



Małopolska Coordination Group Meeting
Meeting Minutes – 07 December 2023

Meeting subject:	Małopolska Coordination Group Meeting
Time & location:	9 am – UNHCR Krakow Sub-Office
Chaired by:	UNHCR; Open Krakow Coalition
Minutes prepared by:	UNHCR
Participants:	Małopolski Urząd Wojewódzki; Alight; All Hands and Hearts; Halina Niec Legal Aid Center; Kocham Debniki Foundation; Mission-U Foundation; Project Hope Polska; Save The Children; UNHCR; UNICEF; Vela Foundation; Wolno Nam; ZHP; Zustricz Foundation;
Agenda:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction and updates from the co-chairs • Updates from UKR and refugee-led organizations • The Pursuit of Safe and Inclusive Accommodation – UNHCR • Current situation in the collective shelters- Malopolskie region <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Overview of the current situation ○ Update on specific current issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Wolno Nam ➤ Situation in Koninki • Discussion on concrete actions • AOB
AGENDA POINT	DISCUSSION
Introduction and update on points from last meeting	Participants were welcomed to the 27th Małopolska Coordination Group (MCG) meeting.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNHCR provided updates about recent activities. In regard to cash assistance, the UNHCR targeted cash assistance will conclude at the end of 2023. Regarding the 2023 RRP, UNHCR reminded RRP partners that the deadline for Q4 reporting in Activity Info is 19 January. On the meeting theme of collective accommodation, UNHCR shared that representatives of the Krakow Sub-Office had recently attended the inauguration of a social rental agency in Dabrowa Gornicza.
Agenda point 1	No updates were provided under the given agenda point.
Agenda point 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Protection Officer focal point for Protection monitoring from the UNHCR Country Office shared a presentation on the theme “The Pursuit of Safe and Inclusive Accommodation” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ It was highlighted that accommodation is at the heart of inclusion and the crosscutting issues exist across collective shelters. ○ Through the end of August 2023, there were 1906 collective sites overseen by the government, accommodating 52,000 refugees. The Ministry of Interior confirms that the most vulnerable refugees largely reside in collective shelters and that approximately 43% of the residents are children. Malopolskie region was indicated by the Ministry of Interior as a location requiring a special focus, as more than 10% of refugees in the Voivodship are staying the collective shelters. ○ Protection risks in collective shelters include the pressures of financial contributions and relocations resulting in premature return decisions, MHPSS concerns, lack of meaningful engagement with the host community and information on rights, possible isolation and limited access to services, and limited alternative housing options • Following the presentation, The Representative of the Voivode took the floor: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Representative noted that the sixth criteria for exemption from participation in accommodation costs - that on the basis of hardship - is susceptible to misuse. In Malopolskie region, 83% of refugees in collective accommodation are exempt from payment. In some sites the exception rate is 100%. It is the responsibility of the mandated lawmaking body to rectify the potential for abuse of this criterium. Likewise, there is the potential for landlords to benefit financially from this system and some do take advantage of this fact. ○ Regarding relocation, the Representative noted that larger collective sites were an emergency solution in the beginning of the refugee crisis. In the long term, it is difficult to maintain hygiene and social cohesion in these larger

	<p>sites. For this reason, relocations are constantly happening. In Małopolska, when relocations take place the Voivodship Office always provides several options. In one case of a large-scale relocation from Kliny in Krakow, a catalogue of offers was created and psychological support and transport were provided. The Voivodship has also recently made amendments to the relocation procedures. Each relocation must now be approved by the Voivodship Office and confirmed by the Powiat Coordinator. A priority for finding accommodation is given to new arrivals to Poland. The relocation of individuals to Małopolska from other Voivodships is possible but also requires the approval of the Voivodship Office.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In relation to the above, UNHCR highlighted that a proper system is important to understand the situations of people in shelters. Avoiding shelter shopping is also critical, as shelter shopping can lead to recruitment by trafficking rings. In regard to vulnerability criteria, it is also important to keep in mind that vulnerabilities are not always visible. • Mission-U Foundation emphasized that housing and accommodation are the biggest problems for refugees from Ukraine. As a Foundation, Mission-U works on integration through culture. However, no other services or interventions can be effective if an individual has no accommodation. The same is true for employment, where a mother will struggle to work unless she has a stable place to live, but also will struggle to find a stable place to live until she has employment. For this reason social accommodation is also important, especially given that other forms of assistance are time limited. Refugees who cannot find accommodation may consider returning to Ukraine prematurely, at risk to their health or safety. When it comes to the needs of refugees and possible solutions, it must also be remembered that Ukrainian organizations need to be given a seat and the table and consulted. • UNHCR thanked Mission-U for the comment and highlighted that one protection risk is already one too many.
<p>Agenda point 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wolno Nam Foundation provided updates about the recent situation in a collective shelter run by the organization. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The shelter run by Wolno Nam on Pilsudskiego street in Krakow has a 168 bed capacity and currently 131 beds are occupied. Wolno Nam has a rental contract with a private landlord for the space used in the building and pays monthly rent. The landlord has a contract with the Municipality and receives the government payments for hosting refugees. Since September, the landlord has not made these payments available to Wolno Nam to be used in support of the refugees living in the shelter. Also since September, the landlord has been threatening periodically to cancel the rental contract with Wolno Nam. In late November, the landlord provided notification that Wolno Nam needs to leave the premises within 6 days and that the landlord would be taking over support of the refugees living there. Wolno Nam has consulted with lawyers from Halina Niec and met with the Municipality. As the contract for hosting refugees is between the landlord and the Municipality, Wolno Nam is

not a party to this agreement and little support can be provided. The uncertainty of the situation is difficult for the refugees living in the shelter, especially given that many of them have additional vulnerabilities.

- Halina Niec Legal Aid Centre shared that the Centre had prepared an article about different types of lease agreements under Polish law. The article in Polish is available at the following link: [Lease Agreements](#)
- UNHCR again highlighted the initial point that it is important to understand the profiles of the individuals in collective shelters. All participants are in agreement that collective shelters are not a durable solution; however, the challenge is building a net outside of this system. Relocation of individuals can be explored, but to adequate conditions. In the case of individuals in specific situations – for example women above 60 years old or persons with disabilities – it is important not to create additional vulnerabilities. Of key importance is connecting persons with specific needs with actors that can provide support in accessing complex procedures. Important is also that protection actors work not to facilitate mindsets of aid dependence, but instead support people in finding safe ways to move out of collective sites and become independent. This should also be a key consideration for authorities when organizing relocation after closing a shelter. Sending refugees in localities with no job opportunities is also a high risk of creating path for trafficking networks.
- UNICEF noted that social behavior changes campaigns focused on both the Polish and Ukrainian communities will be necessary, as social tensions are growing with time. Refugees living in large collective shelters are also a challenging group and people misusing the system from both sides also do not help the situation. For this reason, UNICEF will focus more on behavior changes in the coming year.
- UNHCR noted that there also has to be a focus on spreading the same message. In other contexts, various actors have approached refugees and spread different messages, which has been confusing.
- The UNHCR Protection Team and Monitors shared a presentation about the situation in the collective shelter in Koninki based on field visits.
 - As of December 2023, 190 refugees are registered as staying in the collective shelter in Ostoja Koninki. 113 of them are Ukrainian Roma.
 - Through the discussions with the refugees, there were no complaints about the quality of the accommodation reported by refugees, protection concerns exist. However, some concerns could be identified such as: lack of access to public health services, early pregnancies and child marriages, lack of children attending education, unemployment, and lack of acceptance from the host community including sexual harassment.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In response to the presentation, the Representative of the Voivode noted that the fact that many individuals are concentrated in this one location makes the situation difficult. There are issues regarding social aspects, but also employment prospects, the lack of desire to work, and sexual education. • Zustricz Foundation added that psychologists from the Foundation had previously been visiting this shelter. Among refugees hosted in this shelter, there seemed to be the impression that the larger world outside of Koninki does not exist. Eventually the Foundation’s psychologists were banned by the owner from visiting the site, after they raised protection concerns. Furthermore, there is a hole in the system regarding exemptions from payment for unemployed individuals. These individuals have no incentive to work legally and can claim unemployment to gain free housing while working illegally. • UNHCR emphasized that when working with refugees, there must be reminders that refugees have rights, but they also have obligations. Education is a right, but it is also an obligation for parents to send children to school. Sexual and reproductive health is also a concern and work must be done together with Roma communities. UNHCR is planning to strengthen its work with Roma-led organizations. However, there must also be adaptations on the part of the community to the Polish legal system – for example adhering to the fact that child marriage is illegal and lot of work to enhance the sensitization of these communities should be done jointly. However, it is important to ensure that work is equally done with Polish community to better address discrimination faced by Roma communities
Agenda point 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concrete action points were discussed. These included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Considering how coordination on the topic of collective accommodation can be further enhanced. ○ Conducting a mapping of actors carrying out activities in collective accommodation sites (who, where, what and frequency)
AOB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Save the Children noted that the organization has separate funding to support third country nationals and minority groups and will be focusing more heavily in these areas in the future.

ACTION POINTS SUMMARY

No.	Action	Responsible	Deadline	Status (as of)
1.				