Regional Refugee Response for the Ukraine Situation

SLOVAKIA
APRIL 2024

SITE MAPPING AND MONITORING

#1 ROUND | ANALYSIS ON COLLECTIVE ACCOMMODATION

Bratislava, Slovakia. Accommodation center in Petrzalka hosting refugees coming from Ukraine. © Samo Šóth

Introduction

Site Mapping and Monitoring (SMM) is a joint initiative of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and International Organization for Migration (IOM), initiated in 2022, which aims to ensure an adequate and timely understanding of the situation and needs of the accommodation sites in Slovakia. The results-oriented nature of SMM allows UNHCR and IOM, as well as their partners, to better inform their response programmes in particular by adapting prevention, advocacy, assistance and policy interventions tailored to the needs of accommodation sites hosting refugees. This assessment covers accommodation sites in all regions in the country, and provides information on the type, capacity, and services at these sites.

Methodology and limitations

As a first stage, accommodation sites for refugees coming from Ukraine who entered Slovakia were identified across the country. This mapping process was a continuous coordinated effort through the Refugee Coordination Forum[1] and the Information Management Working Group[2], including government entities, humanitarian actors and other relevant stakeholders, to collaborate on this initiative, increasing the list of accommodation sites since 2022. However, it does not contain all accommodation facilities in the country, and results presented in this document represent an analysis of those sites mapped and contacted during the data collection exercise.

Data collection was conducted between mid-March and mid-April 2024 through a structured survey questionnaire developed for key informants and conducted with site managers or responsible personnel at each site, by UNHCR, IOM and Slovak Humanitarian Council (SHC) trained enumerators, by phone and through in-person interviews. The analysis presents the situation of 83 accommodation sites in all regions across the country.

Results are based on the answers of site manager or responsible person at the site; there was no on-site verification of the information shared. Also, on many occasions the responsible manager and/or sites staff were not available or willing to participate, therefore, from the total 200 accommodation sites mapped, 171 were contacted; however, 83 participated in the interview. The rest of the sites contacted but not being part of the survey was mainly because the site was closed or about to close (13 sites), or the manager did not consent to proceed with the interview (36 sites) or did not have time to proceed with the interview (39 sites).

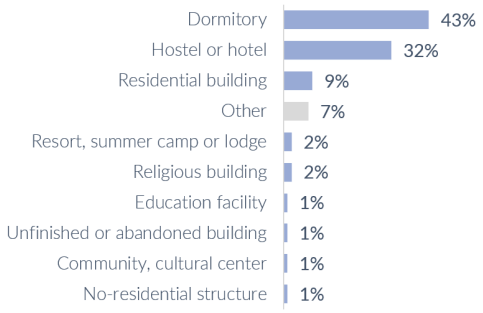
UNHCR, IOM and SHC put in place mechanism for follow up action when protection incidents cases were identified during this process.

1 RCF – Refugee Coordination Forum - online
2 IMWG – Information Management Working Group - online

Overview

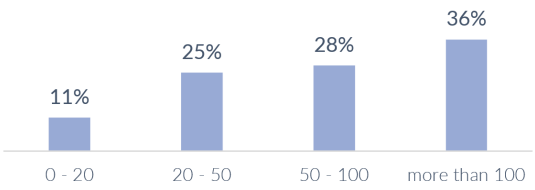
Out of the total 83 accommodation sites surveyed, the majority of the sites used for accommodating refugees from Ukraine were dormitories (43%) and hotel/hostels (32%). Regarding the location, 70% of the sites surveyed were in urban areas, and 17% in peri-urban areas. However, these facilities were frequently located in remote areas, far from the city/town centers.

Type of building



At the time the interviews were conducted, 81% of the sites reported being owned by private companies or individuals; and 77% managed by a private entity or individual.[3] Regarding the sleeping capacity, 36% of these sites were large centers with capacity to host over 100 individuals.

Sleeping capacity (individuals)



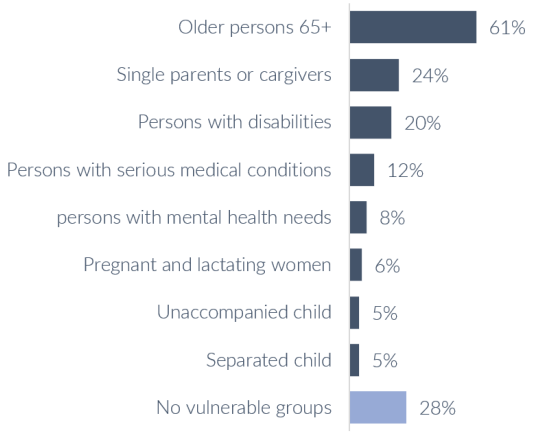
Eighty per cent of the sites reported an average of stay over 6 months. Prolonged stays in collective sites may increase protection risks as it is generally recommended that collective sites are used in short term, followed by transition to more adequate, medium-term to long-term housing solutions.

Average of stay

Vulnerable groups

Site managers were asked about vulnerable groups hosted at the site at the moment of the interview. Two-thirds (61%) of accommodation sites hosted older persons (over 65 years old), 24% hosted single parents or caregivers and 20% hosted persons with disabilities. Those are concerning results as the majority of centers are not properly equipped and prepared to host persons with disabilities and older persons. The data in fact suggests a concerning trend of high number of older persons residing at collective sites. This situation warrants a more detailed examination, as it could be associated with the insufficient availability of care facilities for older persons from Ukraine throughout Slovakia.

Vulnerable groups reported being present at the site



Infrastructure

The analysis also examined the infrastructure situation of the centers. All site managers reported having functional showers and toilets, with 3.9 persons on average sharing a toilet and 4.2 persons sharing shower facilities. Only 55% of sites reported having toilets separated by gender, and 23% reported having at least one toilet accessible for persons with disabilities.

No major structural issues were reported by site managers; however, some cases of insulation, ventilation issues, and minor repairs for structural damages were noted.

3 During the mapping process, Ministry of Transport provided information of accommodation facilities supported by the subsidy program; in most cases owned by private companies.

Provision of Basic Needs

The survey also included information on provision and availability of basic needs at the sites, such as provision of food products, hygiene items, menstrual products, cleaning items, clothes, and supplies for children and older people.

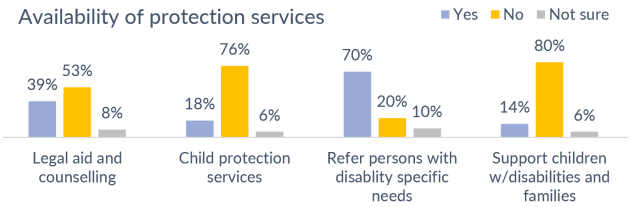
Some items were reported to be already available at the sites; such as medical supplies (78% of sites), cleaning items (57%). However, the majority of the items asked during the interviews were not available, or in some cases, were provided by humanitarian actors.

Item	Not available	Provider: Already at the site	Humanitarian actors	Government program	Provided by Others	Private companies	Host community
Basic medical supplies	8%	78%	13%				
Cleaning items	27%	57%	14%	2%			
Clothes	73%	2%	19%		2%	1%	1%
Equipment for older persons and PwD	82%	5%	10%	2%	1%		
Food products	76%	5%	11%	1%	5%	2%	
Hygiene items and personal care items	40%	39%	18%	4%			
Menstrual products	84%	6%	10%				
Supplies for child friendly spaces	57%	23%	16%	1%	2%	1%	
Supplies for infants and toddler care	69%	13%	16%	1%		1%	

Protection Services and Assistance

Site managers or responsible personnel were interviewed about on-site services and information provided to individuals accommodated at the sites, and/or in the proximities to the centers.

Legal aid and counselling services were reported being available by 39% of site managers, majority of these services provided by humanitarian actors and NGOs. Regarding child protection services to identify and refer children at risk, in most cases (76%) they were reported as not being available at the sites or in the proximities. Additional sources of information[4] revealed higher perception of risks for children residing in collective centers, such as risks to their mental health and wellbeing, and vulnerability to neglect.

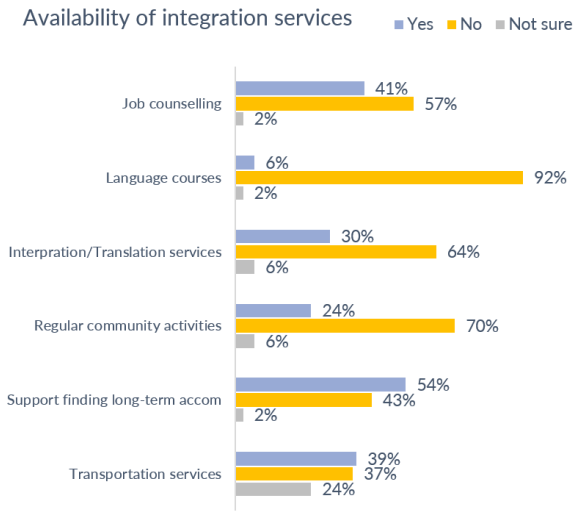


Concerning results were obtained on specific support and assistance for persons with disabilities and older persons. Only 14% of the sites managers interviewed reported having specific support for persons with disabilities and their families.

An important gap was identified from the analysis on Gender-based Violence (GBV) and Prevention from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA). The majority of site managers, 87%, reported their staff not being trained on these topics, and only 11% had a written protocol for handling GBV and PSEA cases. Further analysis from other sources of information[5] revealed higher concerns regarding security faced by women and men when hosted in collective sites.

An important factor for a successful inclusion in the community is the possibility to learn the new language. However, only 6% of site managers reported having language courses at the site or in proximity, and one-third reported having interpretation or translation services.

More than half of the site managers (54%) reported providing support to find long-term accommodation for the refuges hosted at the site, and 41% having job counselling sessions, mainly provided by the site staff (social workers) and, in some cases, UN Agencies.



4 Multi-sector Needs Assessment 2023 – Slovakia - online
5 Multi-sector Needs Assessment 2023 – Slovakia - online

Regardless of the high number of sites reporting having basic medical supplies (78%), only 19% mentioned availability of primary medical care at the site or in proximity. Similarly, for mental health and psychosocial problems, 77% of the site surveyed, did not provide this kind of services or had them in the proximities.

Majority of site managers (92%) reported schools available in the proximities, and in 52% of cases, the centers provided support to find schools for refugee children hosted at the site. However, half of the accommodation centers reported not having dedicated spaces for recreational activities for children, and 40% did not have, at the moment of the interview, spaces for educational activities.

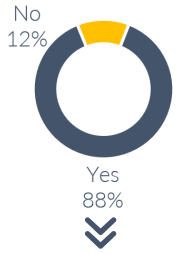
Rather positive results were obtained on accountability to affected population; 83% of site managers reported having feedback and complaint mechanism at the center, with the majority of them being confidential and accessible to anyone. Nevertheless, only 31% of them reported following up on the reported complaints.

Accommodation subsidy program

Due to the accommodation and housing situation in the country[6], the survey also analyzed the situation of those sites supported by the government subsidy program, and the impact on refugees hosted at those centers with regards to possible changes to this scheme.

Out of the total sites surveyed, 86% of site managers expressed their centers would continue hosting refugees after March 2024.[7] This percentage decreases to 78% of sites under the government subsidy program (88% of all surveyed sites).

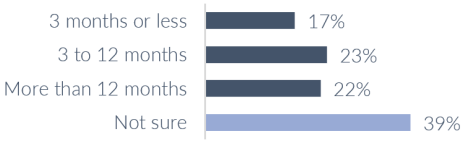
Site receiving government subsidies to host refugees from Ukraine



Site under Gov. Sub. - plan to accommodate refugees after March

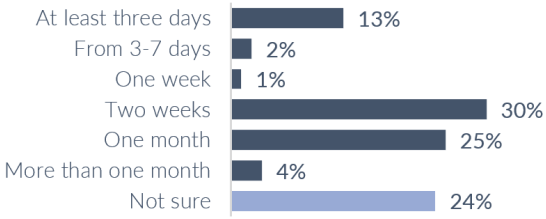
The situation remains uncertain for those sites planning to continue hosting refugees after March 2024. More than half of the sites managers (55%) plan to continue hosting refugees for more than 3 months, while the rest of collective centers will provide accommodation for less than 3 months, or still do not know what the situation will be in the short term. Additionally, 39% of site managers interviewed reported uncertainty on the availability of the site to continue hosting refugees.

How much longer the site can provide accommodation after March



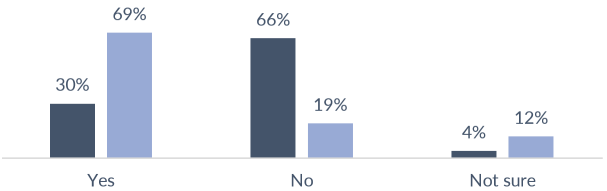
This unpredictable situation has a direct impact on protection and wellbeing of refugees. Almost half of the sites (46%) mentioned a notice period of two weeks or less, and 24% of site managers did not share during the interview a specific timeframe to inform refugees to leave their current accommodation, increasing the uncertainty on refugees' housing situation and difficulty to plan ahead.

Site under Gov. Sub. - notice period to leave the site



Another important result of the analysis is regarding the additional costs refugees contribute with at the centers. At the time of the interview, 30% of the sites under the government program reported receiving additional contributions from refugees for the running costs. When asked about the situation in case this program would be decreased or discontinued, the percentage increased to 69%.

Refugees contribute to additional costs



6 Since February 2024, the Government of Slovakia decreased the accommodation subsidies by 50 percent compared to the previous levels. Additionally, in March 2024, the subsidy schemes were valid only until the end of the month of March. At the time when some interviews were conducted, there was uncertainty, if the Government of the Slovak Republic intends to extend the subsidy scheme or not. On 20 March 2024, the Government has announced extension of its subsidy schemes for providing accommodation to Temporary Protection holders in Slovakia. The subsidy schemes have been extended until 30 June 2024. Official information is available here and here. Briefly, the subsidy schemes are:

1. The subsidy paid to the private owners of apartments and houses continue to be 5€ per night per Temporary Protection holder.

2. The subsidy paid to the commercial owners of accommodation (hotels, hostels, etc.) continue to be max. €6 per night per Temporary Protection holder.

7 As stated above, it is important to note that the Government of the Slovak Republic announced extensions of subsidy schemes on 20 March 2024. Questions related to intentions of owners or managers of collective sites accommodating refugees were included to understand what the owners or managers intentions in case are the subsidies had not been extended.

In light of the anticipated amendments to the accommodation subsidy scheme, the data on the intentions of the collective site owners or managers indicate potential protection risks. This is particularly significant when considering the number of vulnerable persons living in these collective sites, including older persons and persons with disabilities. The likelihood that these groups may not be able to afford extra contributions shall be thoughtfully taken into account.

Site managers were asked about the possibility to continue hosting refugees in their facilities if the government program was fully discontinued. Less than half of them (46%) confirmed their center might continue providing accommodation to refugees coming from Ukraine in such case.

Conclusions

The Site Mapping and Monitoring revealed that the accommodation situation is especially challenging for those refugees who are most vulnerable. High numbers of the surveyed collective sites reported accommodating persons with different specific needs, including older persons (61%), single parents or caregivers (24%), persons with disabilities (20%), or persons with serious medical condition (12%). Nevertheless, majority of the sites (68 of the 83 surveyed) reported having no equipment to address the needs of older persons and persons with disabilities, 36% of the surveyed sites reported not being accessible for persons with disabilities, 35% did not have disability-accessible showers, and 59% did not have disability-accessible toilets.

The Site Mapping and Monitoring showed that with the adjusted accommodation subsidies, refugees will need to financially contribute to running costs at 69% of the surveyed collective accommodation sites. However, there is a risk that vulnerable groups who cannot take up employment in Slovakia would not be able to cover these accommodation costs. This concerns mainly older persons receiving low pensions from Ukraine, single mothers who must take care of their children, persons with disabilities or serious medical condition, or newly arrived refugees who could not yet find jobs.

Despite the challenges outlined, the Site Mapping and Monitoring showed important positive results. First and foremost, the robust accommodation subsidy scheme provided by the government facilitated access to accommodation for a significant number of refugees in Slovakia. The survey findings indicate that a majority of the sites surveyed are committed to continuing their support for refugees, with a proportion of them prepared to host individuals beyond the current subsidy period. This demonstrates a foundation of support and a possible positive trend towards sustainable housing solutions. Moreover, the implementation of feedback and complaint mechanisms in 83% of the sites reflects a growing emphasis on accountability and continuous improvement in service delivery. These efforts signal a constructive path forward for enhancing the overall wellbeing of refugees in Slovakia.

Joint initiative of:

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