

Date	12 Sep 2023	Location	Ruse Municipality, 6 Svoboda Sq, Ruse, "St. George" Conference Room (& hybrid)
Chair & Co chair	Ruse Municipality & UNHCR	Note taking / minutes	UNHCR (Silvia Desheva)
Participating organizations and members	Municipality of Ruse (Mayor Pencho Milkov, Katya Petrova, Zeyneb Ahmedova), UNHCR (Hayoung Kim, Nicolas Rodrigez Serna, Lea Kraitem), UNICEF (Dani Koleva), BHC (Dmitry Popsulis), BRC (Antoaneta Yabanozova, Ekaterina Vatova), Caritas (Stefan Markov, Teodora Naiydenova), Center Dinamika (Deana Dimova), Child Protection Agency (Denitsa Ivanova), Children Pedagogical Room (Desislava Ivanova, Nikolai Velikov), Crisis Center for Unaccompanied Minors, foreign citizens and children at risk (Erhan Rujdiev, Sevgi Zuyhtuy), Migration Directorate Ruse (Krasimir Petrov), State Agency National Security (Orfey Orfeev), Regional Department of Education Ruse (Mariana Kisyova, Valeria Lavcheva), Regional Health Inspectorate (Chavdar Valchev)		
Agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opening Remarks by Mayor Pencho Milkov Overview of Ruse Municipal services & discussion on key areas for coordination: Protection, Livelihoods and Socioeconomic Inclusion, Education, Health & Nutrition AOB 		
Agenda Point	Summary	Agreed Decisions / Follow-Up Actions	
Opening Remarks by Mayor Pencho Milkov	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Due to the situation in Ukraine, Ruse Municipality had to face the challenge of catering to the needs of newcomers – children and adults. Municipality, local institutions, entities and CSOs, as well as international organisations collaborated to support the people in need building good practices. 		
Overview of Ruse Municipal services & discussion on key areas for coordination: Protection, Livelihoods and Socioeconomic Inclusion, Education, Health & Nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ruse context: due to its geographical location Ruse was a transit for refugees coming from Ukraine passing through the Danube bridge. For local actors receiving many refugees from Ukraine at beginning of last year has been a challenge, as they have not worked with such vulnerable groups before. For refugees coming from Syria and Afghanistan the main need is supporting unaccompanied minors, as children who were caught at the border or within the country needed a place to live. Hence, since November 2022 a <i>Crisis Center for Unaccompanied Minors, foreign citizens and children at risk</i> has been established. It is a service provided by the municipality, delegated by the state. Municipality also collaborated with other institutions and actors. The center is a place where children can receive support and services. Not all reception centers in the country can provide appropriate conditions for children, hence this center is a good practice. Main challenges for the work of the Crisis Center: language barriers, lack of vaccinations, logistics, addressing cultural and religious differences. Runaways are also a common issue. Capacity-building activities have been taking place for the people working in the center to ensure that the best standards and practices are upheld. 		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Profile of refugees: there are 300 people (refugees from Ukraine) registered at the Ruse Municipality. They are travelling back and forth to Ukraine. The majority of Ukrainians who are TP holders are residing at the coast. Children from other nationalities are in different situations – last year, in summer the center had a big influx of pax including children, 23 children passed through the crisis center of <i>Center Dinamika</i> for a short period of time. The majority of them had declared they are underage, but the staff at the center reported that visibly older than the age they declared. 	
<p>Discussion Points</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bulgarian Red Cross (BRC), Migration Directorate, MoI, Ruse Municipality – have worked together since refugees from Ukraine started coming. BRC collaborated with UNHCR and UNICEF on establishing the Blue Dot (in BRC facilities) – only for 2023 to date 250 new people have sought help from the Blue Dot, and 2007 people have received help. Blue Dots have become safe spaces for people, where they feel catered for. • Good practices: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <u>BRC</u> organised a three-day camp as a recreational activity for both children and adults. BRC manages two social services: center for family-care accommodation, and center for children. They are working with two Syrian children and actively try to integrate them. BRC also organizes workshops for children. ○ <u>Caritas</u> implemented a project for cash support last year; currently they are working on providing employment consultations as a part of their project with UNHCR. ○ <u>BRC and Center Dinamika</u>, and other collaborators, provided accommodation and support for mothers with children coming from Ukraine we supported accommodation of mothers with children. They also organised mobile teams to support mothers with children accommodated in hotels at the Black Sea coast. Good practice was that while mothers were attending Bulgarian language courses, activities for children were organised for them to overcome the trauma they have experienced. They also supported mothers to find employment. • Some of the challenges refugees from Ukraine experience: rents are higher than for Bulgarian citizens, with 2-month deposits; finding employment is difficult, but most of the refugees are working, excluding elderly people. People also face issues with health care insurance; procedure for being granted allowance for disability. Some face technical issues registering in the healthcare system, as some of them have invalid TP registrations. Issues with address registration, as this needs to be done at the police station, and it is mandatory to be done for any foreign citizen, this is responsibility of the host/landlord. This is not happening, when refugees change their address and this leads to issues and limited access to services. • Education: The Regional Education Directorate shared that schools did not face many difficulties to include children from Ukraine in schools/kindergartens. There were a lot of applicants but a low enrolment rate in schools/kindergartens in reality. Children enrolled in schools could attend additional Bulgarian language classes 	<p>Further discussions will be had with the municipality on identified areas of need by actors: a) accommodation support, b) social security support, and c) enhanced coordination between regional and national coordination mechanisms.</p>

	<p>and were provided with free textbooks for studying Bulgarian language. The Regional Education Directorate also shared that there were 40 pupils enrolled in local schools for the 2023 school year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthcare: The Regional Healthcare Inspectorate shared that there have been no complaints from Ukrainian citizens for not having access to healthcare. • UNICEF, the Child Protection Agency and National Security Agency appreciated the good coordination between institutions and organizations. • UNHCR: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ongoing discussions on national level on law on refugee and asylum seekers and temporary protection status, which should help all actors to define their roles and resource allocation. ○ Refugees are not only recipients of assistance; they are can also provide and contribute to the host and refugee communities. They can contribute with knowledge and expertise. ○ The services provided should be available not only on national but also on municipal level, and it is essential that these services are extended so that they are available for vulnerable Bulgarian population as well. • Municipality Suggestions for further coordination/developments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ○ a meeting on national level (SAR, Migration Directorate, MoI, UNHCR, UNICEF) to discuss the procedures and obstacles refugees are facing, and to coordinate the work processes; ○ A national child protection mechanism has been developed, and Ruse Municipality has been applying this framework. However, up to now this mechanism is signed and endorse only by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, and it should be endorsed by all ministries, and all relevant actors to apply it. The actors on local level implement this mechanism, but it should be also coordinated on national level. Need to advocate for the responsible institutions embed this coordination mechanism, we can contribute to the parts where we have expertise, but this mechanism needs to be endorsed so everyone knows their responsibilities. 	
<p>Next Meetings</p>	<p>National Inter-Agency Meeting 19th September – 10:00-11:00 (UNHCR office, Sofia & hybrid)</p> <p>Inter-Agency Workshop – 2024 RRP 26th September – 10:00 – 11:00 (UNHCR office, Sofia & hybrid)</p>	