11.2k</b>
	Individuals supported in accessing health care services	<b>59.9k</b>
Education	Individuals trained to provide health services to refugees and host populations	<b>3.9k</b>
	Children enrolled in formal education in host countries	<b>3.8k</b>
Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)	Children participating in non-formal education programmes	<b>47.7k</b>
	PSEA network members and partner personnel trained on SEA risk mitigation, prevention and response	<b>57</b>
Basic Needs	Individuals who received assistance for basic needs	<b>52.3k</b>

\*A list of implementing partners who reported on behalf of appealing RRP partners is available on the 2023 RRP Reporting dashboard.

\*\*The number of individuals reached is an estimate based on the highest number of individuals reached per activity, per sector and/or per region, to avoid double counting.



## CZECH REPUBLIC

### Situation Overview

By the end of 2023, Czechia remained among the top three destinations for Ukrainian refugees with one of the largest refugee populations overall and per capita in the European Union. Over 581,000 Ukrainians were granted temporary protection (TP) since February 2022 while more than 375,000 maintained an active status as of end 2023.<sup>13</sup> Women constituted approximately 47 per cent of the refugee population; and children represented around 26 per cent, highlighting potential vulnerabilities within a significant proportion of the refugee population.<sup>14</sup>

The Czech Government, working closely with regions, municipalities, partners, NGOs, and refugee-led organizations, displayed exemplary solidarity, adopting a whole-of-society approach to address the refugee situation. However, recognizing the challenges in providing equal assistance to all refugees, the Government implemented Acts, collectively referred to as Lex Ukraine V. in July 2023,<sup>15</sup> that defined vulnerable categories of refugees for focused assistance and shifted from a system that supported all TP holders equally to a more targeted approach. The aim was to motivate TP holders to enter the labour market, foster social cohesion and dispel any perception of preferential treatment for Ukrainian refugees. While, in principle, income-related social benefits remained available to all TP holders, by the end of the year only one third of Ukrainian refugees qualified to receive social benefits from the state.<sup>16</sup>

According to research by PAQ, high numbers of economically active refugees secured jobs by the end of 2023 (72 per cent), but the majority of refugees were working below their qualifications and often face precarious conditions.<sup>17</sup> As a result, 57 per cent of TP holders lived below the effective poverty line.<sup>18</sup> The shift in support brought by Lex Ukraine V. led to a decrease in the recipients of social benefits and cost-free accommodation. At the same time, obstacles such as language barriers hindered the attainment of better employment opportunities and higher incomes. This led the Government to implement the sixth amendment of the legal framework before the end of the year through a package of laws called Lex Ukraine VI., which increased financial support predominantly for vulnerable groups.<sup>19</sup>

Certain challenges in socio-economic inclusion notwithstanding, there were many positive trends. Attendance of refugee children grew in all levels of education, despite limited capacities in certain educational institutions.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> [Situation Ukraine Refugee Situation \(unhcr.org\)](https://www.unhcr.org/situation-ukraine-refugee-situation) as of 31 December 2023.

<sup>14</sup> Statistics of the Ministry of Interior, as of 31 December 2023.

<sup>15</sup> Acts no. 65-67 Coll., on measures related to the armed conflict on the territory of Ukraine caused by the invasion of the troops of the Russian Federation. Accessible from [zakonyprolidi.cz](https://zakonyprolidi.cz).

<sup>16</sup> Statistics of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs as of 31 December 2023.

<sup>17</sup> Report of PAQ Research from 18 December 2023. Accessible from [paqresearch.cz](https://paqresearch.cz).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Amended acts no. 65-66 Coll., collectively referred to as Lex Ukraine VI. took effect from 1 January 2024.

<sup>20</sup> 90 per cent of children attend primary schools, 70 per cent of three to five-year-olds are enrolled in kindergartens, and nearly half of refugees aged 15 to 17 attend Czech secondary schools. Source: Report of PAQ Research from 20 December 2023. Accessible from [paqresearch.cz](https://paqresearch.cz).



Refugees further reported very high coverage of health insurance (99 per cent) and good access to health services.<sup>21</sup>

Czechia's response to the Ukrainian refugee situation has been commendable. The implementation of targeted support through Lex Ukraine V. and VI. demonstrates the Government's commitment to addressing vulnerabilities within the refugee population. As efforts continue, addressing language barriers and other obstacles to income opportunities and ensuring sufficient educational resources will be crucial for the successful inclusion of Ukrainian refugees into Czech society.

## Highlights and Achievements

Throughout 2023, the Refugee Response Plan (RRP) partners collaborated closely with the Czech Government and various state authorities, aligning their strategies to efficiently address the evolving needs of Ukrainian refugees.

In the first quarter, the focus was still on the emergency response and catering to the immediate needs of refugees. RRP partners provided assistance in emergency accommodation and delivered essential supplies. Overall, more than 4,000 refugees received basic needs assistance, including cash assistance to 1,000 children with disabilities. Over 4,500 mental health consultations took place with refugees.<sup>22</sup> UN agencies also played an important role in coordinating efforts and resources for immediate relief.

During this period, RRP partners forged collaborations with the Ministry for Regional Development, unlocking unused apartments to create additional accommodation capacities for refugees. Partnerships with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs were expanded to address the specific needs of Ukrainian refugee children with disabilities and further cooperation with the Ministry of Interior was established to support more than 20 municipalities in their integration activities.

In the second quarter, there was a notable expansion in educational and healthcare services for refugees, alongside efforts to foster community integration. Almost 140,000 refugees were provided with help accessing healthcare services. The participation of more than 24,000 refugee children in non-formal education was ensured.<sup>23</sup>

RRP partners intensified their focus on disseminating information about legislative changes, particularly with the entry of Lex Ukraine V. into force in July 2023. They organized numerous information sessions and consultations, employing various communication channels and products, such as social networks, flyers, posters, and printed brochures. During the first weeks after Lex Ukraine V. was in place, emergency modalities were launched to provide beneficiaries with legal and social assistance on the ground through helplines and social media. The challenges introduced by Lex Ukraine V. led to some confusion and a perceived undermining of support. However, the collaborative endeavours of the RRP partners, working in alignment with the Government, ensured the essential needs of the refugee population were effectively addressed. More than 277,000 adult refugees and 45,000 children were supported in accessing protection and child protection services, respectively.

The final quarter witnessed a consolidation of services for refugees and their inclusion into national systems, with a shift towards increased local community engagement. Gender-Based Violence referral pathways for services in Prague were collaboratively created. Efforts were made to ensure the long-term well-being and integration of refugees, including the organization of social cohesion events, trainings for social workers in intercultural work and workshops on ethical employment practices for both employers and TP holders. Overall,

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<sup>21</sup> 67% of refugees have access to a general practitioner and pediatrician. Source: [UNHCR MSNA](#).

<sup>22</sup> Both figures are cumulative RRP partner results for year 2023.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

almost 18,000 refugees received support in livelihoods and socio-economic inclusion services and development programmes.

## Gaps and challenges

The inclusion of Ukrainian refugees in Czechia in 2023 faced a number of multifaceted challenges, highlighting the complexities of the process, particularly for vulnerable groups, including single parents of young children, refugees with disabilities, elderly persons, and LGBTIQ+ refugees.

The transition of individuals from collective facilities to standard housing remained a major challenge. According to research conducted by PAQ, the numbers of refugees in collective facilities significantly decreased and the number of refugees in rental housing increased (up to 49 per cent of respondents).<sup>24</sup> However, more than 27,000 individuals remained in collective facilities by the end of the year.<sup>25</sup> It is recognized that these facilities pose higher risks of overcrowding, a lack of privacy, alcoholism, gender-based violence, and exploitation, making them inappropriate for long-term residence, especially for families with children. The process of transition requires not only financial support but also social assistance to address the specific needs of the most vulnerable refugees.

Decreasing financial support from the state is compelling refugees to increasingly rely on themselves. As considerable 56 per cent of refugees work below their qualifications, primarily hindered by language barriers.<sup>26</sup> Efforts are required to facilitate easier recognition of qualifications, skills development, and accessible language courses, catering not only to beginners but also to more advanced learners. Special attention is further needed for children aged 15 and above, as well as young adults, who face the challenge of re-entering education or need vocational training. Unemployed and out-of-school youth might face particular protection risks.

Despite the good level of attendance in compulsory schooling, challenges persist with regard to preschoolers and teenagers. Preschoolers face obstacles due to limited capacities of kindergartens, while teenagers struggle with integration into social collectives, especially when they continue attending online classes in Ukraine. In addition, refugee children experience challenges such as bullying and hostile environments.<sup>27</sup> The need for a safe and supportive educational environment became evident, as well as the need to foster language education and to provide accessible leisure activities to better include children into social groups.

Social cohesion emerged as a critical area that requires reinforcement: 64 per cent of adult refugees have encountered discrimination, most often when looking for housing (29 per cent) and when looking for a job (21 per cent).<sup>28</sup> Local and municipal initiatives must be supported to foster a more inclusive and supportive social environment.

The lack of personnel in mental healthcare poses another challenge. Efforts must be directed into creating safe spaces, community hubs, and activities to improve the well-being of the refugee population. Information on available services should also be better disseminated, as there is an overall lack of awareness among refugee communities. Refugees also reported low awareness of specialized services for victims of domestic and gender-based violence,<sup>29</sup> and further resources need to be directed to address this gap.

Sustaining funding levels to address the increasingly diverse and complex needs of refugees remains a primary challenge. The need for continued support and resources remains critical, ensuring long-term inclusion into society amid changing priorities and potential assistance fatigue.

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<sup>24</sup> Report of PAQ Research from 9 August 2023. Accessible from [pagresearch.cz](https://pagresearch.cz).

<sup>25</sup> Statistic of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.

<sup>26</sup> Report of PAQ Research from 9 August 2023. Accessible from [pagresearch.cz](https://pagresearch.cz).

<sup>27</sup> Only half of Ukrainian children are well integrated. Source: Report of PAQ Research from 27 July 2023. Accessible from [pagresearch.cz](https://pagresearch.cz).

<sup>28</sup> Report of PAQ Research from 9 August 2023. Accessible from [pagresearch.cz](https://pagresearch.cz).

<sup>29</sup> [UNHCR MSNA](https://www.unhcr.org/msna).

### **Successful engagement of Ukrainian professionals in MHPSS team**

A community-based multidisciplinary MHPSS team was created in partnership with Asociace Trigon. The team consists of specialists from mental health centres in Frýdek-Místek, Opava, Havířov, and Ostrava, including psychiatrists, psychologists, psychiatric nurses, social workers, mental health experts, interpreters, and a special educator. The project not only provided a wide range of mental health and psychosocial support services including individual consultations with psychologists, psychiatric services, psychosocial support, case management, leisure and social activities for children and youth, and community-based integration support for adults but also employed Ukrainian mental health professionals. This unique approach enabled Ukrainian professionals to work, learn Czech, and have their qualifications formally recognized while offering mental health support to the refugee community.

### **Being a parent on the way to safety**

Access to early childhood education and care (ECEC) is critical for young refugee children's development, regaining a sense of normality and wellbeing. Importantly, access to ECEC enables mothers to work. Liudmyla and her family used to live in a small town in Lviv region. When the war started, Liudmyla decided to leave with her five-year-old son Yegor. They spent the first month in Warsaw and later moved to Prague. Liudmyla started a new job and enrolled her son in the play and learning group at Kampa Community Centre.

“The first month in Poland was extremely difficult for Yegor. He was sick and had a fever most of the time. When we moved to the Czech Republic, he joined the play and learning group and soon began to feel safer and better.”

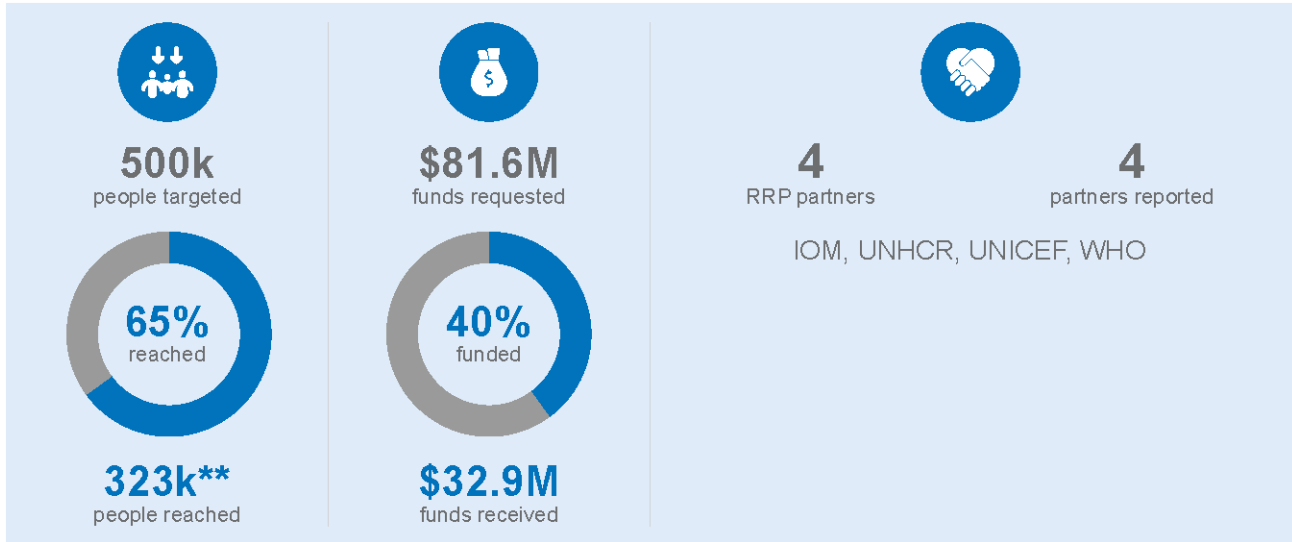
In 2022 and 2023, over 4,000 young children like Yegor accessed learning and care through diverse activities and programmes in over 70 play and learning centres across the Czech Republic that have been supported by various partners, including UNICEF, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Regional Integration Centres, CSO partners, and the Municipality of Prague.

# CZECH REPUBLIC END-OF-YEAR ACHIEVEMENTS (2023)



Within the framework of the 2023 inter-agency Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) for the Ukraine Situation, 4 partners joined forces in Czech Republic, in support of government-led efforts, to provide protection services and multi-sectoral humanitarian assistance to refugees from Ukraine, third country nationals seeking safety and

other persons in need. Partners also focused their activities on promoting the socio-economic inclusion of refugees as well as social cohesion between refugees and their hosts. The figures were reported by RRP partners against the regional RRP indicators.\*



Sector		People reached
<b>Protection</b>	Individuals supported in accessing protection services	<b>277.1k</b>
	Children provided with child protection services	<b>45.9k</b>
	Participants trained on child protection and children's rights	<b>1.6k</b>
	GBV referral pathways established and functional	<b>1</b>
	Individuals reached through community outreach and prevention activities on GBV	<b>84.3k</b>
<b>Livelihoods &amp; Socio-Economic Inclusion</b>	Individuals supported in livelihoods and socio-economic inclusion services and development programmes	<b>17.7k</b>
<b>Cash</b>	Individuals who received cash assistance	<b>2.9k</b>
<b>Health &amp; Nutrition</b>	Consultations provided for mental health and psychosocial support	<b>4.5k</b>
	Individuals supported in accessing health care services	<b>139.7k</b>
	Individuals trained to provide health services to refugees and host populations	<b>209</b>
<b>Education</b>	Children enrolled in formal education in host countries	<b>51.3k</b>
	Children participating in non-formal education programmes	<b>24.5k</b>
<b>Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)</b>	PSEA network members and partner personnel trained on SEA risk mitigation, prevention and response	<b>685</b>
<b>Basic Needs</b>	Individuals who received assistance for basic needs	<b>4.1k</b>

\*A list of implementing partners who reported on behalf of appealing RRP partners is available on the 2023 RRP Reporting dashboard.

\*\*The number of individuals reached is an estimate based on the highest number of individuals reached per activity, per sector and/or per region, to avoid double counting.





## ESTONIA

### Situation Overview

Since 24 February 2022, more than 5.9 million people from Ukraine have sought refuge across Europe. In 2023, Estonia received 56,900 applications for temporary protection as well as 6,366 applications for international protection by Ukrainians. Once temporary or other form of protection is granted, refugees are able to access services such as education, health, and employment.

In 2023, 9,130 Ukrainian citizens were registered in the state education system including primary, secondary and VET or language courses. As the conflict in Ukraine reaches its second-year mark, and looking towards 2024, socio-economic issues have become increasingly the focus of activities of RRP partners in Estonia.

In 2023, the Refugee Response Plan (RRP), led by UNHCR, and comprising the 14 humanitarian partners working together on their funding situation and its impact on programming. The 2023 RRP asked for US\$9.135M for activities in Estonia, of which 29 per cent were funded at year end. The current funding situation indicates that more than half of the appealing partners need to adjust their activities due to funding gaps, with local NGOs being severely affected. The sectors most affected are basic needs, protection as well as livelihood and economic inclusion.

### Highlights and Achievements

The RRP 2023 prioritized the needs of Ukrainians in Estonia and by the end of 2023, around 17,653 individuals had received humanitarian assistance over the course of the year.

Assistance included outreach activities that covered over 6,065 individuals and 510 persons who were provided with legal support, while 115 individuals benefitted from child protection services. Counselling, legal assistance, guidance on procedures and practices in Estonia as well as emotional support services were provided to Ukrainian and other refugees seeking assistance and information. Partners undertook both individual and group counselling for refugees in Estonia. Individual counselling was provided daily in Tallinn and through phone, Viber, Telegram, e-mail, and other digital channels. Group counselling sessions were provided on topics of particular interest, such as Estonian digital services, housing, legal issues, and employment. One partner also created short explanatory videos providing guidance on what steps an individual needs to take when applying for asylum in Estonia and how they can be assisted throughout the process. The videos are available in English with subtitles in English, Russian, Ukrainian, and Estonian.

There was a strong focus on the provision of information, child protection issues, and support services for victims of gender-based violence.

As far as basic needs were concerned, assistance included food, winter clothing, hygiene kits, other non-food items, and humanitarian transport. Around 10,000 individuals were assisted with in-kind food assistance, with a further 5,000 individuals assisted with winter items and clothing as well as hygiene kits. Temporary private accommodation was provided to some 1,516 individuals. Over 357 individuals benefitted from humanitarian transport through Estonia to other European Union countries, and cash assistance.

With 9,130 Ukrainian citizens registered in the Estonian education system, RRP partners supported schools, students, and teachers to better understand the needs of the refugees and the education system in Estonia.

As a result, the collaboration between refugees and their hosts has increased, although more funding and additional awareness and language learning opportunities are needed to ensure successful integration of Ukrainian students and teachers.

In the Livelihoods & Social Inclusion sector, RRP partners catered for around 600 individuals with access to employment and support in livelihoods and socio-economic inclusion services. Estonia has one of the highest employment rates of refugees from Ukraine among all host countries of the Ukraine response, thanks in part to fewer language barriers than in other countries. The RRP partners capitalized on this through entrepreneur programmes, cultural adaptation, and on-the-job language training. Further attention to this area, including language training, is nevertheless needed to assist refugees to fully integrate.

Lastly, RRP Partners provided focused psychosocial activities for individuals who are assisting refugees.

## Gaps and Challenges

Partners have identified a continued need for information about the general organization of health and social services, including about the organization of medical care, finding a family doctor, and access to a doctor.

More guidance and support for refugee parents from Ukraine regarding a variety of issues, including how the child protection system works, questions about guardianship / custody, and awareness-raising about the rules of child-rearing in Estonia, such as positive parenting. For children, materials about losing parents may also be needed.

Partners identify that many refugees from Ukraine have limited knowledge about assistance and services for survivors of GBV and some are not registered for temporary protection. Partners have also identified cases of violence at home, psycho-traumas of losing a loved one, cross-generational violence and domestic violence.

There is a need for additional training for Ukrainian refugee teachers to improve their opportunities in the Estonian education system. The teachers have particularly requested further Estonian language trainings.

The need to have more capacity-building events, such as trainings, workshops and seminars related to Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) still remains and was further highlighted by the MHPSS mapping that WHO and the Ministry of Social Affairs conducted in 2022-2023. During an MHPSS conference panel discussion and during subsequent workshops it was also highlighted that culture exchange events with MHPSS component could be organized. These were not planned during the writing of the 2023 RRP but could be planned.

The basic needs sector has remained underfunded despite the growing needs related to rising prices and housing shortages.

Partners identified that needs for supporting refugees transiting Estonia have decreased due to low numbers of refugees transiting in recent months.

There is a remaining need for language learning opportunities both for adults and children. The Institute of Baltic Studies estimates that the number of available language courses does not correspond to the language learning demand. Language learning opportunities are especially limited outside of Estonian cities and on the islands.

There is also a need for the activities involving interaction of Estonian population and Ukrainian refugees to assist the integration of the newcomers and address social barriers and migration-related biases.



A group of refugees from Ukraine attend an event at the Oandu nature centre, organized by the Estonian Human Rights Centre and the Social Centre of Tallinn City Centre © UNHCR/Max-Michel Kolijn

### **Arvamusfestival**

At the 2023 *Arvamusfestival*, an annual democracy festival held each year in August, a discussion entitled 'Refugees in Estonia Before and After the Full-Scale War in Ukraine: What Has Changed?' was showcased. A dialogue took place between the local community and refugees, featuring Tahsin, an engineer from Türkiye, and Behnam, a film director from Iran. A short overview of the event was published<sup>30</sup>.

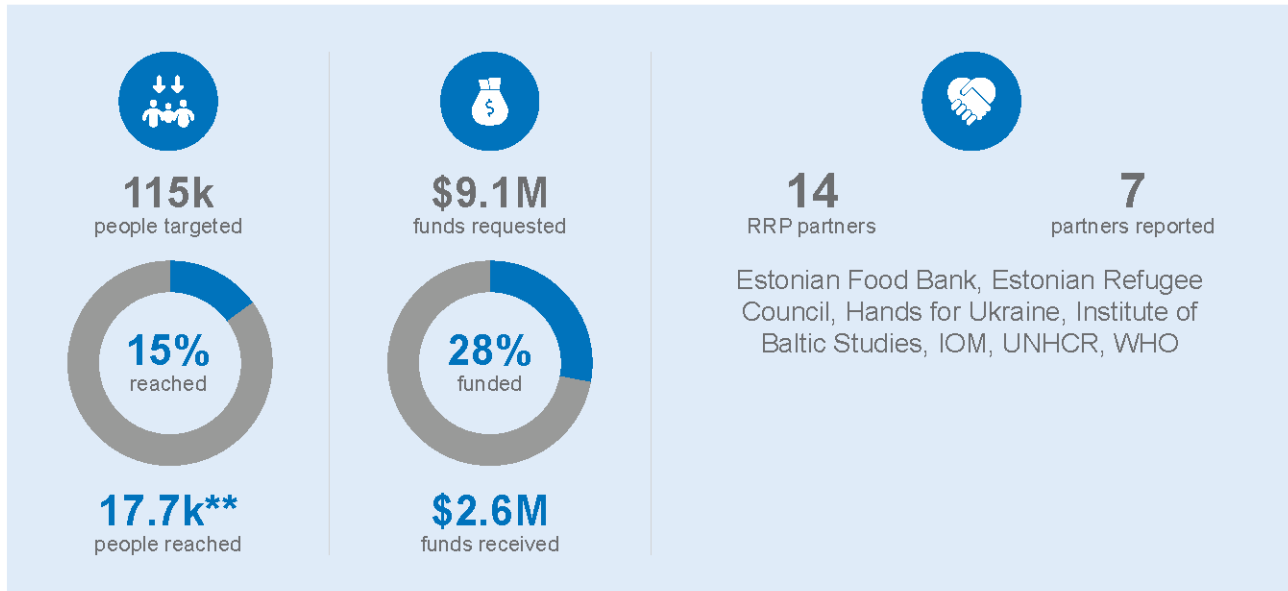
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<sup>30</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/neu/102017-2>



Within the framework of the 2023 inter-agency Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) for the Ukraine Situation, 14 partners joined forces in Estonia, in support of government-led efforts, to provide protection services and multi-sectoral humanitarian assistance to refugees from Ukraine, third country nationals seeking safety and

other persons in need. Partners also focused their activities on promoting the socio-economic inclusion of refugees as well as social cohesion between refugees and their hosts. The figures were reported by RRP partners against the regional RRP indicators.\*



Sector		People reached
Protection	Individuals supported in accessing protection services	6.1k
	Children provided with child protection services	115
Livelihoods & Socio-Economic Inclusion	Individuals supported in livelihoods and socio-economic inclusion services and development programmes	591
Cash	Individuals who received cash assistance	287
Health & Nutrition	Consultations provided for mental health and psychosocial support	150
	Individuals supported in accessing health care services	156
Education	Children participating in non-formal education programmes	20
Basic Needs	Individuals who received assistance for basic needs	17.7k

\*A list of implementing partners who reported on behalf of appealing RRP partners is available on the 2023 RRP Reporting dashboard.

\*\*The number of individuals reached is an estimate based on the highest number of individuals reached per activity, per sector and/or per region, to avoid double counting.



## HUNGARY

### Situation Overview

By the end of 2023, Hungary recorded 41,000 applications for temporary protection (TP) status, along with nearly 27,300 Ukrainian nationals registered under work-related residence permits issued after February 2022.<sup>31</sup> Hungary prolonged the Temporary Protection Directive until March 2025, in line with the EU Council decision, and automatically extended the validity of TP certificates already issued. TP application numbers stabilized throughout 2023, with an average of around 650 new applications per month. First time applications for residence permits by Ukrainian nationals averaged 975 per month in 2023.

Last year, Ukrainian nationals accounted for over 1.5 million border crossings into Hungary and 1.3 million exits to Ukraine through the direct border.<sup>32</sup> The majority are not crossing for the first time or continuing their journey onwards towards Slovakia, Germany, Czechia, and Austria.<sup>33</sup> Only a minority of the crossings are associated with newcomers intending to reside in Hungary, as indicated by the TP numbers.

In 2023, RRP partners provided information and assistance to refugees crossing the border and new arrivals impacted by the armed conflict and depleted resources at border crossing points in Záhony, Beregsurány, Tiszabecs, Lónya and Barabás, as well as the now-closed Budapesti Olimpiai Központ reception centre and emergency shelters in Budapest and throughout the country. Partners also maintained assistance and protection programmes across a network of community centres and mobile interventions ensuring the most vulnerable were provided with complementary basic needs assistance including in the form of vouchers/cash, non-food items, rent support, information and individualized support.

The Hungarian Government grants TP holders a range of support measures to assist them with settling in and integrating into Hungarian society.<sup>34</sup> These benefits include free temporary accommodation, access to healthcare, education, employment, and subsistence allowances. Additionally, free public transportation from the border to/within Budapest was extended for the whole of 2023.<sup>35</sup> In 2023, the Government digitalized services for TP holders, introducing an online information platform<sup>36</sup> in multiple languages, and the possibility for TP holders to obtain online proof of residence in Hungary to ease access to some local services, including health and school enrolment.

However, two years into the conflict, the socio-economic inclusion of vulnerable refugee individuals, including refugees with disabilities, older refugees, ethnic minorities, unemployed refugees, and those with chronic medical conditions, continues to be strained. The prolonged displacement and localized factors, such as rising costs of living and rent, impacted the income and savings of refugees and hindered their sustainable inclusion

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<sup>31</sup> National Directorate-General for Aliens Policing.

<sup>32</sup> Hungarian Central Statistical Office.

<sup>33</sup> According to border monitoring interviews conducted in Ukraine, 60% crossed into Hungary multiple times ([UNHCR IBCP Monitoring Dashboard](#)). This data is corroborated by similar findings of refugees interviewed in 2023 in Hungary, where 45% have been back at least one to Ukraine since displacement. Finally, as per interviews conducted in Ukraine, 44% of refugees crossing to Hungary expressed the intention to transit onwards to western countries ([UNHCR IBCP Monitoring Dashboard](#)).

<sup>34</sup> [Safe in Hungary \(gov.hu\)](#)

<sup>35</sup> The Government of Hungary extended the state of danger until May 2024. It enables the government to pass emergency legislation through decree. The state of danger has been enacted continuously since May 2022.

<sup>36</sup> <https://safeinhungary.gov.hu/hu>



into Hungary, increasing their dependence on government and humanitarian subsidies and assistance. Language barriers and limited access to social protection tools further compounded the difficulties in achieving successful integration. To address these challenges, in 2023, RRP partners focused on complementing government assistance to support the socio-economic inclusion of refugees in Hungary, with efforts targeting, in particular, the most vulnerable groups.

## Highlights and Achievements

In 2023, RRP partners provided comprehensive protection support to refugees in Hungary, both in-country and those in transit, including integrated case management and legal assistance. Nearly 45,600 refugees seeking temporary protection were reached with information about rights and services by RRP partners, mainly in Budapest and at the border crossings. Over 10,600 vulnerable refugees were identified and referred to services based on their needs, and an additional 3,900 were provided with individual counseling sessions on temporary protection. Protection actors conducted multiple trainings with frontline officials, including a series of workshops on the risks of trafficking in human beings in the context of the Ukraine emergency, a safety audit, and offered technical guidance on gender-based violence (GBV) principles, while referral pathways countrywide were updated and made available for case management.<sup>37</sup>

Child protection achievements included updated referral pathways for unaccompanied and separated refugee children, as well as children at risk of trafficking. Partners established similar pathways for children with developmental delays and disabilities. Over 4,200 refugee children received individual case management and specialized child protection services from RRP partners. Safe spaces and child protection hubs across the country operated by RRP partners engaged over 16,600 refugee children in community activities. Additionally, almost 2,500 front liners and professionals took part in capacity-building initiatives to enhance their ability to identify and respond to child protection cases, including 250 law enforcement officials working in border crossing points who were trained on child trafficking.

Cash and voucher assistance served to support the integration efforts of refugees, with over 9,000 households reached in 2023 with multipurpose cash assistance, cash for basic needs, and protection. Partners prioritized technical discussions on Cash and Voucher assistance; key topics included transfer value calculation, deduplication of assistance, and assistance mapping. Winterization Cash Assistance saw harmonized transfer values and successful deduplication through data-sharing agreements.

The Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Task Force significantly boosted frontline actor capacity, training over 700 individuals on PSEA. Jointly developed safeguarding messages for refugees, aid workers, and humanitarian organizations, along with a briefing note, were also published and disseminated in multiple languages.

Throughout 2023, partners have prioritized efforts to support the socio-economic inclusion of refugees in Hungary, with a focus on education (enrolment and attendance in local schools and prevention of dropouts);<sup>38</sup> accommodation (mid to long-term housing options, housing assistance, rental programmes); employment and financial resilience (labor counseling, awareness raising on employment, job fairs and job matching, upskilling, cash assistance); and health and mental health services. In particular, education actors promoted enrolment and attendance of refugee children, including children from the Romani community, for the new school year and organized catch-up and support classes for over 15,700 children. Over 2,150 children received learning

<sup>37</sup> A multi-stakeholder roundtable involved 23 NGOs and civil society organizations sharing experiences in addressing GBV cases in November, while between November and December, an interagency 16-day campaign against gender-based violence engaged 1,500 individuals with 18 events across the country.

<sup>38</sup> 5,014 Ukrainian children are enrolled in 1,525 schools across Hungary for the current school year (2023/24), distributed in kindergartens (19%), primary schools (75%), and secondary schools (6%). The data includes 40% of dual nationals (Ukrainian/Hungarian) from Ukraine. 4,856 Ukrainian refugee students were enrolled in Hungary in the past school year (2022/23; data as of June 2023). Source: Public Education Information System of the State Secretary Office for Public Education, Ministry of Interior in November 2023.

materials and equipment. Additionally, over 1,700 refugee children were supported in enrolling in childcare and kindergarten, facilitating parents' daytime work.

Regarding access to livelihoods, nearly 7,900 refugees received professional, upskills and language training, primarily in Budapest, and over 1,300 received support for job placement, including livelihood counseling. Partners increased efforts to move refugees out of short-term accommodation (less than one month), securing private mid to long-term options for over 5,000 refugees, while over 2,500 received counseling on housing options in Hungary. RRP partners facilitated healthcare access for over 5,600 refugees nationwide and enhanced the skills of 315 health workers dealing with refugees. Mental health and psychosocial support were prioritized, involving over 15 partners who provided over 12,000 focused psychosocial consultations and over 1,150 specialized consultations, and engaged nearly 8,900 refugees in community-based psychosocial activities.

## Gaps and Challenges

In early 2023, access to territory became more restrictive at the border with Ukraine, with the resumption of Schengen entry requirements for third country nationals. These new measures created challenges in access to territory for some individuals seeking safety in Hungary: for example, a number of third country nationals who were otherwise eligible for Temporary Protection were in some cases not allowed to enter Hungary with their Ukrainian family members and were required to return to Ukraine to obtain visas. In addition, upon arrival, TP applicants continue to wait on average 60 days for TP status.

Given the vulnerable refugee profiles in Hungary, it is important to enhance support for refugees with specific needs, ensuring that sustainable social safety nets are available based on needs. Humanitarian support is tailored to complement available state-provided social protection schemes, with a focus on refugees with disabilities, older individuals, refugees with chronic medical conditions, refugees at risk, and children. In addition, as the crisis grows longer, needs have become increasingly diversified and targeted integration support for the most vulnerable is essential to support inclusion.<sup>39</sup>

Despite the encouraging data on the level of employment (71 per cent) and refugees living in private accommodations (60 per cent) in Hungary, integration challenges persist in accessing quality employment, mid to long-term accommodation, and financial independence. Increases in cost of living, reduced opportunities for state benefits, language barriers, lack of access to decent work opportunities all continue to be major hurdles for Ukrainian refugees to meet their basic needs.

Similar challenges also exist in ensuring effective access to public services, such as health care and education. Refugees still report health needs as well as barriers in accessing the needed care, including language, administrative hurdles and costs of specialized healthcare.<sup>40</sup> The lack of information on the health system in Hungary among TP holders and around eligibility of TP holders among service providers in the health care system remains a crucial issue. The lack of updated documents showing the extension of TP is also problematic. Unmet mental health support needs persist among Ukrainian refugees in Hungary with a demand for more focused, specialized, and community-based interventions. Despite RRP partners' MHPSS programmes, obstacles such as stigma, language challenges, and limited information on service providers still hinder access to available support services. Finally, in the education system, bullying, insufficient classroom capacity, and lack of specialized expertise also continue to hinder integration.

RRP organizations continue to offer vital complementary support in protection, basic needs and integration activities. However, they cannot satisfy all needs. In 2023 Hungary's response effort secured funding at 40%, despite the RCF's efforts to mobilize additional local and regional donors. RRP organizations, in particular

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<sup>39</sup> Tailored activities for youth out of employment, education, or training as well as older individuals and persons with disability will be prioritized as well as programming addressing the specific challenges faced by members of the Romani community important in the response.

<sup>40</sup> [MSNA 2023 Hungary](#).

local organizations and refugee and community-based organizations, have struggled to maintain funding levels and a number of partners were forced to reduce their programmes, leading for example to the closure of a number of shelters. This trend is unlikely to reverse and is further compounded by reduced private assistance and a growing aid fatigue. The importance of enhancing financial support for RRP organizations is hence crucial as the crisis enters the third year.

### **Mainstreaming Age, Gender and Diversity through Coordination.**

Cross-cutting issues were integrated through the main coordination groups, producing five advocacy and briefing notes. These principles encompass the commitment to do no harm, facilitate meaningful participation, uphold accountability, and encourage active engagement. The aim of these efforts is to identify and address the specific needs of diverse vulnerable groups and barriers to services, reducing exposure to protection risks and ensuring the full application of protection principles throughout the response. The initiative focused on enhancing the integration of vulnerable refugees ([refugees of Roma background](#), [refugees with disabilities](#)), reinforcing [Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse \(PSEA\)](#), and promoting school enrollment ([cross-sectoral collaboration](#) and [advocacy on enrollment](#)). The efforts facilitated discussions and resource sharing, and deepened the engagement with government and civil society.

### **Social Inclusion and peaceful coexistence.**

In 2023, RRP partners, aligning with Objective 4, significantly bolstered events promoting social cohesion for refugees nationwide in Hungary. Refugee and community-based organizations, joined by the Ukrainian diaspora, played a crucial role in mobilizing communities, solidarity, expertise and resources addressing unique refugee needs. Beyond urban centres, local partnerships were formed, engaging numerous volunteers and amplifying refugee voices. Activities included catch-up classes, language courses, psycho-social support, cultural exchanges, and community awareness events. The Ukrainian diaspora contributed to skills development and networking, specifically supporting Ukrainian refugee teachers and health professionals in adapting to Hungary. Furthermore, RRP partners extended initiatives to the host community, for example fostering inclusive recreational and educational activities with 6,000 Hungarian children accessing child-friendly spaces with refugees. These comprehensive efforts underscored a commitment to social cohesion, inclusion, and holistic community development.



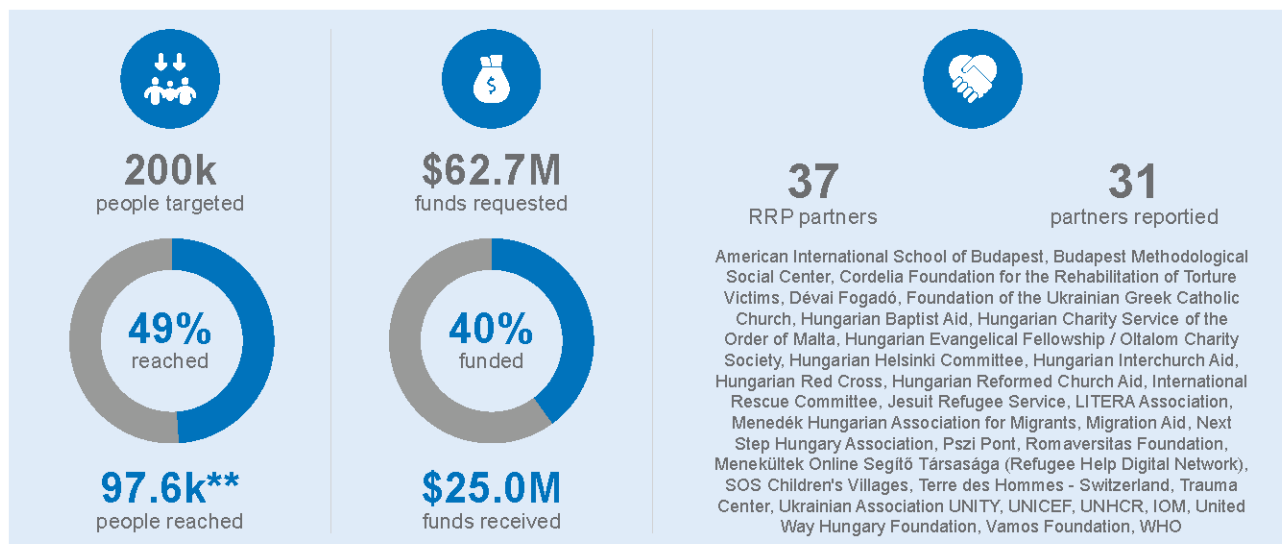
Refugee children in afternoon recreational activities, May 2023. © UnitedWay

# HUNGARY END-OF-YEAR ACHIEVEMENTS (2023)



Within the framework of the 2023 inter-agency Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) for the Ukraine Situation, 37 partners joined forces in Hungary, in support of government-led efforts, to provide protection services and multi-sectoral humanitarian assistance to refugees from Ukraine, third country nationals seeking safety and

other persons in need. Partners also focused their activities on promoting the socio-economic inclusion of refugees as well as social cohesion between refugees and their hosts. The figures were reported by RRP partners against the regional RRP indicators.\*



Sector		People reached
Protection	Individuals supported in accessing protection services	55.4k
	Children provided with child protection services	19.9k
	Participants trained on child protection and children's rights	2.5k
	GBV referral pathways established and functional	1
	Individuals reached through community outreach and prevention activities on GBV	6.2k
Livelihoods & Socio-Economic Inclusion	Individuals supported in livelihoods and socio-economic inclusion services and development programmes	9.5k
Cash	Individuals who received cash assistance	28.2k
	Health & Nutrition	Consultations provided for mental health and psychosocial support
Health & Nutrition	Individuals supported in accessing health care services	5.6k
	Individuals trained to provide health services to refugees and host populations	475
	Education	Children enrolled in formal education in host countries
Education	Children participating in non-formal education programmes	16.5k
	Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)	PSEA network members and partner personnel trained on SEA risk mitigation, prevention and response
Basic Needs	Individuals who received assistance for basic needs	89.7k

\*A list of implementing partners who reported on behalf of appealing RRP partners is available on the 2023 RRP Reporting dashboard.

\*\*The number of individuals reached is an estimate based on the highest number of individuals reached per activity, per sector and/or per region, to avoid double counting.





## LATVIA

### Situation Overview

Since 24 February 2022, more than 5.9 million people from Ukraine have sought refuge across Europe. At year's end 2023, Latvia had received 46,000 applications for temporary protection by Ukrainian citizens. The RRP in 2023 aimed to address the needs of over 33,000 Ukrainians in Latvia who had applied for protection in Latvia. While funding constraints did not allow all partners to fully implement their plans, at year's end, some 23,000 individuals had received humanitarian assistance through UNHCR and its partners. Through the inter-agency coordination platform, led by UNHCR, three UN agencies, two international NGOs and five NGOs, engaged on their funding situation and its impact on programming.

In 2023, Latvia consolidated its response to the influx of refugees from Ukraine. RRP partners were at the forefront of making sure that those arriving from Ukraine were met and given both information and access to services. Often this was facilitated at the Vientuli, Grebneva, Terehova, and Silene border crossing points, amongst others, where RRP partner staff were some of the first contacts.

Holders of temporary protection status had access to healthcare, education, and the labour market, as well as welfare. Support to refugees from Ukraine is granted on the basis of the Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians, which was first adopted in March 2022, and has been extended several times since. Recently, the Government of Latvia again decided to extend its support for refugees from Ukraine and prolonged the Law on Assistance to Ukrainian Civilians until the end of the year. The same level of assistance as in 2023 is expected in 2024. The Government further adopted an Action Plan for 2023 that specified activities and responsible actors for the implementation of the services provided to refugees from Ukraine. The Government had allocated 102 million euros for the implementation of this Action Plan. In 2024, the allocation for the Action Plan is expected to decrease to 70 million euros. RRP required US\$12 million for activities in Latvia, of which 25 per cent was funded by the year's end. Consequently, more than half of the appealing partners needed to adjust their programming due to funding gaps, with local NGOs in particular being severely affected. The sectors most affected were basic needs, protection as well as livelihood and economic inclusion.

As the start of the conflict in Ukraine reaches its second anniversary, and looking towards 2024, socio-economic issues have become increasingly the focus of activities of RRP partners in Latvia. Activities will look further towards strengthening employment, education, and integration opportunities, that further enable self-reliance among refugees and ultimately making them feel embedded within Latvian society.

### Highlights and Achievements

Partners provided support, information, and legal counselling to those who had newly arrived, regarding asylum procedures, access to temporary protection, and access to rights and services, amongst other issues. Protection assistance included outreach activities covering over 10,178 individuals and 413 persons assisted with legal support, including at more than ten accommodation sites for refugees in Riga, Balvi, Saulkrasti, and Ludza. Partners conducted legal counselling on various topics, including access to the asylum procedure, enquiries regarding social benefits, registering an NGO, family law, and employment disputes. Many refugees further had need for psychosocial support, with 1,419 supported with community based psychosocial activities and 169 individuals referred through protection monitoring, while 15 children benefitted from child protection services.

RRP partners provided basic needs to around 23,364 individuals, which included food assistance, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) related services, provision of accommodation, humanitarian transportation, cash/voucher assistance, legal and material assistance, as well as counselling. In 2023, 2,536 vulnerable refugees in transit in the area near the Russian and Belarusian borders were provided with temporary accommodation.

In the education sector and with some 30 per cent of refugees being minors, the continuation of school studies was paramount. The total number of children from Ukraine in Latvia aged between 7 and 17 was estimated at 6,357 according to the Ministry of Education's October figures. At the end of 2023, a total of 3,727 children were enrolled in Latvian educational institutions, including 2,462 aged 7 to 17 (the rest being preschoolers). RRP partners also provided language courses to 201 children. In addition, many children and parents elected to continue education through Ukrainian institutions online.

Livelihoods & Social Inclusion catered for around 1,393 individuals with access to employment and support in livelihoods and socio-economic inclusion services. Partners ran courses, where people could receive up-to-date information on various issues. The issue of the labour market is very relevant: it is important to know how to search for a job, how to analyse vacancies on various portals, and what you need to know about working hours, salary, job duties and rights.

## Gaps and Challenges

Partners highlighted a number of gaps and challenges in the integration processes for Ukrainian refugees. These included social inclusion activities, such as language courses and mentoring programmes for Ukrainian and Lithuanian families. In addition, more effort is needed to raise awareness about refugees from Ukraine and foster social cohesion. Furthermore, there were gaps in the capacity of front-line workers that required building, while more specialists in services are needed.

Cash assistance remained one of the main challenges in 2023, both with actual funding and the reaching of beneficiaries. Limited funding impacted on multi-purpose case assistance, which had to be primarily focussed on single mothers with children and refugees with disabilities. Further, results from an initial cash voucher assistance (CVA) exercise showed that many people were no longer in municipalities and that data-gathering at municipal level required further attention. In addition, refugees appeared to be in need of more information about their rights with regard to receiving benefits.

Due to delays with registration for disability status and limited state resources, support with health care and additional financial support from municipalities does not always reach disabled refugees in a timely manner, thus creating a gap.

The LAMPA Opinion Festival on 9-10 June, saw two organized events, which provided visitors with the chance to watch use virtual reality to illustrate the life of refugees. The NGO "Your Friends" contributed a large tent to host a wide range of activities related to the topic of forced displacement. The event also included a presentation on the global refugee situation, and shared experiences of arriving and re-building their lives in Latvia.

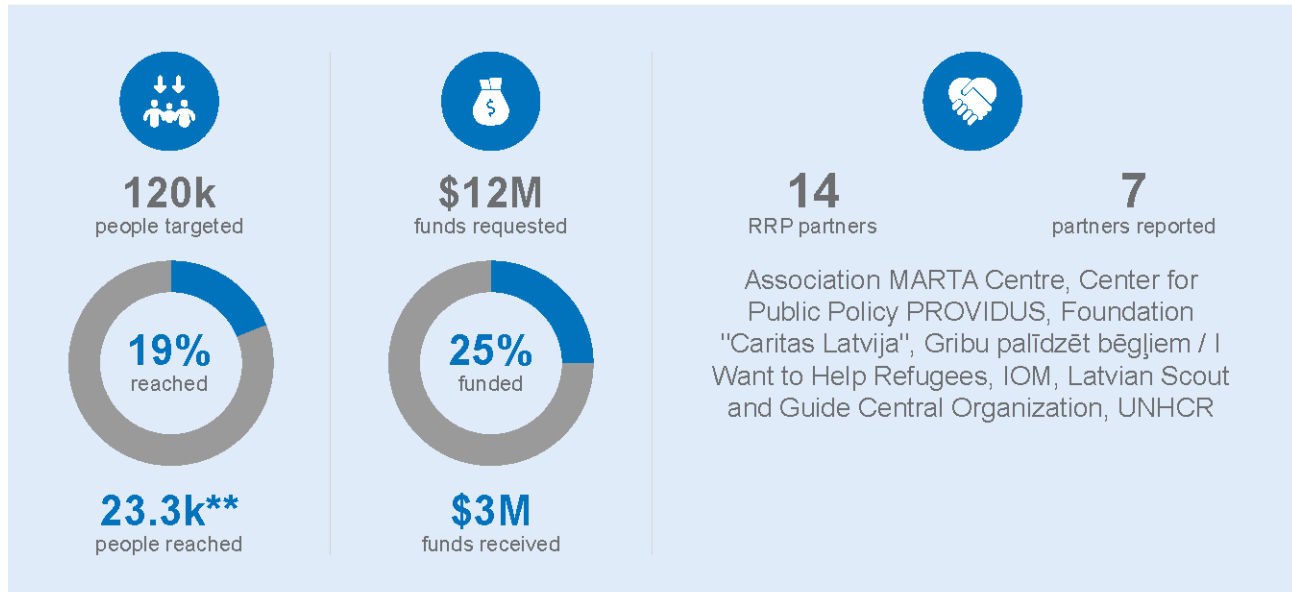


On World Refugee Day, UNHCR and partners organized an event in Riga with refugees from Afghanistan, Ukraine, Syria, Nigeria, Kuwait, Turkey, Iraq and Iran, together with Latvian locals. © UNHCR/Shelter Safe House



Within the framework of the 2023 inter-agency Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) for the Ukraine Situation, 17 partners joined forces in Latvia, in support of government-led efforts, to provide protection services and multi-sectoral humanitarian assistance to refugees from Ukraine, third country nationals seeking safety and

other persons in need. Partners also focused their activities on promoting the socio-economic inclusion of refugees as well as social cohesion between refugees and their hosts. The figures were reported by RRP partners against the regional RRP indicators.\*



Sector		People reached
Protection	Individuals supported in accessing protection services	<b>10.2k</b>
	Children provided with child protection services	<b>15</b>
Livelihoods & Socio-Economic Inclusion	Individuals supported in in livelihoods and socio-economic inclusion services and development programmes	<b>1.7k</b>
	Cash	<b>1.7k</b>
Education	Children participating in non-formal education programmes	<b>201</b>
Basic Needs	Individuals who received assistance for basic needs	<b>23.3k</b>

\*A list of implementing partners who reported on behalf of appealing RRP partners is available on the 2023 RRP Reporting dashboard.

\*\*The number of individuals reached is an estimate based on the highest number of individuals reached per activity, per sector and/or per region, to avoid double counting.



## LITHUANIA

### Situation Overview

Since 24 February 2022, more than 5.9 million people from Ukraine have sought refuge across Europe. As of December 2023, Lithuania had received 52,300 applications for temporary protection by Ukrainian citizens.

In 2023, the inter-agency coordination platform, led by UNHCR, and comprising the 10 humanitarian partners of the Refugee Response Plan (RRP), worked together to raise funds and align their programming. The 2023 RRP required US\$17.8 million for activities in Lithuania, of which 46 per cent were funded.

At the start of the year and in close coordination with the relevant authorities, RRP partners were present at the border to assist with the arrival of refugees from Ukraine, with the aim of monitoring access to asylum procedures, including the primary (registration) interviews, and ensuring that access to services is available and that all procedures were commensurate with EU standards.

Several Humanitarian Aid Centres supported refugees in 2023. Such centres provided refugees from Ukraine support for their basic needs, including clothing, footwear and housing materials. These centres are also one-stop information hubs for social assistance, finding jobs and emotional support.

As the conflict in Ukraine reaches its second-year mark, and looking towards 2024, socio-economic issues have become increasingly the focus of activities of RRP partners in Lithuania. Strengthening employment, education, and integration opportunities, all of which further enable self-reliance among refugees and ultimately making them feel included within Latvian society, are all activities that will receive greater focus.

### Highlights and Achievements

The RRP 2023 prioritized the needs of Ukrainians in Lithuania, with 52,300 individuals applying for temporary protection. As of the fourth quarter of 2023, around 25,778 individuals had already received humanitarian assistance.

Around 15,906 individuals were provided with protection-related services, with 14,010 included in outreach activities and 839 provided with support through helplines and 96 with legal assistance. Lawyers made regular visits to accommodation facilities to provide legal counselling. Community coordinators facilitated communication with refugees, provided support to social counsellors and, together with volunteers organized group information sessions on specific issues including healthcare, social benefits, labour rights, trafficking and other forms of GBV, non-discrimination, protection of children's rights. Partners also organized other community engagement activities, such as community meetings, self-help groups, language clubs, and meetings with public authorities, local organizations and other stakeholders. These activities helped strengthen community-based protection mechanisms and facilitated access to rights in host municipalities.

Psycho-social support was provided to 627 individuals and 81 individuals were referred through protection monitoring mechanism. Lastly, RRP Partners also provided Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) to 3,373 individuals.

Ukrainian children were welcomed at children day centres and provided with equal services as the children of host community. In addition, the groups of unaccompanied and separated children from Ukraine relocated to national institutions and were provided with assistance and psychosocial support. Child protection services



were provided to 3,498 children, with 2,348 receiving MHPSS, 322 having access to recreational services, and 144 being assisted at safe spaces.

The protection risks to the population in transit are significant and under a project aimed at the prevention of Trafficking 100 people received training, vocational education and language support. Under a project supporting access to protection services, 501 individuals accessed various. A total of 81 people were referred for specialized services.

Refugees from Ukraine had their basic needs met through food assistance, hygiene kits, blankets/shelter kits, multi-purpose cash, rental assistance and non-food items. A total of 15,550 individuals received food assistance and 16,028 were assisted with the provision of hygiene kits and first-aid kits. Cash assistance was provided to 11,415 individuals. Around 154 individuals benefitted from rental assistance and NFIs.

In the Livelihoods & Social Inclusion sector around 7,331 individuals were assisted, among whom 6,928 with integration services and 100 individuals with language training. As part of those integration services, refugees familiarize themselves with the law and duties in the country of Lithuania and learn about topics such as education, employment, and health.

## Gaps and Challenges

RRP partners indicated that there were ongoing needs in relation to integration processes for Ukrainian refugees. These needs included language courses, mentoring programmes for Ukrainian and Lithuanian families and social inclusion activities. The capacity building of front-line workers and service specialists also needs development. Some partners report that funding constraints have meant that they are not able to implement all the activities related to multi-purpose cash assistance, self-employment, skills development, and mentorship. Insufficient financing is also preventing implementation of a full-scale sustainable housing programme – providing refugees with resources to cover their deposit and/or insurance. The funding situation severely affected local NGOs.

Identified gaps in the education system which would allow educational professionals to obtain the knowledge on migration trends, modalities, human rights and cultural awareness are not being addressed due to insufficient financial resources.

Under health, one identified gap is the provision of healthcare support for refugees who have a legal status in Lithuania which does not allow them to receive free health services. UNHCR's protection profiling and monitoring exercise showed that healthcare was a need for 31 per cent of respondents.

Regarding disabilities, it was noted that foreign citizens do not have access to determination of intellectual/psychosocial disability due to unavailability of required tests in different languages. Furthermore, it was noted that citizens of Ukraine can access disability determination or recognition procedures only if they are beneficiaries of temporary protection, but not if they have temporary resident status on other grounds (i.e., work, study, family reunification, etc.).



Children from Ukraine rehearsing in music classes in Kaunas, Lithuania, organized by UNHCR's partner Artscape in cooperation with Center for Cultures of Various Nations. © Artscape/Zura Basheleishvili

Under the project Fostering refugee and immigrant integration at the local level (For-In)<sup>41</sup>, launched by the Nordic Council of Ministers and the UNHCR representation for the Nordic and Baltic countries, RRP Partner Diversity Development Group conducted a training in the municipality of Šiauliai (northern Lithuania). During the training, they introduced a methodology the aim of which is to strengthen the capacities of the municipal authorities and other local actors to involve immigrants and refugees in policy planning, co-design and co-implementation; and to strengthen the capacities of immigrants and refugees to develop communities and self-representation structures, to increase their sense of belonging and be actively involved.

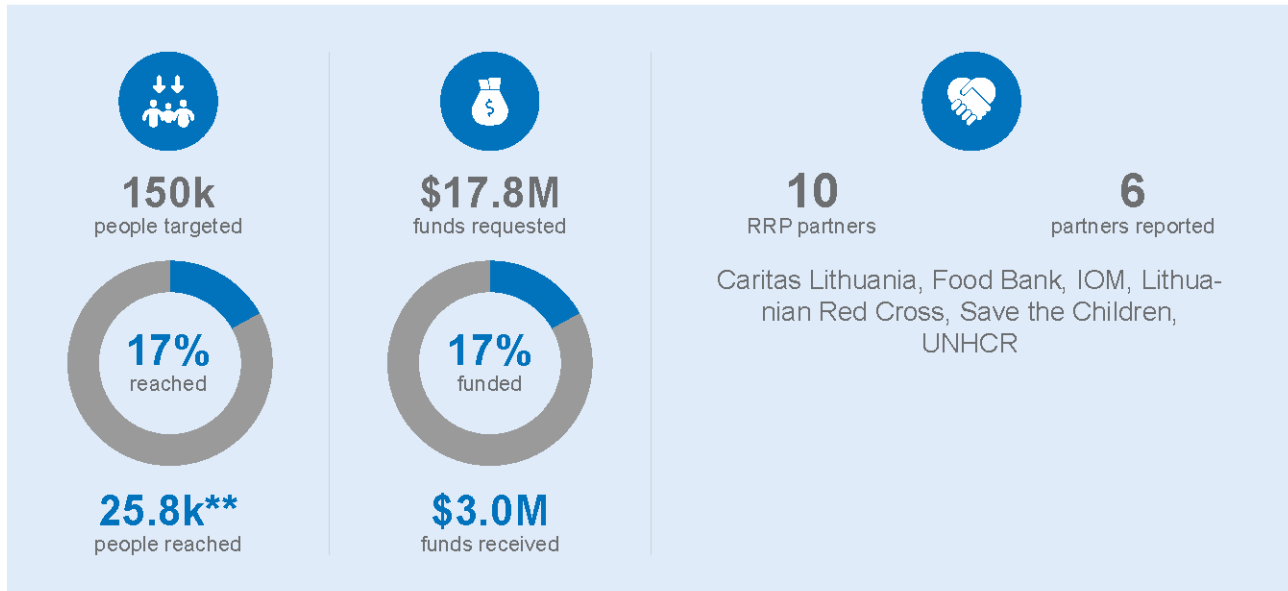
In September, RRP partner NGO Artscape held the opening 'safe space' at the Foreigners' Registration Centre in Pabrade. The safe space, or 'house of creative missions' as it is also referred to, give residents an opportunity to enjoy some privacy and quiet time. To arrange the space, Artscape painted a refugee housing unit (RHU), which forms the actual safe space, and decorated the inside together with the residents of the centre.

<sup>41</sup> [https://www.diversitygroup.lt/fwp\\_portfolio/for-in-project/](https://www.diversitygroup.lt/fwp_portfolio/for-in-project/)



Within the framework of the 2023 inter-agency Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) for the Ukraine Situation, 10 partners joined forces in Lithuania, in support of government-led efforts, to provide protection services and multi-sectoral humanitarian assistance to refugees from Ukraine, third country nationals seeking safety and

other persons in need. Partners also focused their activities on promoting the socio-economic inclusion of refugees as well as social cohesion between refugees and their hosts. The figures were reported by RRP partners against the regional RRP indicators.\*



Sector		People reached
Protection	Individuals supported in accessing protection services	15.9k
	Children provided with child protection services	3.5k
Livelihoods & Socio-Economic Inclusion	Individuals supported in livelihoods and socio-economic inclusion services and development programmes	7.3k
Cash	Individuals who received cash assistance	11.4k
Health & Nutrition	Consultations provided for mental health and psychosocial support	3.4k
Basic Needs	Individuals who received assistance for basic needs	25.8k

\*A list of implementing partners who reported on behalf of appealing RRP partners is available on the 2023 RRP Reporting dashboard.

\*\*The number of individuals reached is an estimate based on the highest number of individuals reached per activity, per sector and/or per region, to avoid double counting.



## REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

### Situation Overview

Since February 24, 2022, the Republic of Moldova (hereafter referred to as Moldova) has seen a total of 1,003,478 arrivals from Ukraine. As of end 2023, the number of individuals who arrived from Ukraine as well as Ukrainians who arrived over the air or from Romania and remained in Moldova totalled 129,753. Among these, 120,693 are Ukrainian refugees, accounting for 93 per cent of the total.

Most Ukrainian refugees are women and children, comprising 81 per cent of the refugee population (37 percent women, 21 percent girls, and 23 percent boys). By the end of December, out of the total population mentioned above, 36,802 people had applied for temporary protection (TP), of whom 28,369 received the status, including 8,515 children. In addition to TP holders, over 8,000 refugees from Ukraine have regularized their stay in Moldova either through the asylum system or by obtaining residence permits for work, education, or family ties.

Despite the compounding crises affecting the country, Moldova has granted Ukrainian refugees access to a wide range of services and rights. These include the right to work, access to education, and emergency and primary health care, as well as a certain level of access to social protection services. This has been made possible through the activation of the TP regime, effective since March 2023.

In 2023, government efforts were supported by 73 RRP partners, including 24 national/local civil society organizations. The 2023 RRP successfully assisted over 159,091 individuals. These efforts were coordinated within the framework of the Refugee Coordination Forum (RCF), established in March 2022 by the Prime Minister's Office and UNHCR. In 2023, the RCF actively supported the National Inter-Ministerial Commission on Migration and Asylum as an inclusive government-led platform for policy development and public consultation.

At the local level, the response was coordinated in close collaboration with local public authorities and partners through eight Local Refugee Coordination Forums, covering the main areas hosting refugees in Moldova.

In line with the Global Compact for Refugees, Moldova's response has been characterized by a whole-of-society approach, supported by strong international solidarity, as evidenced by the commitments made by the Government of Moldova at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum held in Geneva in the areas of socio-economic inclusion, social protection and child rights, inclusion in national statistical systems, protection from gender-based violence, education, documentation, and statelessness. The leadership of the Moldovan Government at all levels, together with strong support from partners and the international community, has laid the groundwork for important results, contributing not only to the protection and inclusion of refugees in the country but also to the 2030 Agenda and key development objectives set in national plans, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

### Highlights and Achievements

In 2023, RRP partners reported reaching 159,910 individuals, of whom 50 per cent were women, 22 per cent men, 15 per cent girls, and 13 per cent boys. Of this total, 51,239 were members of the host community. Support included legal assistance for 68,068 individuals, Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance (MPCA) for 86,219 refugee individuals and 46,262 individual Moldovan hosting family members, assistance for 55,824 children

and caregivers who accessed MHPSS services, including from Blue Dots and other child-friendly spaces, gender-based violence-related support for 39,983 individuals including through Orange Safe Spaces, and primary healthcare support for 37,838 individuals.

A significant milestone in 2023 was the activation of the TP regime, providing refugees and certain third-country nationals with a more stable and predictable legal status. Throughout the year, RRP partners engaged with the Government in advocacy to improve the TP legal framework on issues such as proof of residence, accessibility, and awareness of registration procedures and access to associated rights.

Another important achievement was the simplification of school enrolment procedures for Ukrainian children by the Ministry of Education and Research (MER) with the support of RRP partners. Revised instructions on enrolment procedures were released by MER clarifying that Ukrainian children, as well as other children from war-torn countries, can enrol in Moldovan schools regardless of their legal status.

In health care, coordination with the National Health Insurance Company (NIHC) allowed for the review of the health financing and financial protection mechanisms to ensure equitable access to health care services for TP holders. This resulted in 37,838 primary health care consultations provided for refugees from Ukraine, including 31,944 for women and 2,961 for children. Additionally, 783 cancer patients received treatment, 63 dialysis sessions were provided, and diabetes care was given to 675 refugees.

RRP partners collaborated closely with the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection to offer refugees temporary accommodation and long-term housing solutions. They supported the operation of 44 Refugee Accommodation Centres (RACs), providing shelter to more than 2,900 refugees, and supplied 157,000 meals to refugees (including at the border points) and vulnerable members of the host community. A key part of adapting the response to the evolving situation was the consolidation of the RACs and the recalibration of services in border areas. This strategy maximized resource utilization and enabled a reallocation of efforts to areas needing more support, including outreach in rural areas and initiatives focused on inclusion.

An important aspect of the 2023 refugee response was the continuation of the cash assistance programmes in close coordination with the Government of the Republic of Moldova. A winter support program provided 800 MDL (~ 45 USD) monthly to both refugees and vulnerable Moldovan households during the winter months. A comprehensive Market Assessment informed these efforts. To harmonize interventions, the Common Cash Facility Approach was adopted, introducing the Refugee Assistance Information System (RAIS) for better collaboration and accountability, with 10 partners joining by year-end.

## Gaps and Challenges

Nine months after the implementation of the TP regime, 28,369 individuals had obtained this status by December 31, 2023, representing 23.5 per cent of Ukrainians residing in Moldova, while approximately 10,000 have obtained other forms of legal status, including residence permits (approximately 7,000), status through the asylum system (asylum-seeker, recognized refugees or persons granted humanitarian protection) or confirmation of Moldovan nationality (about 2,000). This accounts for approximately 55 per cent of the refugee population staying in Moldova for over 90 days (approximately 70,000), indicating that, at a minimum, the remaining 45 per cent are in the country without legal status.

In 2023, Moldova's child protection system faced challenges due to limited financial and human resources, impacting its ability to assist vulnerable households and children. While identifying and referring at-risk children at border crossings was largely successful, strengthening the identification process for children who become unaccompanied or separated within Moldova, especially in the Transnistrian region, is necessary.

Access to services for = survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) remains inconsistent. Challenges include service providers' capacity gaps in adhering to a survivor-centred approach and a lack of confidential entry points for survivors. Survivors' fear of retaliation, exposure, and stigmatization exacerbate these barriers. There is a pressing need for standardized GBV case management and an information system to safely collect data on GBV trends for informed programming.



Despite ongoing efforts to increase school enrolment, the rate of Ukrainian children enrolled in Moldovan schools remains low (5 per cent in total). Primary reasons for this include parental preference for the Ukrainian online curriculum and language barriers. Although it is believed many children are engaged in online learning, there is no system to track their attendance or learning outcomes.

Employment remains a major challenge for refugees. As of 31 December 2023, 1,283 people are officially employed according to the National Employment Agency. Employment barriers include structural issues like limited childcare, language barriers, and wage discrepancies. There is also a mismatch between refugees' job preferences and profiles, and the local labour market.

As to health care, one of the major issues is the lack of clarity regarding entitlements and procedures for accessing medical care, leading to delays and difficulties in receiving the necessary medical attention. The health services available are limited to emergency and primary care, with some specialized services. Expanding the scope of health services for both TP and non-TP holders is crucial to ensure comprehensive coverage and equitable access to essential medical care, including essential medicines.

Given Moldova's unique situation as a non-EU country with a significant poverty rate and limited resources, integrating refugees into government-granted social assistance programs will require medium to long-term support and close coordination between humanitarian and development actors. Despite these challenges, the Government remains committed to providing basic social protection to refugees. International solidarity, as demonstrated through the Moldova Support Platform, is crucial to ensuring the sustainability of the transition towards greater inclusion of refugees. This support will enable refugees to actively contribute to Moldova's development and the communities hosting them. It will also bolster Moldova's efforts in undergoing crucial reforms aimed at alleviating poverty and advancing socio-economic development.

### **Gender Accountability Framework**

In September 2023, the Gender Accountability Framework (GAF) was deployed in Moldova to assess humanitarian actors' effectiveness in promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls. Led by the RCF Gender Taskforce in coordination with sectoral working groups, the GAF was adapted to the Moldovan context, and comprised 32 criteria. The assessment revealed that the Moldovan response fully satisfied 44 per cent and partially met 47 per cent of the GAF criteria, demonstrating a robust commitment to addressing gender gaps within the response. Nonetheless, it also underscored areas for improvement, including the need to strengthen overall capacity on gender equality among RRP partners and across sectors. The outcomes of the GAF exercise have contributed to shaping the 2024 Refugee Response Plan and have been integrated in global monitoring initiatives concerning gender accountability.

## Pathways to Inclusion

Olga Ruda, a 34-year-old Roma refugee, fled to Moldova with her husband and their nine children, seeking safety. Despite facing the challenge of illiteracy, Olga's family quickly adapted to their new environment. Motivated by their parents, seven of their children enrolled in literacy classes at the Refugee Accommodation Center (RAC), where they are staying. Alexei, Veaceslav, Mikola, Ilona, Sofia, Artur, and Arsen are not only learning to read and write in Romanian but are also engaging actively in classroom discussions. Meanwhile, two other children are continuing their education through online Ukrainian classes. Their educational journey inspired their parents to start learning Romanian, breaking the family's cycle of illiteracy. Through the Roma Task Force, RRP partners collaborate with Roma refugees and host communities to ensure that no one is left behind.



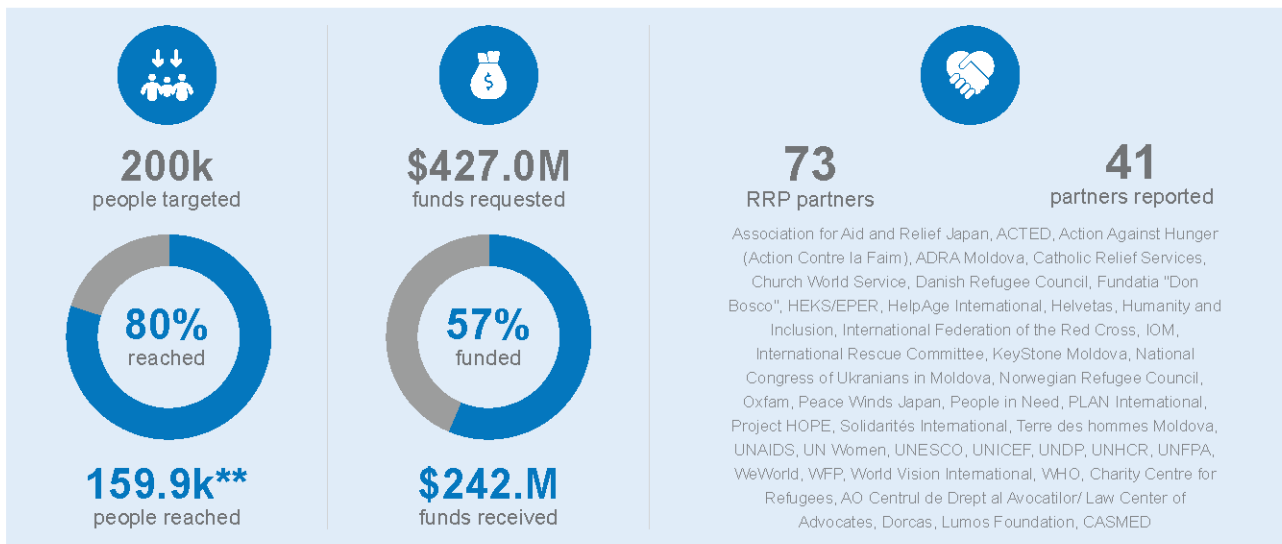
In the preschool in Palanca village, Stefan Vodă, Moldovan and Ukrainian children participate in educational activities using LEGO, provided by UNICEF. © UNICEF/UNI403034/Pirozzi.

# MOLDOVA END-OF-YEAR ACHIEVEMENTS (2023)



Within the framework of the 2023 inter-agency Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) for the Ukraine Situation, 73 partners joined forces in Moldova, in support of government-led efforts, to provide protection services and multi-sectoral humanitarian assistance to refugees from Ukraine, third country nationals seeking safety and

other persons in need. Partners also focused their activities on promoting the socio-economic inclusion of refugees as well as social cohesion between refugees and their hosts. The figures were reported by RRP partners against the regional RRP indicators.\*



Sector		People reached	
Protection	Individuals supported in accessing protection services	98.6k	
	Children provided with child protection services	59.7k	
	Participants trained on child protection and children's rights	476	
	Individuals reached through community outreach and prevention activities on GBV	5.6k	
Livelihoods & Socio-Economic Inclusion	Individuals supported in livelihoods and socio-economic inclusion services and development programmes	3.4k	
Cash	Individuals who received cash assistance	124.8k	
	Health & Nutrition	Consultations provided for mental health and psychosocial support	35.2k
		Individuals supported in accessing health care services	20.8k
	Individuals trained to provide health services to refugees and host populations	4.4k	
Education	Children enrolled in formal education in host countries	2.3k	
	Children participating in non-formal education programmes	18.4k	
Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)	PSEA network members and partner personnel trained on SEA risk mitigation, prevention and response	1.3k	
Basic Needs	Individuals who received assistance for basic needs	118.6k	

\*A list of implementing partners who reported on behalf of appealing RRP partners is available on the 2023 RRP Reporting dashboard.

\*\*The number of individuals reached is an estimate based on the highest number of individuals reached per activity, per sector and/or per region, to avoid double counting.



## POLAND

### Situation Overview

Amid concerns of a significant refugee influx from Ukraine in late 2022 and the early months of 2023, driven by attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure and harsh weather conditions, the movements recorded did not reach levels seen during the initial escalation of the conflict in early 2022. Throughout the year, regular movements between Ukraine and Poland persisted, often maintaining a balance between people entering and leaving Poland. A July 2023 Intention Survey<sup>42</sup> revealed that over 70 per cent of respondents expressed hope to return to Ukraine one day. The UNHCR's stance on return reiterated the importance of voluntary return as a fundamental right, with considerations for safeguards in the context of returning to Ukraine. Data from the October Protection Monitoring<sup>43</sup> exercise highlighted that the prevalence of larger families, including single mothers with dependents, and families with members with serious medical conditions were more prevalent in the early phases of displacement, while there is a significant increase of prevalence of single adults among those who have arrived more recently. Vulnerabilities of the refugee population coming from eastern Ukraine are more complex and linked in some cases with status, documentation and risks of statelessness. The vast majority of refugees continue to be women and children, with a slight increase on adult men among new arrivals. Data from Poland's PESEL registration system indicated that over 90 per cent of refugees were women, children, and older individuals, with 37 per cent being children under 18 and 63 per cent being female.

Despite strong solidarity from Polish society following the escalation of the conflict, fewer Poles believed that Ukrainian refugees required assistance, as indicated by a survey conducted by the Polish Economic Institute<sup>3</sup>. Social cohesion needed monitoring as tensions with host communities were reported by a third of refugee households. Despite strong solidarity from Polish society following the escalation of the conflict, fewer Poles believed that Ukrainian refugees required assistance, as indicated by a survey conducted by the Polish Economic Institute<sup>44</sup>. Accommodation remained a central issue, with approximately 7% of refugees indicating that they resided in collective sites.<sup>45</sup> Inclusion efforts, including job activation, policy changes to enable employment, access to administrative services, education, childcare, and Polish language learning, are crucial for the successful inclusion of Ukrainian refugees.

The 2023 Multi-Sectorial Needs Assessment<sup>46</sup> revealed that 82 per cent of households reported unmet needs. Many refugee children still did not attend Polish schools, with low enrollment persisting in 2023, likely due to participation in online classes in Ukraine. A September 2023 report from Save the Children and IMPACT<sup>47</sup> initiatives emphasized children's need for better access to extracurricular activities, especially sports, and increased leisure time. While psychosocial concerns negatively affected both children and caregivers, only a few sought mental health and psychosocial services (MHPSS).

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<sup>42</sup> <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/101782>

<sup>43</sup> <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/104584>

<sup>44</sup> <https://pie.net.pl/en/80-of-refugees-from-ukraine-see-a-positive-attitude-towards-them-among-poles/>

<sup>45</sup> <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/104427>

<sup>46</sup> <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/104427>

<sup>47</sup> [Save the Children and Impact Initiatives, Experiences, Needs and Aspirations of Children Adolescents and Caregivers displaced from Ukraine, September 2023](#)

The parliamentary election in 2023 resulted in a change of Government at the end of the year. Among several issues, the new Government, in collaboration with Parliament, will have to take several important decisions with an impact on the situation of Ukrainian refugees including extending through a legislative amendment the Temporary Protection Directive and align its duration with the European Council decision (March 2025).

## Highlights and Achievements

In May 2023, the Protection and Shelter Sectors initiated a joint plan, issuing Guidance to ensure minimum standards for collective sites and communal housing. Aligned with Polish and EU legislation, the technical framework was disseminated through regional authorities via the Ministry of Interior, providing a contribution to effective accommodation management and support for refugees. In September a mapping of activities supporting refugees willing to leave collective sites was conducted, with information on more than 390 activities from 50 partners. The information was consolidated into infographics, providing a useful tool to understand areas of intervention, location, and the main actors involved.

Early in 2023, a joint mechanism was developed by the Protection Monitoring Task Force to track protection incidents. Focused on issues like the withdrawal of temporary protection status, social benefit reductions, and eviction risks, the tool included a referral mechanism to support affected individuals. It served as robust evidence for advocacy with authorities, enhancing the protection framework.

Significant strides were made in the Economic Inclusion Sector, particularly in language training and increased access to financial products and banking services. Integration centres across the country played a crucial role in providing job counselling, career advice, and facilitating connections with employers. Job fairs organized by RRP partners and authorities further bolstered economic inclusion initiatives.

The Health Sector reported comprehensive mental health and psychosocial support efforts, with a collaborative effort with the Clinical Management of Survivors of Rape and Intimate Partner Violence taskforce positively impacting survivors of GBV.

Within the Basic Needs Sector, collaboration with international and local organizations ensured the provision of essential items to refugees living in a situation of vulnerability, including dignity kits, winter clothing, bedding, heating devices, and partitions. Cash support, guided by MSNA results, targeted specific needs and supported government-led responses, complementing local services. The Cash Working Group strengthened coordination with various sectors, producing frameworks for targeted cash, alignment options on social protection, a Post Distribution Monitoring framework, and updated transfer values.

The Shelter, Housing & Accommodation Sector made strategic efforts to address critical gaps in housing and accommodation solutions. Diverse modalities, including housing information assistance and cash for rent, proved instrumental in navigating economic challenges. Collaborative guidelines with the Protection Sector set benchmarks for assistance delivery in collective centres, enhancing coordination with the Ministry of Interior.

The collaboration between government authorities and humanitarian partners has been crucial in navigating challenges and fostering impactful solutions.

At the field level, exchange of information, communication and operational interagency coordination was improved through several local coordination mechanisms – with UNHCR leading the coordination efforts in Krakow, Rzeszow, and Lublin, and supporting local government coordination efforts in Warsaw. Through these mechanisms, UNHCR ensured effective operational coordination through service mapping of activities, development of contingency planning, and facilitation of prompt and efficient communication between RRP partners and Government counterparts.

## Gaps and Challenges

The Economic Inclusion Sector in Poland continued to identify challenges in the provision of comprehensive language training to refugees, particularly within technical and professional domains. Persistent gaps arise



from systemic issues within the banking sector, especially in the low-income segment, hindering refugees' access to financial products and banking services and limiting their economic opportunities.

In the Health Sector, partners grappled with financial constraints, leading to the discontinuation of psychological assistance provided by RRP partners. Securing funds for mental health support became ever more challenging as collaborators discontinued aid due to funding shortages. Uncertainties about program availability in 2024 persists, and gaps in mental health services are exacerbated by a lack of Ukrainian-speaking professionals. The growing demand for services exceeds current capacity, particularly for extended free-of-charge medical services, posing a challenge with current resources.

Basic Needs partners reported continuous struggles for Ukrainian refugees to meet their basic needs and achieve self-reliance, despite legal provisions granting access to social benefits and employment. Language barriers, lack of relevant work experience, low wages, and insufficient childcare services limited opportunities for gainful employment. The increased cost of living, rising energy and accommodation prices, and additional winter-related needs further undermined the ability of refugees to benefit from safety nets and be fully included in the host society.

The high inflation rate in Poland prompted the Cash Working Group (CWG) to revise the transfer value of Multipurpose Cash Assistance. The decrease in funding for the humanitarian response significantly impacted the number of persons receiving cash assistance.

Access to social protection in Poland remains not fully understood, especially by vulnerable Ukrainians facing difficulties accessing these services. Findings from the MSNA indicated complex household dynamics, with 49 per cent of households including a member with chronic illness, 42 per cent consisting of single caregivers with dependents, and 5 per cent having household members with disabilities, which illustrates social protection needs. The absence of a national governmental level shelter strategy hindered alignment between RRP partners and government-led activities in the Shelter and Accommodation Sector. Limited availability of comprehensive information on critical shelter aspects, such as site mapping data, further limited the coordination process, impacting the Sector's ability to provide essential services.

Limited access to information about statistical data on collective sites presented a challenge in mapping all the facilities and addressing the needs of refugees.

## Achievements:

### Data-Driven Advocacy

As part of its continuous efforts to strengthen protection analysis and joint advocacy, in October 2023, the Protection Sector issued a joint protection analysis<sup>48</sup>, which includes detailed information on the needs and protection risks affecting refugees from Ukraine and provides concrete recommendations to policy makers, legislators and the broader humanitarian community around thematic areas, including withdrawal of protection status, prevention and response to gender violence, non-discrimination, prevention of labour exploitation and of human trafficking.

### Coordination for Inclusive Communities

The Local Refugee Coordination Forum and the Municipality of Rzeszow jointly organized a Social and Economic Inclusion Workshop, with the participation of refugees, IOM, Caritas, PRO-FIL and PSAR, and the municipal cultural institution Estrada Rzeszowska. The workshop engaged refugee participants to share their insights on challenges and opportunities related to their socio-economic inclusion in the Podkarpackie region. The findings from the workshop will serve as guidance to different stakeholders' socioeconomic inclusion activities, and they will also feed into the strategy for the inclusion of refugees in Podkarpackie.

### Building National PSEA Expertise:

The PSEA Network trained over 120 law enforcement officers. The interagency collaboration, which included UNHCR, IOM, and Interpol's Project Soteria Team, contributed to the success of the initiative. Another achievement was the creation of a national pool of SEA investigators, trained by the global consulting agency OSACO. This effort support smaller organizations without internal capacities for independent, transparent, survivor-centered, and trauma-oriented investigations into SEA incidents.

## Challenges:

### Challenges of Temporary Protection

A considerable challenge surfaced with the ambiguity surrounding the loss and the length of legal temporary protection status. At the one hand, refugees crossing the border to Ukraine on a temporary basis continued to face the loss of status and social benefits, and on the other hand the unclear future of the status created a barrier for companies to invest in long-term employee development initiatives. The lack of clarity in the legal framework hindered strategic planning and deterred businesses from committing to sustained investments in their workforce. This uncertainty not only affected organizational strategies but also discouraged employees from engaging in long-term perspectives for their professional growth. Addressing this challenge necessitates a concerted effort to provide clearer and more predictable legal provisions, fostering a stabler protection environment that is conducive to economic inclusion.

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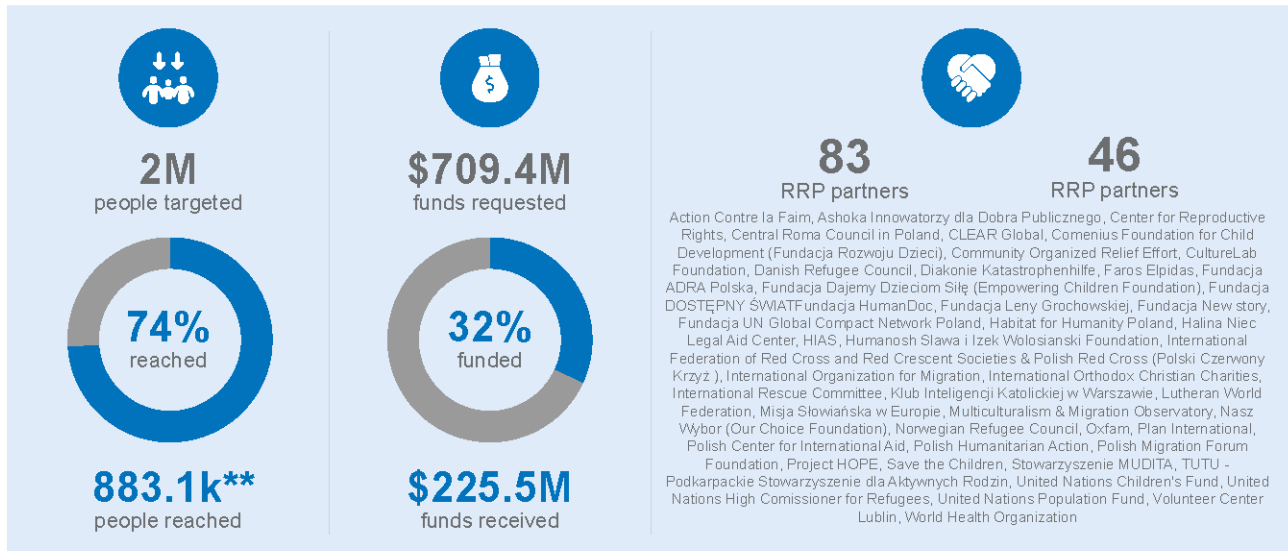
<sup>48</sup> [Joint Protection Analysis](#)

# POLAND END-OF-YEAR ACHIEVEMENTS (2023)



Within the framework of the 2023 inter-agency Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) for the Ukraine Situation, 83 partners joined forces in Poland, in support of government-led efforts, to provide protection services and multi-sectoral humanitarian assistance to refugees from Ukraine, third country nationals seeking safety and

other persons in need. Partners also focused their activities on promoting the socio-economic inclusion of refugees as well as social cohesion between refugees and their hosts. The figures were reported by RRP partners against the regional RRP indicators.\*



Sector		People reached
Protection	Individuals supported in accessing protection services	81k
	Children provided with child protection services	258.9k
	Participants trained on child protection and children's rights	3.7k
	GBV referral pathways established and functional	9
	Individuals reached through community outreach and prevention activities on GBV	313.1k
Livelihoods & Socio-Economic Inclusion	Individuals supported in livelihoods and socio-economic inclusion services and development programmes	50.1k
Cash	Individuals who received cash assistance	203.9k
Health & Nutrition	Consultations provided for mental health and psychosocial support	27.9k
	Individuals supported in accessing health care services	323.3k
	Individuals trained to provide health services to refugees and host populations	12.1k
Education	Children enrolled in formal education in host countries	186.5k
	Children participating in non-formal education programmes	673.4k
Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)	PSEA network members and partner personnel trained on SEA risk mitigation, prevention and response	620
Basic Needs	Individuals who received assistance for basic needs	334.6k

\*A list of implementing partners who reported on behalf of appealing RRP partners is available on the 2023 RRP Reporting dashboard.

\*\*The number of individuals reached is an estimate based on the highest number of individuals reached per activity, per sector and/or per region, to avoid double counting.



## ROMANIA

### Situation Overview

Romania continued to play a pivotal role as a refugee-hosting country amid the ongoing war in Ukraine. Since 24 February 2022, over 5.4 million Ukrainian refugees and third country nationals have entered Romania from Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. At the end of 2023, a total of 85,710 refugees from Ukraine were present in the country and some 149,116<sup>49</sup> refugees had obtained temporary protection (TP) status.

On 30 June 2022, the Government of Romania adopted the two-year National Plan of Measures (NPM) for the Protection and Inclusion of Displaced Persons from Ukraine and Temporary Protection Directive Beneficiaries, marking a shift from the emergency response to a longer-term protection and inclusion phase. On 12 April 2023, the Romanian Government's 50/20 programme,<sup>50</sup> which provided funds to Romanian hosts for accommodation and food for TP holders, was updated to link support to inclusion benchmarks<sup>51</sup> and made refugees from Ukraine direct beneficiaries of the programme. At the end of 2023, refugees experienced delays in receiving payments for the second half of the year.

While substantial progress has been made on meeting the needs of refugees, more focus is required on aspects of social cohesion and socio-economic inclusion. At the end of 2023, according to the Ministry of Education, nearly 72 per cent of children holding temporary protection were registered with Romanian schools and early years education and care services. However, only 28 per cent of school-aged children had acquired full pupil status, while the rest remained mainly with the transitioning status of audients, as per the Romanian legislation. Overall, only about 40 per cent of school-aged refugee children report attending Romanian schools. Despite successful efforts to reduce barriers, 28 per cent of households with healthcare needs still reported problems, especially regarding mental health and sexual and reproductive healthcare, and gaps related to service provider capacity. Similarly, by the end of 2023, around 33 per cent of working-age Ukrainian nationals reported to be working. Refugees frequently cited a lack of knowledge of the Romanian language, limited employment opportunities, and jobs that match their skills as major barriers to further labour market participation and socio-economic inclusion.

### Highlights and Achievements

During 2023, 34 RRP partners worked to advance the refugee response, led by the Government of Romania, delivering complementary services and assistance in the areas of protection, gender-based violence (GBV), child protection, education, healthcare and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), as well as the provision of multi-purpose cash, and core relief items.

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<sup>49</sup> Approximately 73 per cent of registered TP holders being women and children.

<sup>50</sup> Government Emergency Ordinance No. 22/2023 modifying Emergency Ordinance 15/2022 - through which RON 50 (US\$ 11.2) per person per day was provided for accommodation and RON 20 (US\$ 4.5) per person per day for food until April 2023

<sup>51</sup> These include registration of children in the education system, and actively seeking a job on the labour market through the national employment agency. See Government Emergency Ordinance No. 22/2023

To support social cohesion, increase the absorption capacity of service providers in Romania and enhance the quality-of-service provision for refugees and citizens alike, RRP partners provided technical, material, and human resources support to both public and grassroots service providers. RRP partners provided technical capacity support to over 8,600 service providers on enhancing provision of services. Approximately 1,500 teachers received training on inclusive education; 1,955 persons received training on GBV prevention and response, including 227 medical professionals who were also trained on the Clinical Management of Rape and Intimate Partner Violence; and nearly 1,400 service provider staff were trained on anti-trafficking and the identification of victims of trafficking. 11 GBV referral pathways were developed enhancing care for GBV survivors. Support was provided to national child protection agencies for implementation of a case management system. By the end of 2023, the National Authority for the Protection of Children Rights and Adoption had registered more than 35,000 Ukrainian children in its case management system. Furthermore, RRP partners developed an online toolkit on Investigations and Prosecutions in Anti-Trafficking action, provided school materials and IT equipment for schools, medical equipment to public hospitals, and human resources support to governmental departments.

RRP partners supported the empowerment of refugees, providing information on services and rights reaching vast numbers of refugees, through a variety of methods, including helpdesks, hotlines, social media, and a dedicated website ([Services Advisor](#)) providing an overview of services available for refugees in Romania. Nearly 78,500 refugees received legal aid and counselling, notably in relevant legal and administrative aspects for their inclusion in Romania, and over 7,500 refugees were supported with employment counselling, vocational training, and engagement with employers. Over 100,000 individuals received targeted cash support to overcome vulnerabilities and to meet winter needs. To provide more targeted assistance, RRP partners worked with authorities to develop a scorecard system to identify the most vulnerable refugees for services and support. The scorecard was piloted in select cash programs and will be fine-tuned in 2024 for use by other partners and in the delivery of other forms of assistance, thereby increasing coherence and focus of the response.

RRP partners worked to maintain social cohesion between refugees and host communities. A successful public social cohesion campaign across social and traditional media reached over 2,4 million people via digital means and prompted over 300,000 visits to a webpage to address myths stemming from disinformation and misinformation. More than 5,600 refugees and members of host communities took part in activities building bridges and developing mutual understanding and over 9,000 refugees received language training. RRP partners supported seven local coordination initiatives in support of local authorities, providing local solutions to barriers faced by refugees to socio-economic inclusion. Additionally, RRP partners worked with municipalities in Romania to share good practices in the refugee response and to enhance peer learning.

## Gaps and Challenges

Despite many achievements in 2023, challenges remain, particularly in the areas of social cohesion and socio-economic inclusion. Refugees face constraints in accessing services and inclusion in Romanian society due to systemic challenges, primarily the lack of information, administrative requirements – notably the need for proof of address in Romania, which is also required of Romanian citizens – as a prerequisite to access social protection benefits, language barriers affecting access to the labour market and education,<sup>52</sup> and economic vulnerabilities. This, coupled with delays in financial assistance and dwindling assistance from humanitarian actors, is reflected in 70 per cent of refugee households reporting a decrease in purchasing power in comparison with their first months in Romania.<sup>53</sup>

While refugees from Ukraine have received a warm welcome in Romania, these positive sentiments may gradually decline. Currently, over 25 per cent of refugee households surveyed in the multi-sector needs

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<sup>52</sup> MSNA, preliminary findings, October 2023

<sup>53</sup> MSNA, preliminary findings, October 2023



assessment reported experiencing negative attitudes, mainly discrimination or verbal aggression in personal interactions or through social media. Concerted efforts must be undertaken to maintain social cohesion and address concerns of vulnerable host communities in refugee-hosting areas, including strengthening service provisions for both refugees and Romanian citizens, particularly ahead of an intense electoral year in 2024. Coordination continues to play a key role in building alliances with civil society and municipalities, for both the maintenance of the protection space, to support socio-economic inclusion, and maintain social cohesion at the community level.

A central challenge revolves around the funding levels of the RRP. In 2023, the RRP secured funding of around 51 per cent against the appeal, with national partners receiving only 25 per cent against their appeals. The financial constraints and the absence of longer-term funding pose a risk to undermining the achieved progress, with the potential to further erode social cohesion if sustained funding for system strengthening and comprehensive service delivery remains elusive.

### **Cities at the front-line**

Cities and municipalities of Romania have played a critical role in the refugee response since the onset of the Ukraine situation. Four municipalities committed to refugee inclusion and the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees through pledges ahead of the Global Refugee Forum. The Bucharest municipality pledged to develop a comprehensive public policy to foster inclusion, combat discrimination and promote diversity and communication. Braşov municipality pledged to maintain the KATYA Centre as a one-stop-shop service centre for refugees. In Galaţi, local authorities confirmed their continued support for inclusive access to services and infrastructure for refugees, fostering an environment that enables self-reliance and socio-economic contribution to the local community. The Timişoara municipal Directorate for Social Assistance pledged to build an inclusive community, involving all stakeholders, with a focus on education, health, work, culture, and social services. A municipal team will be dedicated to refugee integration which will further build bridges between the local community and the refugees.

### **Adolescent and Youth Task Force**

The RRP launched the Youth & Adolescents Task Force (YAD TF) as a coordination platform promoting social cohesion and cross-sectoral youth participation, aimed at sharing innovative youth-inclusive tools, participatory approaches and linking interventions to YAD needs. The YAD TF facilitates information-sharing and coordinated interventions for and with refugee YAD across RRP partners. By voicing concerns, discussing challenges, and communicating opportunities, organizations complement programmes and reach YAD in a more structured way in the face of YAD isolation and misconnection of refugee-response stakeholders to YAD-specific needs according to their age and the local context. Among the results of the TF in 2023 are a Telegram channel developed with the aim at providing a safe digital means for sharing opportunities directly with Ukrainian young people in Romania, disseminating best practices, needs-assessment results, as well as improving youth-participatory mechanisms and collaboration among members.



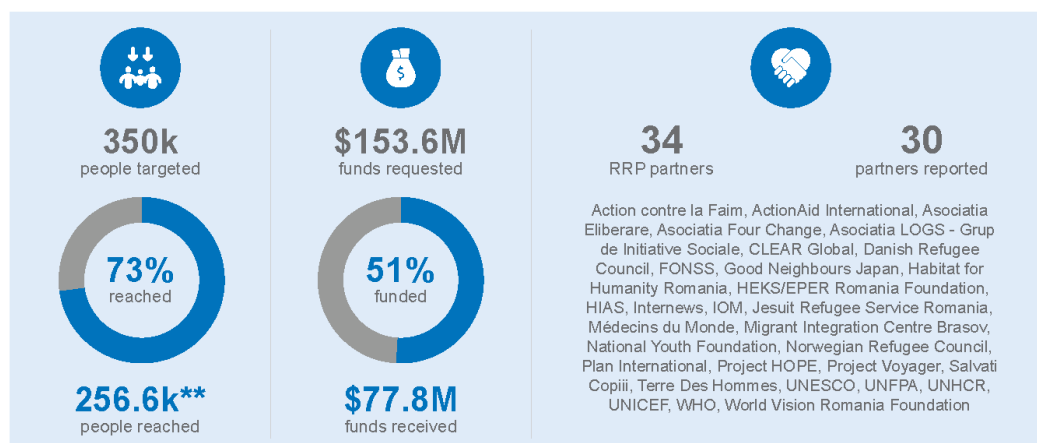
Limba Romana: Refugees from Ukraine during Romanian Language courses organized by Suceva Youth Centre (National Youth Foundation) in Suceava on 27.10.2023. © Foto made by Radu Andonie.

## ROMANIA END-OF-YEAR ACHIEVEMENTS (2023)



Within the framework of the 2023 inter-agency Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) for the Ukraine Situation, 34 partners joined forces in Romania, in support of government-led efforts, to provide protection services and multi-sectoral humanitarian assistance to refugees from Ukraine, third country nationals seeking safety and

other persons in need. Partners also focused their activities on promoting the socio-economic inclusion of refugees as well as social cohesion between refugees and their hosts. The figures were reported by RRP partners against the regional RRP indicators.\*



Sector		People reached
Protection	Individuals supported in accessing protection services	90k
	Children provided with child protection services	33k
	Participants trained on child protection and children's rights	1.3k
	GBV referral pathways established and functional	11
	Individuals reached through community outreach and prevention activities on GBV	52.9
Livelihoods & Socio-Economic Inclusion	Individuals supported in in livelihoods and socio-economic inclusion services and development programmes	23.4k
Cash	Individuals who received cash assistance	100.4k
Health & Nutrition	Consultations provided for mental health and psychosocial support	8.1k
	Individuals supported in accessing health care services	16k
	Individuals trained to provide health services to refugees and host populations	759
Education	Children enrolled in formal education in host countries	38.8k
	Children participating in non-formal education programmes	73.4k
Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)	PSEA network members and partner personnel trained on SEA risk mitigation, prevention and response	359
Basic Needs	Individuals who received assistance for basic needs	146.6k

\*A list of implementing partners who reported on behalf of appealing RRP partners is available on the 2023 RRP Reporting dashboard.

\*\*The number of individuals reached is an estimate based on the highest number of individuals reached per activity, per sector and/or per region, to avoid double counting.



## SLOVAKIA

### 2023 Situation Overview

By the end of 2023, some 2 million Ukrainians and TCNs in need of international protection and assistance had crossed into Slovakia since the escalation of the war in Ukraine in February 2022, with some 135,000 of them applying for temporary protection in the country, and 114,000 having been granted status and residing in the country.<sup>1</sup> Women and children constituted close to 83 per cent of the overall displaced population.

Slovakia continued throughout 2023 to show great solidarity to those fleeing Ukraine, with all actors involved in the response, including national, district and local authorities, being active and supportive to measures and solutions for addressing the needs of refugees. Refugees from Ukraine continued to have access to Temporary Protection (TP) status, which Slovakia introduced in 2022 in line with the EU Temporary Protection Directive. Additional legislative amendments made in 2023 allowed TP holders to continue to access services including subsidized private accommodation and healthcare. The legislative environment supported the TP holders with social benefits, in particular for families with children, the unemployed or persons with disabilities, welcoming enrollment policies in the national education programmes and offering opportunities for entering into the Slovak labour market.

However, while progress was made in many sectors of the refugee response there remained areas that needed to be carefully monitored and supported, including on protection and access to the social safety net, access to information, quality health services, employment, education, housing and childcare. The 2023 multi-sectoral needs assessment (MSNA) highlighted the vulnerabilities and needs of refugees from Ukraine, the most commonly reported needs were healthcare services, employment and livelihood support, and language courses - representing an important change from the 2022 results, when the top three priority needs were food assistance, accommodation, and employment.

The 2023 inter-agency refugee response plan (RRP) for Slovakia brought together 28 partners in a coordinated multi-sectoral response complementing the government-led efforts, in particular in the areas of protection, GBV, child protection, education, healthcare, MHPSS and the provision of multi-purpose cash. In addition, the multi-partner response plan further promoted the socio-economic inclusion of refugees in Slovak society, including by strengthening social cohesion between refugees and their host communities.

### Highlights and Achievements

RRP partners worked together with government counterparts to reinforce reception conditions by strengthening local capacities and monitoring arrivals to ensure non-discriminatory treatment, including for third-country nationals. With targeted actions including legal counseling and advocacy,

partners supported a total of 93,000 individuals in accessing protection services, and efforts were to identify specific needs, including persons with disabilities, and unaccompanied and separated children for referral to specialized services. Of note, RRP partners provided over 26,000 refugee children with child protection services, including through the Blue Dots, and over 500 professionals from a wide range of actors were trained on child protection and children's rights. Advocacy and communication efforts continued to bolster the inclusion of refugee children in the national education programmes, resulting in over 12,000 children being enrolled in formal education, while some 20,000 children were supported to participate in non-formal education programmes.

In coordination with local authorities, partners focused on strengthening national support mechanisms for gender-based violence (GBV) survivors and in this regard, 2,000 individuals were reached through community outreach and prevention activities on GBV and 8 GBV referral pathways were established. Efforts also continued regarding protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), including by strengthening capacity of 14 organizations in the PSEA network; some 989 partner personnel were trained on SEA risk mitigation, prevention and response. Partners complemented national authorities' efforts to prevent and respond to trafficking in persons through information sessions and capacity-building programmes for authorities, civil society organizations, frontline workers and volunteers, and the reinforcement of existing capacities to provide case management and support.

A total of 76,000 individuals were supported in accessing health care services and 67,000 consultations provided for MHPSS. Moreover, RRP partners coordinated efforts to improve the accessibility of quality health care services and continuity of care, which resulted in the Government approving plans to expand the programme of health coverage to include all adult refugees in all services provided to host populations.

RRP partners joined forces to support refugees in meeting their basic needs, including with interventions of direct benefit, such as provision of non-food items (NFIs) to some 40,000 individuals and the continuation of targeted cash assistance to address urgent and specific protection needs for over 35,000 individuals, which complemented the government-led cash programme.

A total of 29,000 individuals received support in livelihoods and socio-economic inclusion services, including with vocational training and job counseling, enterprise skills and self-employment trainings using existing community centers, and through synergies with host and refugee community networks, while advocacy efforts also continued regarding enabling the self-employment of refugees. In addition to community-based initiatives and gradual emphasis on socio-economic inclusion and mitigation of labour exploitation, this involved engaging with the self-governing regions and municipalities across Slovakia with a view to including refugees in existing strategies and action plans and expanding social services capacity of essential services at regional and local levels. Community-based approaches to protection and inclusion, in particular through sports and culture and in partnership with sport associations and cultural institutions, also proved effective in promoting social cohesion between the host communities, Roma communities and refugees.

## Gaps and Challenges

Despite the favorable protection environment for refugees in the country, major challenges remained in accessing essential services such as longer-term accommodation, given the limited accommodation capacity and inadequate social housing system. In addition to limited access to funding on the part of the national and local authorities, and uncertainties for RRP partners to access funding to address strategic priorities, lack of an accommodation strategy and uncertainties



regarding accommodation subsidies have led to significant unmet needs and have exacerbated the risk of exploitation and abuse of refugees. Moreover, assistance to persons with disabilities, including among others reasonable accommodations for them, is limited to ad hoc assistance by disability partners as well as disability care-giver grants by the Ministry of Labour. Local disability NGOs lack of capacity and funds, while the State institutions and municipalities may be still in need of expertise in this area, which can make an important impact on the access of persons with disabilities to essential services. Most sites monitored are not accessible to persons with disabilities or older persons staying in these sites. In addition, access of children at risk to national child case management services, save for the most urgent cases, remains very limited.

While there was progress on expanding the coverage of the health programme to all refugees, challenges remained to access quality health care, especially for persons with underlying serious health conditions as well as those in need of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), including as the public health system is seriously overstretched. Similarly, there remained obstacles and challenges in ensuring an inclusive education environment for all refugee children, resulting in low enrollment in kindergartens and elementary and secondary schools, while legislative and programmatic efforts to introduce compulsory education for TP beneficiaries continued.

While all actors involved in the response and RRP partners responded very well in addressing the urgent needs and facilitating to the extent possible the inclusion of refugees, resources during 2023 were already stretched, increasing the risk of leaving many people behind. At the same time, refugees have strong capacities to achieve socio-economic resilience and access livelihood opportunities, with much to contribute based on their professional and technical qualifications. By supporting and empowering refugee communities so they can further their own socio-economic inclusion and actively and inclusively engaging local actors, refugee and local communities can promote intercultural dialogue and social cohesion and create a more welcoming and resilient society. Facilitation of further recognition of qualifications and skills and job opportunities remains a challenge. At the same time, the insufficient number of schools and kindergartens affects school enrollment, which consequently affects the ability of parents to work because they cannot leave their children unattended. In addition, efforts should continue towards minimizing and eliminating barriers to inclusion in the host society for all age groups. In particular, youth programming is an area that is not addressed currently by stakeholders, which is key to social cohesion and shifting attitudes towards refugees. Young refugees do not have avenues to integrate into Slovak society and contribute to their own solutions.

The situation at the end of 2023 highlighted the importance of continued advocacy at all levels by inter-agency partners so that longer-term accommodation needs can be addressed and that support to refugees can be provided through a more holistic approach to access to the labor market, education and social protection. Specifically, there is a physical shortage of housing, limited access to education, coupled with non-compulsory school attendance, and need for childcare for mothers with young children. Specialized services for GBV survivors should be further strengthened, as well as prevention and risk mitigation mechanisms.

## Coordination and Advocacy

Throughout 2023, RRP partners worked together with the Slovakia inter-agency Refugee Coordination Forum (RCF), initially established in March 2022, co-chaired by the Government (Migration Office of the Ministry of Interior) and UNHCR. The RCF provided a platform of open dialogue for all humanitarian partners and local authorities, and ensured the development and implementation of the RRP, by coordinating the work among partners so that complementarities with government-led structures could be achieved. A working group on Education was established, complementing the work of the working groups on Cash, Health, Information Management and Protection and Inclusion and two sub-working groups on Child Protection and MHPSS, as well as taskforces on PSEA and Anti-trafficking. With the aim of strengthening advocacy efforts and better informing policies, the Protection and Inclusion working group provided key recommendations on GBV,<sup>54</sup> Accommodation and Housing<sup>55</sup>, and Disability<sup>56</sup> to the Government and RRP stakeholders. Thanks to strategic advocacy efforts, the MHPSS sub-working group was granted the status of a permanent Committee of the National Commission for Mental Health, ensuring continuation of work and alignment with the government-led reform initiatives and service programming strategies in mental health care and psychosocial support. The government-led Steering Committee for Migration, Integration and Inclusion of Foreigners led by the Migration Office of the Ministry of Interior was operational during 2023, while three dedicated working groups were established under this platform on housing, health and education. Further collaboration with the inter-agency RCF and proactive leadership will significantly contribute to the response.



Ukrainian refugees, together with host community members and other foreigner residents, participated in community-based activities organized by RRP Partners (UNHCR and Mareena) in support of the 16 Days of Activism against GBV, in Bratislava, Slovakia. ©Mareena

<sup>54</sup> <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/101484>

<sup>55</sup> <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/100426>

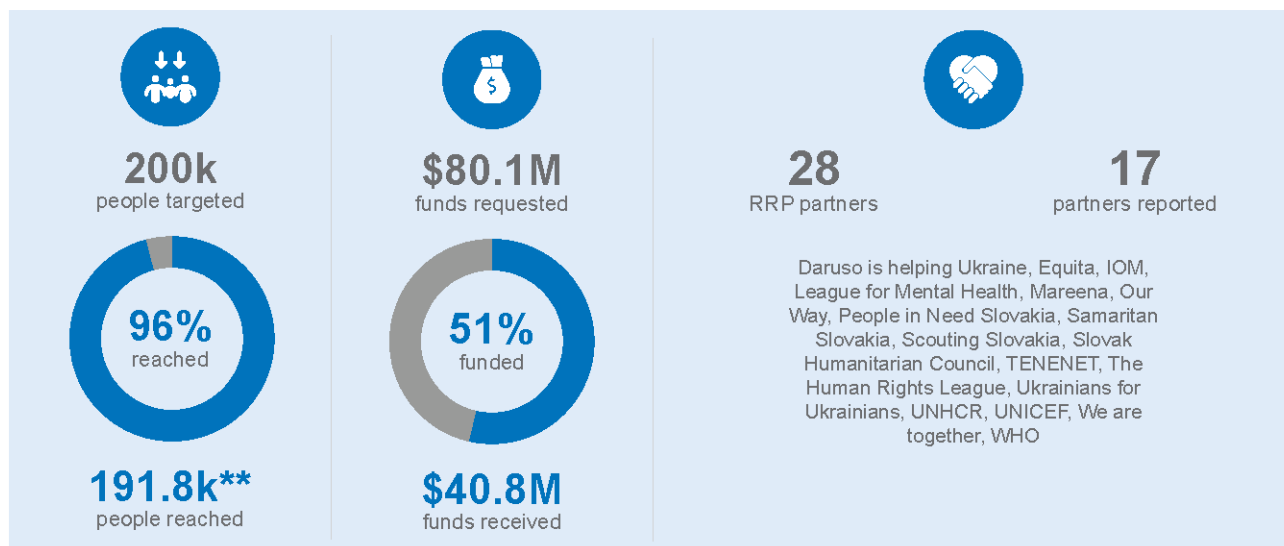
<sup>56</sup> <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/100394>



# SLOVAKIA END-OF-YEAR ACHIEVEMENTS (2023)

Within the framework of the 2023 inter-agency Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) for the Ukraine Situation, 18 partners joined forces in Slovakia, in support of government-led efforts, to provide protection services and multi-sectoral humanitarian assistance to refugees from Ukraine, third country nationals seeking safety and

other persons in need. Partners also focused their activities on promoting the socio-economic inclusion of refugees as well as social cohesion between refugees and their hosts. The figures were reported by RRP partners against the regional RRP indicators.\*



Sector		People reached
Protection	Individuals supported in accessing protection services	93.4k
	Children provided with child protection services	26.5k
	Participants trained on child protection and children's rights	500
	GBV Referral Pathways Established and Functional	3
	Individuals reached through community outreach and prevention activities on GBV	2.2k
Livelihoods & Socio-Economic Inclusion	Individuals supported in livelihoods and socio-economic inclusion services and development programmes	28.9k
Cash	Individuals who received cash assistance	35.0k
Health & Nutrition	Consultations provided for mental health and psychosocial support	67k
	Individuals supported in accessing health care services	75.5k
Education	Children enrolled in formal education in host countries	12.0k
	Children participating in non-formal education programmes	20.1k
Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)	PSEA network members and partner personnel trained on SEA risk mitigation, prevention and response	989
Basic Needs	Individuals who received assistance for basic needs	39.6k

\*A list of implementing partners who reported on behalf of appealing RRP partners is available on the 2023 RRP Reporting dashboard.

\*\*The number of individuals reached is an estimate based on the highest number of individuals reached per activity, per sector and/or per region, to avoid double counting.